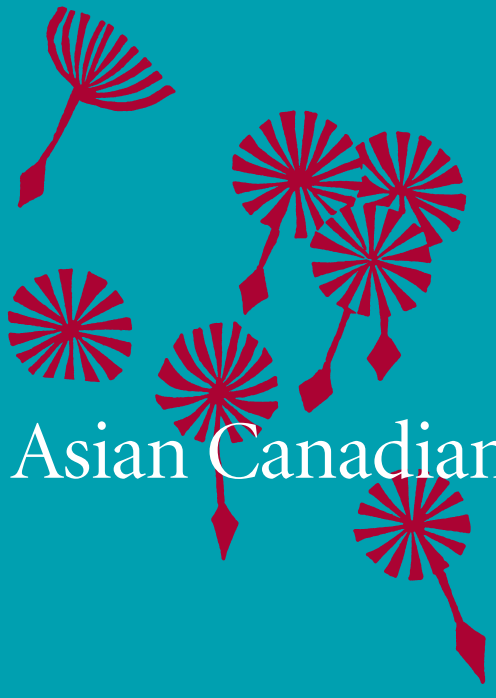
Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review Winter 2008 $25

199



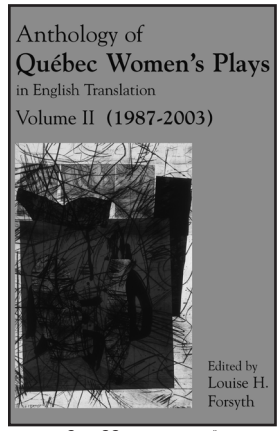
Asian Canadian Studies

IN TRANSLATION

PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS

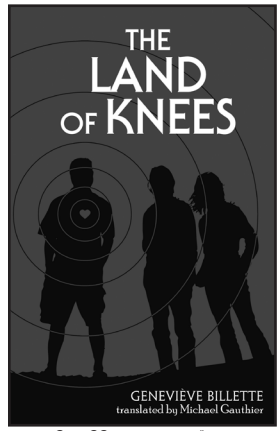
WWW.PLAYWRIGHTSCANADA.COM

A collection of drama from some of Québec's leading playwrights. Includes Hélène Pedneault, Michèle Magny, Pol Pelletier, Abla Farhoud, Geneviève Billette, Emmanuelle Roy, and Emma Haché translated by Linda Gaboriau, Jill Mac Dougall, Bobby Theodore, Don Druick, and Arthur Milner.



978-0-88754-719-5 $50

Timothy and Sammy seek the Land of Knees, a mythical country with no shortage of knees to sit on and an endless supply of kisses and hugs. A story of love: unbreakable, undying, passionate love that requires discipline and disobedience, that frees the spirit and creates everlasting friendships.



978-0-88754-717-1 $14.95

On a dilapidated dock in London, a walking sculpture reminisces about a life devoted to art, squatters plan their uprising against the monarchy and medieval ghosts hatch elaborate revenge scenarios of their own. A play about art, history, sexuality, how we fight our battles and, ultimately, how we choose to live our lives.

978-0-88754-825-3 $17.95

Canadian Literature / Littérature *canadienne*

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review
Number 199, Winter 2008, Asian Canadian Studies
Published by The University of British Columbia, Vancouver
Editor: Margery Fee
Associate Editors: Laura Moss (Reviews), Glenn Deer (Acting Editor), Larissa Lai (Poetry), Réjean Beaudoin (Francophone Writing), Judy Brown (Reviews)

Past Editors: George Woodcock (1959–1977), W.H. New (1977–1995), Eva-Marie Kröller (1995–2003), Laurie Ricou (2003–2007)

Articles

Articles, *continued*

Poems

Books in Review

Forthcoming book reviews are available at http://www.canlit.ca

Canadian Literature thanks the Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies (INSTRCC) at the University of British Columbia for its financial contribution to this special issue. We are especially grateful for the advice and support of Dr. Henry Yu, Director of INSTRCC.

Canadian Literature, a peer-reviewed journal, welcomes original, unpublished submissions of articles, interviews, and other commentaries relating to writers and writing in Canada, and of previously unpublished poems by Canadian writers. The journal does not publish fiction.

Articles of approximately 6500 words (including Notes and Works Cited), double spaced, in 12-point font size, should be submitted in triplicate, with the author's name deleted from two copies, and addressed to The Editor, *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z1. Submissions should include a brief biographical note (50 words), an abstract (150 words), and a self-addressed return envelope, either with Canadian stamps or accompanied by International Postal Reply Coupons. Submissions without SASE cannot be returned.

Articles should follow MLA guidelines for bibliographic format. All works accepted for publication must also be available electronically.

Canadian Literature, revue universitaire avec comités d'évaluation, reçoit des soumissions originales d'articles, d'entrevues et autres commentaires inédits portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

Les manuscrits, d'une longueur approximative de 6500 mots, doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux anonymisés), adressés au directeur de *Canadian Literature*, The University of British Columbia, Buchanan E158, 1866 Main Mall, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z1, et accompagnés d'une note biographique (50 mots), d'un résumé (150 mots), et d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

Les articles soumis doivent répondre aux exigences de forme bibliographique définies par la MLA. Tous les textes acceptés pour publication devront être fournis électroniquement.

Visit the *Canadian Literature* website for news, forthcoming reviews, submission guidelines, subscription information, archives, and other features: **http://www.canlit.ca**

GST R108161779

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is assisted by the University of British Columbia, the Faculty of Arts (UBC), and SSHRCC. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs, and through the Canada Magazine Fund, toward web enhancement and promotional costs.

Canada

Canadian Literature is indexed in *Canadian Periodical Index, Canadian Magazine Index, Humanities International Complete*, and the *MLA International Bibliography*, among numerous others. The journal is indexed and abstracted by EBSCO, PROQUEST and ABES. Full text of articles and reviews from 1997 is available from PROQUEST and EBSCO Publishing. The journal is available in microfilm from University Microfilm International.

For subscriptions, back issues (as available), and indexes, visit our Web site.

Publications Mail Agreement
NO. 40592543
Registration NO. 08647

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO

Canadian Literature
The University of British Columbia
Buchanan E158 - 1866 Main Mall,
Vancouver, BC
Canada V6T 1Z1

TELEPHONE: (604) 822-2780
FAX: (604) 827-4040
E-MAIL: Can.Lit@ubc.ca
http://www.canlit.ca

SUBSCRIPTIONS: $50 INDIVIDUAL; $89 INSTITUTIONAL, GST INCLUDED. OUTSIDE CANADA: US $75 INDIVIDUAL; US $114 INSTITUTIONAL.

ISSN 0008-4360

Managing Editor: Donna Chin
Donna.Chin@ubc.ca
Production Staff: Matthew Gruman
Stephen Ullstrom
Beth Veitch
Design: George Vaitkunas
Illustrations: George Kuthan
Printing: Hignell Printing Limited
Typefaces: Minion and Univers
Paper: recycled and acid-free

Guy Beauregard

Asian Canadian Studies
Unfinished Projects

I

In an essay that investigates "why interethnic antiracism matters now," George Lipsitz asserts that "while ethnic studies is doing very well, ethnic people are faring very badly" (296). In making this assertion, Lipsitz seeks to identify and confront the implications of "the disparity between the status of ethnic studies and the status of ethnic communities" in the United States (296–97). He acknowledges that this disparity stems in part "from the personal failings of individual scholars, from the elitism and ideological conservatism at the core of academic career hierarchies, and from the isolation of many ethnic studies scholars from the activities of actual social movements" (297). But he also underlines that "the ethnic studies paradigm itself, as it has emerged historically, is also partly responsible for the problems we face" (197)—a point that has been addressed in a variety of ways by prominent ethnic studies scholars in the United States over the past twenty years (see, for example, Hirabayashi and Alquizola; Kim; and Omi). Particularly problematic for Lipsitz is what he calls "a one-group-at-a-time story of exclusion and discrimination rather than an analytic, comparative, and relational approach revealing injustice to be the rule rather than the exception in our society" (297). For Lipsitz, new forms of capitalist exploitation and new forms of racism in the postindustrial United States demand "new methods, theories, and strategies" to help us investigate what he calls "the interconnectedness of oppressions" (297).

Lipsitz's wake-up call, directed to scholars working in US ethnic studies, does not translate smoothly for scholars working on Asian Canadian topics. In Canada, to the untrained eye, *ethnic studies itself appears to be faring*

badly. Despite the impressive collective efforts of scholars and community workers to set up specific research centres and even entire universities that serve the needs and interests of racialized communities[1]—efforts that have, in part, helped to legitimize and make possible the shape of current critical projects, about which I have more to say below—the legacy of "ethnic studies" in Canada, understood as such, remains in many instances markedly and unapologetically inattentive to questions of race.[2] But changes are occurring. Over the past ten years, doctoral dissertations on various Asian Canadian topics have been completed in Canada and elsewhere—dissertations that have not only produced original knowledge about Asian Canadians but also, in various ways, attempted to realign the critical bases of Asian Canadian inquiry.[3] Some scholars have set up new academic programs to try to transform the discipline-based, one-group-at-a-time approaches that characterize much existing scholarship on Asian Canadian topics.[4] Meanwhile, some academic departments in Canadian universities have recruited faculty members in new fields that explicitly recognize the importance of Asian North American studies.[5]

In the midst of these evolving developments, I wish to ask why Asian Canadian studies projects might matter now. But before I turn to the specifics of my argument, I want to underline that the shift in my terminology from "scholarship on Asian Canadian topics" to "Asian Canadian studies projects" is not accidental. I'm using these two terms to name overlapping yet distinct approaches in the existing scholarly record. "Scholarship on Asian Canadian topics" names the various kinds of academic work done, typically through established disciplinary approaches, about some aspects of Asian Canadian history or culture or social formations. While obviously diverse in its aims, its methods, and its disciplinary commitments, this body of scholarship, considered as a whole, typically conveys a limited awareness of and engagement with the social movements and the intellectual histories that have, since the early 1970s, enabled "Asian Canadian" topics to become visible as sites of knowledge production. To ungenerous readers, the body of scholarship I've gathered here may be characterized as "academic business as usual—but this time it's about Asian Canadians."

The second term I've introduced, "Asian Canadian studies projects," names scholarly work that also addresses some aspects of Asian Canadian history or culture or social formations. But these projects, despite critical disagreements and diverging methodological or political commitments, nevertheless attempt to work out of an awareness of the social movements, the cultural

activism, and the intellectual histories that have enabled the category of "Asian Canadian" to come into being. In this sense, Asian Canadian studies projects are not content with only producing new studies about Asian Canadians—that is, they are not content with simply considering Asian Canadians as objects of knowledge—but instead attempt, in distinct and sometimes conflicting ways, to understand and possibly transform various discipline-based sites of knowledge production. To sympathetic readers, these critical projects attempt to say, explicitly or implicitly, that, "Yes, we need to address topics concerning Asian Canadians, but academic business as usual needs to be examined too!"

To explain why I distinguish these two terms, I'd like to take a quick detour to provide an example from English literary studies in Canada. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, we accumulated, in the existing scholarly record, many published critical essays on Joy Kogawa's celebrated novel *Obasan* (1981). In other words, when we look at the Kogawa example, we see that there's no lack of scholarship on Asian Canadian topics during this period. But the visibility of scholarship discussing *Obasan*, along with the prominent circulation of Kogawa's novel in the teaching and critical discussion of Can Lit during this period, raises the question of whether, as Roy Miki has asked, "formerly ethnocentric institutions, such as CanLit, [are] being radically transformed by the inclusion of a racialized text" (136). When we examine the critical record produced around *Obasan*, we find comparatively little scholarly work that has attempted to situate Kogawa's novel in the context of Asian Canadian cultural history and comparatively little work that has viewed it as a site in which problems in the discipline of Canadian literary studies may be made visible. With some important notable exceptions—such as the work of Roy Miki, Scott McFarlane, Donald Goellnicht, and others—there were comparatively few Asian Canadian studies projects that asked, as Miki does, whether the "possibility of an 'inclusive university' depends not only on the inclusion of racialized texts and writers on the curriculum, but . . . [also on] the expertise of academics of colour in a critical mass sufficient to transform literary studies into a vital mode of social and cultural critique" (178).

At this point, we might rightly ask whether it's logically sound to use critical discussions of *Obasan* as an example to understand the many and complex vectors of Asian Canadian studies scholarship produced since the 1970s. In fact, as I've argued elsewhere, it may be more precise to think of the case of "Kogawa criticism" as an expression of the particular contradictions facing Canadian literary studies over the past two decades as critics have attempted

to confront the difficult implications of reading a "racist past" in a "multicultural present"—that is, as they have attempted the genuinely difficult task of transforming the discipline of Canadian literary criticism to address representations of racialization and racist exclusion in Canada (see Beauregard, "After *Obasan*"). Debates in other disciplines and in other locations may not fit precisely—or may not fit at all—within this particular problematic. Out of numerous possible examples, we could consider the case of cultural geography and the important work done by scholars such as Katharyne Mitchell on the role of transnational capital in reshaping our understanding of Vancouver's built environment.[6] Mitchell's work has not been explicitly concerned with disciplinary codes or with the contradictions of the existing scholarly record, but it has nevertheless pushed forward our understanding of received notions of "Chineseness" on the west coast of Canada in the 1980s and beyond. Certainly, the questions we ask and the critical problems we face will vary depending on our disciplinary commitments, the institutions in which we work, and the critical problems we try to investigate.

So how might Asian Canadian studies projects matter to us now? To address this question, I want to explain some of the reasons why I've arrived at my current thinking about these matters. I've been reading and thinking about Asian Canadian literature since I moved to Vancouver in 1993 to start an MA at the University of British Columbia. As I read these texts, and as I learned more about the larger social text surrounding them, I was consistently struck by the power with which Asian Canadian cultural production (including literary writing and the visual and media arts) was dynamically pushing forward—and in many cases offering sustained challenges to—received ideas about Canada. But while Asian Canadian cultural production continued to push forward in the 1990s, English studies in Canada responded—sometimes belatedly, sometimes not at all—in ways that I found profoundly discomfiting at that time. Why was that so? To put matters bluntly, English departments in Canada in the 1990s appeared to be more comfortable including *Obasan* as course material than including people of colour as faculty members. In this time period, we witnessed a dramatic proliferation of articles on texts such as *Obasan*, but we didn't witness a similarly dramatic reflexive turn that could question the unselfconscious uses of Kogawa's novel and other Asian Canadian cultural texts as signifiers of multicultural inclusiveness in English studies in Canada. This is not a happy story, and it's not one I retell with any joy. Given these conditions—which, I want to make clear, were *not* uniformly the same across different institutions

and were *not* passively accepted by many of us working within and outside these institutions—I felt dissatisfied with the growing proliferation of "coming to voice" critical narratives that did not, at the same time, analyse and question the exclusions in our profession and the circumscribed terms on which certain racialized voices were being heard and discussed.

As I write this essay, I realize I've become markedly more hopeful about the potential critical contributions of Asian Canadian studies projects. To be sure, many of the problems I've noted above remain with us today. We have not crossed any finish line in a race to address and transform the exclusions inherent in academic practices in Canada. But as I've been reading the essays collected in this issue, I must admit I've been astonished by the clarity with which the contributors have traced the pasts and imagined the possible futures of Asian Canadian studies. In this respect, we could note the theoretical rigour Christopher Lee brings to his examination of the "enacting" of the term "Asian Canadian" in the landmark *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* (1979) and beyond, or Iyko Day's meticulous tracking of the historical fluctuations in race concepts in Canada and their significance for our understanding of "Asian Canadian" as a socially constituted category. We could note Donald Goellnicht's acute investigation of Asian Canadian canon formation to ask how and why the work of Roy Kiyooka and Fred Wah may be important to our understanding of this critical frame. We could note Marie Lo's original analysis of model minority discourse and visible minority discourse (the latter being one of the Canadian state's notable contributions to contemporary English-language governmental discourses of racialization) in the paratext surrounding the literary work of Evelyn Lau. We could note the critical range Glenn Deer brings to his analysis of the profound changes Greater Vancouver has undergone since the Asian Canadian movement in the 1970s, changes that are legible in its built environment and in representations of urban and suburban spaces in Asian Canadian writing. We could note the remarkable ethical engagement Roy Miki brings to what he calls "global drift" and the shifting grounds of national identity and subject formation in Canada. And we could note the principled ways in which Rita Wong and Lily Cho situate the formation of Asian Canadian subjectivities in colonial histories, thereby asking (following Wong) what "decolonizasian" could look like through a close examination of Asian and First Nations relations in literary texts, or asking (following Cho) what renewed examination of colonial archives could tell us about the historical interconnections between the African slave trade and

the "routes of indenture" of Asians in the Americas. Taken together, these contributions suggest that Asian Canadian cultural criticism has entered an exciting and profoundly generative phase.

It may be tempting to view the remarkable critical work collected in this issue as a point of *arrival*. In other words, while it's been widely recognized that cultural workers have been producing work that has been understood as "Asian Canadian" since the 1970s, it may be tempting to view the current critical moment as one in which Asian Canadian cultural criticism has finally *caught up*. Without discounting the power Asian Canadian cultural production has accumulated to put into play new ideas about history and identity and representation, and without minimizing the potentially transformative power of contemporary Asian Canadian cultural criticism, I sense that notions of "arriving" and "catching up" may impede rather than further our understanding of how we've come to the present critical conjuncture. We could ask, *"Arriving" where? "Catching up" to what?* There's no single running track here and, given the complexity of contemporary social formations and historical and cultural representations, no set end point to contemporary Asian Canadian critical projects, whose points of engagement continue to be multiple and varied.

That being said, I sense that there may nevertheless be something distinct and noteworthy about the current critical moment. To explain why, I want to clarify some of the reasons why I believe this is *not* the case. First and foremost, the current critical moment does not gain its importance from somehow springing miraculously out of nowhere, from emerging as a fully formed set of critical projects that have somehow built themselves up from scratch. Scholars working in the current moment have instead, in various ways, taken up and extended the challenges and complexities of previous critical moments, ranging from the remarkable convergence of essays, poetry, interviews, short fiction, and photography collected in *Inalienable Rice* through to many subsequent projects, including the special issue of *Canadian Literature* on *Asian Canadian Writing* edited by Glenn Deer almost a decade ago, that have reframed our lines of investigation and points of intervention.[7] Discounting the significance of these earlier moments—and, as Henry Yu has underlined in his study of what he calls "the origins and consequences of a widespread fascination with the Oriental in the United States" (9), the importance of other earlier key sites of knowledge production too—does not help us to understand how and why contemporary Asian Canadian projects have taken their present shape.

It's also worth stating as clearly as possible that the present critical moment does not gain its strength from naming, and then mapping out, a presumably stable identity—that is, from anchoring itself to a stable referent we can now, finally, call "Asian Canadian." As a marker of identity, the term "Asian Canadian" has *always* been spatially and historically contingent, from its emergence in cultural activism and panethnic coalitions in Vancouver and Toronto in the 1970s through to the different ways the term may continue to be mobilized, as Stephen Sumida has said of the term "Asian American," as an "analytic category, not an identity" (807). On a related note, Asian Canadian projects have not moved to a critically generative phase by setting up and nestling into a single, stable institutional location—that is, by setting up and working within something we could now comfortably call "Asian Canadian Studies" with a capital S—in which we could recognize a stable curriculum, set standards for hiring and promotion, and a defined institutional space dedicated to teaching and conducting research on "Asian Canadian" topics. As Lily Cho points out in her contribution to this issue, scholars working on Asian Canadian topics have not been trained in this way, and any serious engagement of the contemporary formations of Asian Canadian studies scholarship must take this fact into account.

Contemporary Asian Canadian projects have not sprung fully formed in our midst. They do not speak to a self-evident collective identity. They have not been produced in already-formed and securely institutionalized Asian Canadian Studies programs. Given this situation, I want to suggest that *Asian Canadian studies projects may matter now precisely because they have been developed and continue to operate in such unsettled terrain*. Despite facing varying forms and combinations of disciplinary parochialism, multicultural fascination and tokenism, and institutionalized white privilege that persistently downplays the social force of whiteness in Canada, Asian Canadian critical projects produced inside and outside Canadian universities have managed, remarkably, to thrive. And it's noteworthy that these critical projects have, in many instances, rejected a simple additive model of knowledge production (i.e., adding new studies to the critical record—"but this time the studies are about Asian Canadians") and instead sought out what R. Radhakrishnan has called, in his discussion of "conjunctural identities" in Asian American studies, "a different modality of knowledge" (252). Radhakrishnan has pointed out that it's crucial to investigate *Asian-America* (which he uses in this hyphenated form) not merely as a demographic census marker (i.e., as a given category or a set identity) but also as "a political-epistemic category"

(253). On a similar register, contemporary Asian Canadian projects encourage us to reconsider the term "Asian Canadian" as *not* a stable marker that names an already-constituted object of analysis but a "political-epistemic category" that can draw from what Radhakrishnan identifies as "the adjacencies that have developed among the several disciplines that constitute the humanities" (259)—and, I would add, the social sciences too.

So instead of thinking of the current critical conjuncture as a moment of *arrival* or a moment of *catching up*—and instead of viewing it as an attempt to name or describe a stable identity we can now, finally, call "Asian Canadian"—we may productively view the present moment as an opportunity to critically address and transform social and institutional conditions that are not of our choosing. We may well wonder how Asian Canadian studies projects might intervene in currently configured academic formations or how they might articulate these formations to community-based activism and practices of the everyday. There is much work to be done in this respect to connect Asian Canadian studies scholarship to the larger project of social transformation. As I write the introduction to this issue, I remain struck by the many points we could—but have yet to—pursue. I want to stress that this is not simply a matter of adding new materials to existing "Asian Canadian" approaches. It is instead a matter of recognizing, as Stephen Sumida and Sauling Wong have underlined in their discussion of Asian American literature (4), that the perspectives presented here do not *represent* the identity and culture of "Asian Canadians" but instead *present* strategic bases from which to rethink social and cultural formations in Canada. There continue to be many critical perspectives that we need to bring into focus—this, among other things, indicates the potential future significance of Asian Canadian studies scholarship—and the ways we think about Asian Canadian studies and why it might matter will need to change accordingly.

II

Out of many possible lines of intervention, I want to investigate one topic: the ways that existing Asian Canadian studies projects have worked—and continue to work—within various structures of *multicultural governmentality* in Canada. What does this mean? At least since the early 1970s—in other words, at least since the period roughly coterminous with the formation of the Asian Canadian movement as a collective social and cultural movement—state discourses in Canada have, in distinct and evolving ways, encouraged particular expressions of "cultural difference" and named these

expressions as constitutively part of the Canadian nation. These forms of encouragement have functioned as a form of *government* in the precise sense discussed by Michel Foucault. "To govern," in his famous formulation, "is to structure the possible field of actions of others"; for Foucault, "government" designates "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick" (221). In this sense, multicultural governmentality names the diverse and evolving ways in which the conduct and the expression of designated "multicultural others" may be encouraged, directed, and managed.

For racialized and ethnicized communities in Canada, the management of "cultural difference" did not spring up fully formed in 1971 with the Trudeau government's introduction of official multiculturalism and the accompanying White Paper tabled on October 8, 1971. We could note, out of many possible examples, a remarkable scene in Wayson Choy's novel *The Jade Peony* (1995) that represents a classroom in Strathcona School in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 1941:

> In Miss E. Doyle's classroom, at least, there was no name-calling; in class, no pushing, no kicking. Not even whispering. Her commands were simple, and simply barked: "Sit." "Eyes front." "Feet flat on the floor." And all the boys and girls obeyed. . . . Miss Doyle, with her loud gravel voice, was the guardian of our education. With hawk-eyed precision, she reined in her Third-Graders with a kind of compassionate terror, blasting out a delinquent's full name as if she were God's avenging horn: each vowel of any name, however multisyllabled, whether it was Japanese, East Asian or Eastern European, Italian or Chinese, was enunciated; each vowel cracked with the clarity of thunder. (173–75)

In commenting on this scene, the character Sekky observes that "inside Miss E. Doyle's tightly disciplined kingdom we were all—lions or lambs—equals" (184); at the same time, though, there was, against Miss E. Doyle's "thundering authority," absolutely "no appeal" (185). Choy's novel thereby marks out, in a way that aligns his narrative with many postcolonial literary texts, the *classroom* as a crucial site of discipline and subject formation—that is, as a site in which each subject's name would be carefully and forcefully *enunciated*.[8]

But while the management of "cultural difference" in Canada did not simply begin in the 1970s, we can nevertheless recognize significant changes in modes of governmentality in the 1970s and 1980s. This shift is well known and has been frequently discussed in contemporary scholarship.[9] Among contemporary critical accounts, we could note Himani Bannerji's observation that "multiculturalism" is "not a cultural object, all inert, waiting on the

shelf to be bought or not"; rather, it's "a mode of the workings of the state, an expression of an interaction of social relations in dynamic tension with each other" (120). We could recall Smaro Kamboureli's discussion of the 1988 Multiculturalism Act as a kind of "sedative politics"—that is, "a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them" (82). We could consider Eva Mackey's observation that, through the Multiculturalism Act, "the state did not seek to erase difference but rather attempted to institutionalise, constitute, shape, manage, and control difference" and note her insistence on recognizing the fact "that despite the proliferation of cultural difference, the power to define, limit and tolerate differences still lies in the hands of the dominant group" (70).

This last point remains crucial for understanding the question of multicultural governmentality. To elaborate this point, I want to take another quick detour, this time to the work of Ghassan Hage, a cultural critic who has investigated with considerable wit and insight questions of multicultural governmentality in Australia. Particularly memorable in this respect is Hage's reading of a children's book called *The Stew that Grew*, which Hage glosses as a story set in Victoria, Australia, during the gold rush "about how miners from different ethnic backgrounds combined the various ethnic-specific ingredients in their possession and made the 'Eureka stew'" (119). Hage tells us that the stew begins with Molly O'Drew and her husband, Blue, attempting to make a meal out of four potatoes in a cauldron. Molly remarks, in Hage's reading, that "It wasn't much of a feast," and, noticing some tired and hungry miners, she attempts to transform the situation to "make our own Christmas stew" (qtd. in Hage 119). At this point, in Hage's retelling, all the "ethnic" characters step forward and contribute to the stew: "O'Malley rose first with some Spuds, then it was the Rudds turn with some carrots that Blue chopped to pieces and bounced the lot in. Then came Taffy with leeks and Nell with a turnip, old Hugh with some barley and Leopold with some Brussels sprouts, Maria Mazzini with some zucchini, Heinrich and Hans with some sauerkraut, Jacques with onions, Abdul with garlic, Wong the Chinese with a bagful of peas, and many others" (119–20). Finally, after Johnny Barcoo has tossed in "Yams and the tail of a red Kangaroo," Blue makes the final contribution to "the stew that grew": "Then the last thing of all was cast in by Blue /—but just what it was, nobody knew" (qtd. in Hage 120). Hage's brilliant retelling of this story underlines the significance of what he calls "the Anglo who just could not stop cooking" (118)—that is, the fact that, "while everyone throws in their ingredient, one person is allowed

a monopoly over cooking from the beginning of the story until its end: the White Australian 'Blue'" (120). In this way, the story assigns to Blue what Hage calls "the hard work of regulating the mix" (123)—represented by *the as-yet-unnamed contribution he makes to the stew*.

Hage's analysis of Australian cultural politics through "the stew that grew" resonates (Australia-specific ingredients such as red kangaroo tails notwithstanding) with the question of multicultural governmentality in Canada. In Canada, as Hage notes about Australia, "containment does not mean exclusion. It involves a far more complex process of positioning"; practices of containment, in turn, "aim at *regulating the modality of inclusion* of the Third World-looking migrants in national space instead" (133). In the meantime, the *pleasure* of the story—generated through its rhythms and rhymes, with its strategic withholding of key information, and so on—signals the important point that contemporary forms of multicultural regulation are not straightforward repressive social processes but involve what we might call, following "the stew that grew," the pleasures of hotpot cooking—the pleasures of being part of social processes of multicultural mixing.

How, then, might we understand the work performed by contemporary Asian Canadian studies projects? Given the range of the interests and the diversity of the locations of these projects, it seems counterintuitive to think of each as *only* obediently lining up to contribute a single ingredient to a larger white-directed multicultural stew. Yet it seems equally counterintuitive to understand Asian Canadian studies projects as *only* voluntary efforts that somehow stand outside the modes of government that have—in distinct ways in different places and at different times—helped to reshape Canada into a "multicultural" social formation since the 1970s. It may be more precise to note that the cluster of Asian Canadian studies projects that I've described in this essay has emerged alongside these modes of governmentality—and, in doing so, has thereby worked in the spaces of "cultural difference" recognized (as always, in deeply circumscribed ways) by white multiculturalism—*but they have not accepted these terms of recognition as an endpoint to larger projects of social transformation*. Projects as distinct as the critical activist work of DAARE (Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation) to contest the scapegoating and incarceration of undocumented migrants from Fujian province following their arrival on the west coast of Canada in the summer of 1999 (see *Movements*); Rajini Srikanth's analysis of the cultural politics of commemorating the 1914 *Komagata Maru* incident in Vancouver among South Asian communities in North

America; Mona Oikawa's rigorous critique of the gendered racialization that underwrote the internment of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s and how this history might be remembered otherwise; Masumi Izumi's nuanced examination of postwar Japanese Canadian community in Vancouver, with a focus upon "the dialectical relationship between government policy and community initiatives" in the reclamation and transformation of the Powell Street area in the 1970s (309); and Pura Velasco's powerful examination of the unjust global political-economic conditions (including the probability of abuses scripted in the terms of Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program) that circumscribe the lives of Filipino and Filipina migrant workers in Canada—all speak with clarity not only about where Canada has been but also about how and why Canada must change.

III

As I was helping to assemble this special issue, Doudou Diène, a special rapporteur for the United Nations, filed a report entitled *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination* (2004) to the Sixtieth Session of the Commission on Human Rights.[10] The report is based on Diène's visit to Canada in September 2003 to "assess the present situation in Canada, with regard to the question of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, and hence the state of relations between the various communities, against the country's characteristically multi-ethnic and multicultural background" (2). The Diène Report is a remarkable document that pulls together historical and contemporary sources to state unequivocally that, "owing to its background and its specific characteristics, Canadian society is still affected by racism and racial discrimination" (20). Among its fifteen conclusions and recommendations, the report urges the federal government and provincial governments to implement outstanding recommendations from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples;[11] the Nova Scotia provincial government to consult with communities of African origin and "re-examine the conditions of their relocation, particularly from Africville, . . . with a view to granting them reparation" (25);[12] and the federal government to "restart consultations with members of the Chinese community in Canada in order to consider the possibility of compensating the descendants of persons who paid the head tax or members of their families who were affected by that measure" (25).[13]

Following the release of the Diène Report in March 2004, many newspaper articles and letters to the editors of newspapers in Canada focused

on the question of *reparation* and *compensation* for the forceful removal of former Africville residents and for remaining Chinese head tax payers and their families. The print media responses to the question of head tax reparations that appeared in late March 2004 were, at times, predictable—as in the case of *Edmonton Sun* columnist Mindelle Jacobs, who observed that "The past is the past. Let's move on" before advising us to "celebrate our multicultural success story." Some responses were also astonishingly myopic—as in the case of a letter to the *Vancouver Sun* signed by "Chris Haines, North Vancouver," who stated (apparently without irony) that Charlie Quan, a ninety-seven-year-old surviving head tax payer, "should simply be thankful that he was able to leave China, whose future oppressive communist government would not have given him the same opportunities he had in our wonderful free market society." Other responses to the question of head tax reparations were strikingly caustic. In another letter in the *Vancouver Sun*, signed by "Diana Fuoco, Vancouver," the author identified herself as a granddaughter of head tax–paying immigrants before directly admonishing the same Charlie Quan to "quit your complaining, count your blessings and savour each day in this wonderful country."

These letter writers were responding to an article by Petti Fong in the *Vancouver Sun* in which Fong tells us, with sympathy and care, the story of Charlie Quan, a Vancouver resident who arrived in Canada in 1923 as "a skinny 15-year-old kid with more ambition than education" and immediately went to work in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, to pay off his enormous debt, which included eighty dollars to pay for the twenty-day passage from Guangzhou to Canada and five hundred dollars to pay for the head tax levied on prospective Chinese immigrants to Canada. "I didn't have much," Quan says. "More debt than anything in the beginning. For years, a lot of debt." The article reports that Quan worked for nearly twenty years in Saskatchewan and then, since 1942, in Vancouver, where he started two grocery stores with his wife. During this time, "he was so busy having a life in Canada that he didn't think about seeking repayment for the head tax he had paid." "It's okay for me now to go," Quan says. "The only thing that I want to see is the government pay back the money they took from me." At this point in his life, Quan states simply, "It's been a good life in Canada. . . . But I don't want it to end with getting no word from the government."

Surviving head tax payers, in fact, finally have heard from the federal government of Canada. On June 22, 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood up in the House of Commons to "offer a full apology to Chinese Canadians

for the head tax and express [his] deepest sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants" (Harper). The language utilized by Harper in his address (including his characterization of the head tax period as "an unfortunate period Canada's past") was strikingly similar to the language utilized by then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney almost 18 years earlier in his apology to Japanese Canadians on September 22, 1988.[14] Yet what was substantively different in this case was that the apology and compensation provided by the federal government of Canada in 2006 were *not* the result of a negotiated settlement. Harper's announcement subsequently generated a complex mix of euphoria (that the federal government of Canada had finally acknowledged its wrongdoing) and critique (that the "symbolic payments" were to provide compensation to living head tax payers and to the living spouses of head tax payers only—and thereby redress only a fraction of the Chinese immigrants and their Chinese Canadian descendants affected by the head tax). In response to Harper's announcement, Colleen Hua, the National President of the Chinese Canadian National Council, stated flatly: "We need meaningful redress for all head tax families" ("Chinese Canadians"). The mixed feelings at this moment of redress are powerfully captured in Karen Cho's NFB podcast representing the June 22, 2006 announcement and its immediate aftermath, a podcast that concludes with a stark reminder that "While approximately 300 survivors will receive direct compensation, 4000 families of descendants were excluded from the redress package."[15]

When reading the complexity of this moment, we would do well to recall Lily Cho's important critical work on the question of "head tax racism" and redress. In 2002, Cho asked, "would it be enough that [then Prime Minister] Jean Chrétien reenact the scene that Brian Mulroney played in 1988 [in the announcement of the Japanese Canadian redress settlement] where redress becomes the site of a self-satisfied national political consolidation?" ("Reading" 81).[16] Likewise, we can ask: Is it enough that Prime Minister Stephen Harper attempted to reenact this scene? Cho's question about head tax reparations—which draws upon critical rethinkings, by Roy Miki and others, of the implications of the Japanese Canadian redress settlement—is part of a larger critical examination of how redress might be put in the service of an antiracist critique that is not content to *end* with narratives of Chinese exceptionalism (narratives that gain their purchase from the fact that "Chinese" subjects were named and differentiated from "other" subjects precisely through—among many other factors—the legal mechanisms of head tax legislation) but instead attempts the genuinely difficult work of

"find[ing] new ways to consider more substantially coalitions and historically overlapping and interconnected oppressions in order to carve out of the residue of racist culture a powerful antiracist critique" ("Reading" 81).

In this respect, Lily Cho's critical intervention brings us back to George Lipsitz's observations, with which I began this essay, concerning the "interconnectedness of oppressions" and the "new methods, theories, and strategies" that we need to address them (297). Cho's intervention also brings us back to the Diène Report and why it matters as an important signpost of the contemporary moment. A key point that the Diène Report makes clearly and repeatedly is that "The lack of any intellectual strategy is a serious handicap in Canada's undoubted efforts to combat racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia" (23). In this regard, the report underlines the need to address areas that include "the building of identity, the writing of history, education programmes, value systems, images and perception" (23). The Diène Report's rationale for making this point is that "Any attempt to eradicate the racist culture and mentality . . . requires, apart from the force of law, mobilizing intellectual tools to dismantle its deep-rooted causes, mechanisms, processes, expressions and language. *The law forbids, condemns, redresses and remedies but does not necessarily bring about a change of heart*" (23; emphasis added).

When I presented a version of this paper in San Francisco, Henry Yu noted the problem of knowledge production in Asian Canadian studies by asking, "What will the knowledge production be for?"[17] What will Asian Canadian studies be for? At its base, Asian Canadian studies tries to develop and mobilize some of the "intellectual tools" called for by the Diène Report to try to bring about, directly or indirectly, some kind of "change of heart." In this sense, it tries to bring about what Gayatri Spivak has perceptively called, in her discussion of education in the humanities, "an *uncoercive* rearrangement of desires" (526). When we examine the case of Chinese head tax redress, we may appear to be looking backward to late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Canadian history. But in doing so, we are in fact asking how this case raises fundamental and persistent questions about Canada's present—and the sort of place Canada might possibly become. For Asian Canadian studies scholars, Yu's question about the *goals* of knowledge production serves as a necessary reminder to disentangle and rigorously differentiate what the disseminators of disciplinary codes and top-down pressures at universities expect us to do and what, in the current critical conjuncture, actually needs to be done.[18] It's my hope that the essays collected in this special issue can help us to keep this distinction clear. And it's my hope, as we

face the many and varied *unfinished projects* in Asian Canadian studies, that these essays can help to furnish some of the intellectual strategies needed—as Stephen Slemon has powerfully observed—to help transform Canada into a place that can potentially be "just" (Slemon, Afterword 323).

IV

Many people have helped to bring this special issue into being. My former colleague and guest coeditor, Andy Yiu-nam Leung, initiated the idea of having a special issue on Asian Canadian literature, and helped to synchronize our goals with the practical demands of journal publishing. The contributors to this issue delivered, with energy and grace, a set of manuscripts that consistently exceeded our high expectations and helped to direct, in deeply substantive ways, the arguments and the sense of hope I've tried to put forward in this introduction. Here particular thanks are due to Henry Yu for generously contributing his afterword; to Chris Lee for expertly coordinating this issue's collective epilogue; and to Glenn Deer for providing thoughtful feedback throughout. At an earlier point in this project, Kevin Flynn provided sharp readerly eyes and feedback that helped to strengthen the issue as a whole. And warm thanks are due to Margery Fee and the production staff at *Canadian Literature* for graciously taking on this issue and steering the manuscripts through the publication process. Thanks to their efforts, *this* project is finished.

Finally, I wish to note that this issue was initiated and assembled in Taiwan, which is where both Andy and I are currently based. Scholarly work on Asian Canadian topics has taken a decidedly international turn at least since the 1980s, with substantial contributions made by scholars based in the United States, Australia, Europe, Japan, and elsewhere in Asia. The commitment of students and scholars in Taiwan to work through questions of cultural identity in these postcolonial times is, to my mind, particularly noteworthy in this respect and is palpable in all aspects of my scholarly life. This issue attempts to *speak across* in the hope that, in doing so, it can encourage its readers to bring the challenges of facing the "unfinished projects" of Asian Canadian studies some place close to home.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earlier versions of this essay were presented on a panel on "Asian Canadian Studies: Pasts and Futures" at the Association for Asian American Studies, San Francisco, 8 May 2003; to members of the Department of Applied English at National Taipei University of

Technology, Taipei, 16 December 2003; to members of the Department of Ethnic Studies and the Canadian Studies Program at the University of California at Berkeley, 26 April 2005; and to members of the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, University of Western Ontario, 28 May 2005. I'd like to thank the other panel participants in San Francisco as well as audience members at each event for their questions, feedback, and engagement, with particular thanks to Lily Cho, Daniel Coleman, and Kyoko Sato for their generous comments and suggestions. Support for helping to edit this special issue and for researching and writing this essay was provided by the National Science Council in Taiwan (NSC 94-2411-H-007-034) and is gratefully acknowledged.

NOTES

1 Here we could note the Centre for the Study of Black Cultures in Canada at York University, which "endeavours to serve as a stimulus to and focal point for faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, as well as independent scholars who are pursuing research in African Canadian Studies, at York and elsewhere" ("About the Centre"), and, on a broader scale, the First Nations University of Canada (formerly the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College), which has been active since the fall of 1976 and whose stated mission is to "acquire and expand its base of knowledge and understanding in the best interests of First Nations and for the benefit of society by providing opportunities of quality bi-lingual and bi-cultural education under the mandate and control of the First Nations of Saskatchewan" (First Nations University).

2 For a discussion of this point, see Coleman and Goellnicht, who, in noting the founding of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association and the Research Centre for Canadian Ethnic Studies at the University of Calgary in 1968, observe that, "In the Canadian context, 'ethnic' was equated with linguistic and cultural pluralism, so that European and nonwhite ethnic cultures have been treated the same; in fact, European 'ethnic' groups (defined as all Continental cultures apart from the British and French) have traditionally dominated the field of Canadian ethnic studies" (9).

3 For dissertations focused on various "Asian Canadian" topics produced since the late 1990s, see Beauregard, "Asian Canadian Literature"; Cho, "On Eating Chinese"; Day; Fu; Khoo, "Banana Bending"; Koh; Tara Lee; Lo; McAllister; Oikawa, "Cartographies"; and Rita Wong. For publications that attempt to push forward comparative and cross-national critical analysis, see also Khoo, *Banana Bending*; Khoo and Louie; Ty; Ty and Goellnicht; and Yu and Beauregard.

4 One example is the Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies (INSTRCC) at the University of British Columbia, a program that provides institutional support for student fellows to work on projects involving oral and family histories, film-making, and website production; these projects, which range across the histories and cultures of various Asian Canadian communities, are intended to foster an approach to learning in which "students are not passively receiving what is already known but [are] actively creating new knowledge" ("Initiative").

5 We could note here the 2003-04 opening in "Asian North American literatures" in the Department of English at the University of Toronto—the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that a tenure-track position at a Canadian university has been configured as such—followed by similar searches at the University of British Columbia in 2005-2006 and Simon Fraser University in 2006-2007.

6 See Mitchell, "Facing Capital," which, along with the numerous articles and book chapters

she published in the 1990s, is a sustained attempt to grapple with shifting modes of racialization and racist exclusion in the context of what she calls "a tremendous movement of people and capital from Hong Kong to Vancouver" in the late 1980s (4)—an attempt that has appeared in book-length form in Mitchell, *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*.

7 For a partial list of key critical moments as they have appeared in anthologies and special issues of journals since the late 1970s, see Coleman and Goellnicht, *Race*; Deer; *Inalienable Rice*; Lowry and Kong; Miki and Wah; Paul Wong; and Yu and Beauregard.

8 On this last point, see Stephen Slemon's observation that "one of the most insistent arguments made by postcolonial writing . . . is that colonialist literary learning is at the primal scene of colonialist cultural control" ("Teaching" 153)—a topic Slemon has revisited in his afterword to the essay collection *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*.

9 For a cogent summary of this shift, particularly as it pertains to racial formations and concepts of "race" in Canada, see Coleman and Goellnicht, especially the section of their essay entitled "Multiculturalism at Midcentury" (7-11).

10 A full copy of the Diène Report is available through the "Charter-Based Bodies Database" on the website of the United Nations Office of the High Commission for Human Rights; see <http://www.unhchr.ch/data.htm>.

11 "As shown by the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, published in 1996, the persistent marginalization of aboriginal peoples is the result of the breakdown of a viable partnership between native peoples and the Europeans who settled in Canada, and later with the Canadian State. The context and scope of that partnership were determined in several treaties, which are still valid. The representatives of the aboriginal peoples maintain that the current management of aboriginal affairs by a federal ministry prevents their development. What they want is relations on an equal footing, free of any paternalism, between aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginals, based on signed treaties" (Diène 12).

12 "Africville was one of the settlements of Blacks who came to the shores of what is now known as Nova Scotia. It dates back to the 1700s and one of the first purchases of property deeds was recorded in 1848. . . . The period between 1913-1973 saw industrial growth at the expense of residents of Africville. A bone-meal plant, a cotton factory, a rolling mill/nail factory, a slaughterhouse, and a port facility for handling coal were built within earshot of residential homes. In the 1950's, the [Halifax] city dump was moved to within 100 metres of the westernmost group of Africville homes. . . . By 1960, the city of Halifax embarked on an urban renewal campaign, which would forcibly displace the residents of Africville in order to make room for industrial expansion. After 150 years of collusion between the provincial Government and the business community, including through abuse of power, neglect, encroachment and invasion of hazardous industrial materials, in 1970 all of the community was forcefully removed without proper compensation" (Diène 13–14).

13 "The Chinese Immigration Acts took the form of a head tax imposed on every person of Chinese origin entering Canada. From 1895 to 1923, it varied from $50 to $500. The Government of Canada made a sizeable profit from the imposition of the head tax on Chinese people. Between 1886 and 1923, the total revenue collected from Chinese [immigrants to Canada] is estimated at Can$23 million" (Diène 14).

14 In this respect, we could note Harper's assertion that "even though the head tax—a product of a profoundly different time—lies far in our past, we feel compelled to right this historic wrong for the simple reason that it is the decent thing to do, a characteristic to be found at the core of the Canadian soul" (Harper)—an assertion that forcefully locates

head tax racism "far in our past" (even as Harper directly addresses living head tax payers present that day in the House of Commons) while attempting to consolidate, through this apology, Canada's putative "decency."

15 Karen Cho observes: "The apology was a bitter-sweet moment for the Chinese Canadian community . . . . It was moving to see the last living survivors on hand to witness the apology, yet at the same time, it was heartbreaking to think of the thousands of others who had passed away during the struggle for redress and whose families were not included in the redress package" ("NFB's CITIZENShift"). Her podcast *Chinese Head Tax—Canada* (2006), which tracks the official apology on June 22, follows up on her earlier NFB documentary film *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain* (2004), which includes interview footage with surviving head tax payer Charlie Quan and other community workers involved in the redress movement. For a short discussion of Cho's film, see Fiona Lee.

16 "[I]n 1988 an agreement was reached between the federal Government and the National Association of Japanese Canadians to redress State treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II. The Japanese-Canadian redress is seen as an important milestone for that community and for Canada and could . . . eventually inspire future solutions for [the] Chinese head tax case" (Diène 14–15).

17 Yu asked this question as a discussant on a panel on "Asian Canadian Studies: Pasts and Futures" at the Association for Asian American Studies, San Francisco, 8 May 2003.

18 On this point, see Glenn Omatsu's observations delivered at the first Asian American studies departmental graduation ceremony at the University of California at Los Angeles in June 2004: "Creating a 'department of a new type' requires thinking about our education in new ways. It means moving beyond the mission of a traditional academic department, where students are viewed as consumers with little power over the content of their education. It means upholding the right to a college education for all at a time when that right is being attacked on many fronts. It means finding ways to redirect resources from universities to help transform our communities through support of grassroots movements" (2). In the context of this special issue, the "unfinished tasks" enumerated in Omatsu's address serve as a salient reminder of the many *educational* projects that remain "unfinished" when we imagine the possible future work of Asian Canadian studies.

WORKS CITED

"About the Centre for the Study of Black Cultures in Canada." 3 Nov. 2008. <http://www.yorku.ca/aconline/about.html>.

Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars', 2000.

Beauregard, Guy. "After *Obasan*: Kogawa Criticism and Its Futures." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 26.2 (2001): 5-22.

—. "Asian Canadian Literature: Diasporic Interventions in the Work of SKY Lee, Joy Kogawa, Hiromi Goto, and Fred Wah." Diss. U of Alberta, 2000.

"Chinese Canadians Discuss Head Tax Redress Issue in Toronto." Chinese Canadian National Council. 12 July 2006. 12 Nov. 2008. <http://www.ccnc.ca>.

Cho, Karen, dir. *Chinese Head Tax—Canada*. Podcast. National Film Board of Canada, 2006. 9 Dec. 2006. <www.citizen.nfb.ca/podcast>.

—. *In the Shadow of Gold Mountain*. Film. National Film Board of Canada, 2004.

Cho, Lily. "On Eating Chinese: Chinese Restaurants and the Politics of Diaspora." Diss. U of Alberta, 2003.

—. "Rereading Chinese Head Tax Racism: Redress, Stereotype, and Antiracist Critical Practice." Coleman and Goellnicht, ed., 62-84.
Choy, Wayson. *The Jade Peony*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995.
Coleman, Daniel, and Donald Goellnicht. "Introduction: 'Race' into the Twenty-First Century." Coleman and Goellnicht, ed., 1-29.
—, eds. *Race*. Spec. issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002).
Day, Iyko Lisa. "Out of Place: Asian North America in Transnational Borderlands." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 2007.
Deer, Glenn, ed. *Asian Canadian Writing*. Special issue of *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999).
Dième, Doudou. *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and All Forms of Discrimination*. Report. Commission on Human Rights, Sixtieth Session, Economic and Social Council, United Nations. 1 Mar. 2004.
First Nations University of Canada. "Our Mission." 3 Nov. 2008.<http://www.firstnation-suniversity.ca>.
Fong, Petti. "Man Implores Ottawa to Return $500 He Paid as Head Tax in 1923." *Vancouver Sun* 19 Mar. 2004: B1.
Foucault, Michel. "The Subject and Power." *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983. 208-26.
Fu, Bennett Yu-Hsiang. "Differing Bodies, Defying Subjects, Deferring Texts: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression in Chinese Canadian Women's Writing." Diss. U de Montréal, 2004.
Fuoco, Diana. Letter. *Vancouver Sun* 23 Mar. 2004: A21.
Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 1-41.
Hage, Ghassan. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. 1998. New York: Routledge, 2000.
Haines, Chris. Letter. *Vancouver Sun* 20 Mar. 2004: C7.
Harper, Stephen. "Address by the Prime Minister on the Chinese Head Tax Redress." 22 June 2006. 12 Nov. 2008. <http://www.pm.gc.ca>.
Hirabayashi, Lane Ryo, and Marilyn C. Alquizola. "Asian American Studies: Reevaluating for the 1990s." *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*. Ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan. Boston: South End, 1994. 351-64.
Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology. Vancouver: Powell Street Revue/Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop, 1979.
"Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies." 3 Nov. 2008. <http://www.instrcc.ubc.ca/INSTRCC/Who_We_Are.html>.
Izumi, Masumi. "Reclaiming and Reinventing 'Powell Street': Reconstruction of the Japanese Canadian Community in Post-World War II Vancouver." *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Louis Fiset and Gail M. Nomura. Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest; U of Washington P, 2005. 308-33.
Jacobs, Mindelle. "The Past Is the Past, Let's Move On." *Edmonton Sun* 21 Mar. 2004. 8 Apr. 2004. <http://www.canoe.ca>.
Kamboureli, Smaro. *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 2000.
Khoo, Tseen Ling. "Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literature." Diss. U of Queensland, 1999.

—. *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP; Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003.
Khoo, Tseen, and Kam Louie, eds. *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Chinese Diasporic Literatures in English*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP; Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2005.
Kim, Elaine H. "Beyond Railroads and Internment: Comments on the Past, Present, and Future of Asian American Studies." *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*. Ed. Gary Y. Okihiro et al. Pullman: Washington State UP, 1995. 11-19.
Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1981. Toronto: Penguin, 1983.
Koh, Karlyn Y-Mae. "Reflections on the Coming of History: Revisiting the Makings of a 'Chinese Canadian' Identity and Community." Diss. Simon Fraser U, 1999.
Lee, Fiona Hoi Ying. "Head Tax Re-Evaluated: Karen Cho Chronicles the Long Journey towards Redress." *Rice Paper* 9.4 (2004): 22-23.
Lee, Tara. "Promising Transnational Births: The Womb and Cyborg Politics in Asian Canadian Literature." Diss. Simon Fraser U, 2006.
Lipsitz, George. "'To Tell the Truth and Not Get Trapped': Why Interethnic Antiracism Matters Now." *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*. Ed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001. 296-309.
Lo, Meng Yu Marie. "Fields of Recognition: Reading Asian Canadian Literature in Asian America." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 2001.
Lowry, Glen and Sook C. Kong, eds. *In-Equations: Can Asia Pacific*. Spec. issue of *West Coast Line* 34.3 (2001).
Mackey, Eva. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. 1999. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002.
McAllister, Kirsten Emiko. "Remembering Political Violence: The Nikkei Internment Memorial." Diss. Carleton U, 2000.
McFarlane, Scott. "Covering *Obasan* and the Narrative of Internment." *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies.* Ed. Gary Y. Okihiro et al. Pullman: Washington State UP, 1995. 401-11.
Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.
Miki, Roy, and Fred Wah, ed. *Colour. An Issue*. Spec. issue of *West Coast Line* 28.1–2 (1994).
Mitchell, Katharyne. *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2004.
—. "Facing Capital: Cultural Politics in Vancouver." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 1993.
Movements across Borders: Chinese Women Migrants in Canada. Vancouver: Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation, 2001.
"NFB's CITIZENShift Podcasts History in the Making." Press Release. National Film Board of Canada. 19 July 2006. 12 Nov. 2008. <http:// www.onf.ca>.
Oikawa, Mona. "Cartographies of Violence: Women, Memory, and the Subject(s) of the 'Internment.'" *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*. Ed. Sherene H. Razack. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002. 71-98.
—. "Cartographies of Violence: Women, Memory, and the Subject(s) of the 'Internment.'" Diss. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, U of Toronto, 1999.
Omatsu, Glenn. "Unfinished Tasks in Asian American Studies." 2004. UCLA Asian American Studies Center. 3 Nov. 2008. <http: //www.aasc.ucla.eduhttp://www.aasc.ucla.edu/>.
Omi, Michael. "It Just Ain't the Sixties No More: The Contemporary Dilemmas of Asian American Studies." *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian*

American Studies. Ed. Gary Y. Okihiro et al. Pullman: Washington State UP, 1988. 31-36.
Radhakrishnan, R. "Conjunctural Identities, Academic Adjacencies." *Orientations: Mapping Studies in the Asian Diaspora*. Ed. Kandice Chuh and Karen Shimakawa. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2001. 249-63.
Slemon, Stephen. Afterword. *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 2004. 517-23.
—. Afterword. *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 318-24.
—. "Teaching at the End of Empire." *College Literature* 19.3-20.1 (1992-93): 152-61.
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Righting Wrongs." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2-3 (2004): 523-81.
Srikanth, Rajini. "The *Komagata Maru*: Memory and Mobilization among the South Asian Diaspora in North America." *Re/Collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History*. Ed. Josephine Lee et al. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002. 78-93.
Sumida, Stephen H. "Centers without Margins: Responses to Centrism in Asian American Literature." *American Literature* 66.4 (1994): 803-15.
Sumida, Stephen H., and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong. Introduction. *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature*. Ed. Wong and Sumida. New York: MLA, 2001. 1-9.
Ty, Eleanor. *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004.
Ty, Eleanor, and Donald C. Goellnicht, eds. *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004.
Velasco, Pura. "Filipino Migrant Workers Amidst Globalization." *Canadian Woman Studies* 21.4-22.1 (2002): 131-35.
Wong, Paul, ed. *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*. Vancouver: On Edge, 1990.
Wong, Rita. "Provisional Mobilities: Rethinking Labour through Asian Racialization in Literature." Diss. Simon Fraser U, 2002.
Yu, Henry. *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
Yu, Henry, and Guy Beauregard, eds. *Pacific Canada: Beyond the 49th Parallel*. Special issue of *Amerasia Journal* 33.2 (2007).

Christopher Lee

Enacting the Asian Canadian

I

The history of Asian Canadian literature begins, strictly speaking, with the publication of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* in 1979. This is not to say that literature by Canadians of Asian descent begins then: attempts to trace such an "origin" might look back to poems etched onto immigration detention centre walls in British Columbia or the well-known work of the Eaton sisters of Montreal (Edith Maud Eaton, who wrote under the name Sui Sin Far, and Winnifred Eaton, who used the pseudonym Onoto Watanna).[1] But insofar as the editors of *Inalienable Rice* offered a conscious exposition of the term "Asian Canadian," the anthology was, to borrow a definition by Hannah Arendt that I will return to in the course of this essay, an *action* that "engages in founding and preserving political bodies, [creating] the condition for remembrance, that is, for history" (8–9).[2] Arendt's compact definition evokes some key themes in Asian Canadian studies, including the possibility of new sociopolitical formations, the stakes of memory, and the status of history.

Critics working on Asian Canadian studies, including the contributors to this special issue, have written extensively about the historical circumstances that led to the emergence of Asian Canadian identity, often by drawing comparisons with the Asian American movement. Such accounts have also discussed the challenges of antiracist organizing within and among Asian Canadian communities, especially in light of state-sponsored multiculturalism. There is a general consensus among scholars and critics that Asian Canadian culture as such is a relatively recent phenomenon that has yet to gain the recognition that Asian American culture has south of the border.

Donald Goellnicht has described the development of Asian Canadian literature as a "protracted birth" and "a long labour,"[3] while Guy Beauregard bluntly declares, in the introduction to this special issue, that, "in Canada, *ethnic studies itself appears to be faring very badly*."

Keeping these diagnoses in mind, I want to focus on a moment when a sense of Asian Canadian culture did indeed take hold. The text that I want to turn to is *Inalienable Rice*, which combined social activism with literary production in an unprecedented manner. *Inalienable Rice* was produced as a result of the joint effort of two community groups: the (Japanese Canadian) Powell Street Revue and the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop. Having decided that "a publication of Asian Canadian writings had been long overdue" (viii), the editors produced a compilation of articles, fiction, interviews, visual art, photographs, and poetry by Joy Kogawa, Paul Yee, Roy Kiyooka, Sharon (SKY) Lee, Jim Wong-Chu, Roy Miki, and others (readers of Asian Canadian literature will undoubtedly recognize these figures, as they continue to play major roles in shaping the emerging Asian Canadian cultural scene). The circulation of *Inalienable Rice* was limited—only six hundred copies were produced (Chao, *Beyond Silence* 49)—but this fact makes its subsequent influence on Asian Canadian culture all the more remarkable, for the anthology continues to serve as a (if not *the*) point of reference for critical accounts of Asian Canadian literary history.[4]

In their introduction, the editors begin with the following qualification: "we will use the term Asian Canadian to mean Chinese and Japanese Canadian. This is for convenience rather than an attempt to define the work or exclude other groups for any ideological reason" (viii). However, what seems to be a carefully used heuristic term soon acquires a life of its own. The next paragraph opens with this statement:

> What has characterized our experiences growing up Asian Canadian has been a sense of separation from all things Asian Canadian. We learned little about our ancestors, the pioneers who had made this land grow, "caught silver from the sea", laid the rails that had bound British Columbia to Canada. Our school books didn't deal with the Vancouver racial riots of 1887 and 1907, or the World War Two expulsion, incarceration and later dispersal of the Japanese Canadians, or the disenfranchisement of both peoples until the late 1940s. (viii)

While it recognizes differences between Chinese Canadian and Japanese Canadian experiences, with the internment of the latter being the most obvious distinction, the introduction is more concerned with establishing a panethnic collective by defining Asian Canadian identity in terms of

a shared history of racism. In the passage above, "history" is far more than just a factual record of the past, which could just as easily reinforce the differences between Chinese and Japanese Canadians. Rather, it functions as a profoundly paradoxical concept: the editors interpret the absence of history from their own experience and consciousness as an indication of the pernicious inescapability of a racist past.

According to the editors, racism is most clearly manifested in the pressure to "assimilat[e] into the liberal white middle class" (viii). Rejecting this fate, they embark on a wide-ranging search for identity: "Only through encounters with others already questioning this process [of assimilation], through exposure to Asian American literature, on personal searches for a satisfactory sense of identity, or by sheer inadvertence, were we able to break out of this syndrome of trying to become white. By the development of our own Asian Canadian literature, both creative and analytical, we are setting out to bridge that separation from ourselves and other Asian Canadians" (viii). Coming at the end of a paragraph that identifies a "sense of separation from all things Asian Canadian" at the heart of the editors' experiences as racialized subjects, this passage reinforces the notion of an Asian Canadian subjectivity who is deeply alienated from his or her history and, consequently, from a holistic sense of self.

As a literary anthology, *Inalienable Rice* implies that the very act of writing and, by extension, the institutions of literature offer the means through which to bridge the "gap" between self and history, subject and community. For example, historiographical essays by Bennett Lee, Paul Yee, Art Shimizu, and others provide knowledge largely unavailable to the general public at that time. In another essay, Donald Yee describes the pioneering Chinese Canadian radio program *Pender Guy* as an attempt to bring "immigrants and native borns" (65) together to address a pervasive ignorance among Chinese Canadians about their own history. In a more reflective tone, Jim Wong-Chu's poem "old chinese cemetery (kamloops 1977/july)" includes the following lines:

> searching for scraps
> of haunting memories.
> like a child unloved
> pressing his face hard
> against the wet window
> peering in
> straining with anguish
> for a desperate moment
> I touch my past. (8)

The emotional intensity of this poem, with its mixture of pain, indignation, and determination, evokes the "desperation" of the alienated Asian Canadian subject who "strains" to heal the psychic wounds inflicted by racism through a reconnection with personal and collective histories. In retrospect, Wong-Chu's poetry evokes themes that continue to preoccupy Asian Canadian literature to this day. Indeed, the influence of the anthology as a whole is confirmed by the fact that several of its pieces have been republished in other collections and made available to larger audiences.

If the goals of the anthology seem to be clear enough, what isn't always clear is the meaning of "Asian Canadian" itself. The introduction declares that *Inalienable Rice* is a collection of "material by, for and about Asian Canadians," and the editors describe their efforts as an attempt to articulate an "Asian Canadian perspective" (viii). As we have already seen, the status of "Asian Canadian" shifts within the course of a single page from a heuristic device to a term that encompasses a set of objective and definable experiences. In other words, it starts to function as a marker of ethnic difference in its own right and the ground for a distinct epistemological position. As an Asian Canadian identity emerges in this manner, the provisionality of the term dissipates, and it becomes harder to maintain the historical differences between its constituent groups.

What I am describing here is not so much a case of rhetorical slippage as a process that is representative of attempts to produce and inaugurate an Asian Canadian identity. Some thirty years after *Inalienable Rice*'s publication, critics are likely to be more cautious when invoking Asian Canadian identity as such. In the wake of critiques of essentialism, a straightforward and unproblematic definition of such a formation hardly seems to be possible since there are usually experiences that are marginalized or excluded by identitarian categories, such as those of mixed-race or queer subjects as well as more recent immigrants. Indeed, as Goellnicht's essay "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature" demonstrates, one of the tasks of Asian Canadian studies has been to trace and describe these inclusions and exclusions. But while it is critical to trace the meanings and implications of Asian Canadian identity, I want to focus in this essay on the conditions of its emergence, a task that underscores my interest in *Inalienable Rice*. In reading this anthology, I want to consider how questions about the instability of Asian Canadian identity circulate within the powerful intervention articulated by the text, with its claim that the use of identitarian categories is politically justified. There is, to my mind, something compelling and convincing about its call for

empowerment. Asian Canadian studies continues to be invested in this legacy even as it redefines identitarian categories or even places them under erasure. Asian Canadian cultural formations continue to demonstrate the instability of identity, but this instability is extraordinarily generative insofar as it is the catalyst for a flourishing body of work by critics, activists, and artists.

II

Inalienable Rice's standing as the founding text of Asian Canadian literature has been confirmed in a number of subsequently published anthologies and critical texts. These discussions generally emphasize its status as an anthology, a collective effort that is in some way connected to a broader struggle against racist exclusion. In her extensive study of ethnic Canadian anthologies compiled in the 1970s and 1980s (a discussion that does not include *Inalienable Rice* although its observations are applicable to it), Smaro Kamboureli writes, "As efforts to make a collective statement, or to convey what is current, anthologies, perhaps more than individual titles, reflect the values shaping a given tradition or, conversely, a perceived need to revise that tradition. . . . [B]y making available new as well as traditionally ignored and marginalized authors, these texts also make visible, in direct or indirect ways, the cultural and political histories that inform the production of this writing" (133). According to Kamboureli, anthologies are important because they exceed the limitations of "individual titles" by engaging a "tradition" and revealing "cultural and political histories" that have been marginalized.

This emphasis on collective authorship is echoed in the most extensive critical examination of *Inalienable Rice* to date, Lien Chao's "Anthologizing the Collective: The Epic Struggles to Establish Chinese Canadian Literature in English," first published in *Essays on Canadian Writing* in 1995 and subsequently included in her groundbreaking study *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English* (1997). Using terms drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's well-known account of minor literatures, Chao situates *Inalienable Rice* within a collective Chinese Canadian history:

> The "epic struggles" [Chao is referring to the editors' description of their project] also specify the historical conditions for the birth of a community-based minority literature in English. Chinese Canadians have been prepared for a reterritorialization because the community had been historically suppressed as a racial minority for almost a century, and the accumulated resistance against the imposed deterritorialization is too strong to die out. The combination of these two conditions provokes the community, especially its native-born generations, with a psychological need to cry out in the dominant discourse. (*Beyond* 38)

For Chao, *Inalienable Rice* marks the culmination of a century of resistance. Her discussion seems to treat resistance as something tangible and material, something that possesses a measure of agency insofar as it "accumulates" and "provokes." The idea of a community-based literature is central to her larger project, "which adopts a power paradigm of silence vs voice to identify the historical transition experienced by Chinese Canadians from a collective silence to a voice in the official discourse" (*Beyond* 17). Chao elaborates her understanding of "official discourse" by exploring the risks of writing in English and proceeds to construct a genealogy that links *Inalienable Rice* to a more recent anthology of Chinese Canadian writing, *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians* (edited by Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, 1991). She concludes that "The publications of *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* were long-awaited historical events for the community. They signified the collective social advancement and cultural development of contemporary Chinese Canadians. As landmark publications, they have helped to reclaim the community history [sic], to define and redefine the Chinese Canadian identity in a dynamic community" (*Beyond* 50).

While Chao is careful to point out that "'Chinese-Canadian' does not totalize individual experience" (45), her awareness of intracommunity pluralism is constrained by her investment in a unified collective identity.[5] Her essay is particularly valuable because it argues for an alternative critical and aesthetic tradition within Canadian literature and culture, and in this sense, her focus on unity despite diversity places her critical trajectory squarely in line with that of *Inalienable Rice*. In adhering to the spirit of *Inalienable Rice*, however, her perceptive reading also reproduces some of the shortcomings of the anthology's approach to identity, a point that is demonstrated in her treatment of silence. While her study gestures toward a broad definition of silence that takes its resistive potential into account, it largely figures empowerment in terms of voice.[6] Chao writes,

> since silence is not as noticeable as speech, in order to reach the otherwise inaccessible silence, speech has to be born in its space. Only then can the disadvantage of silence be transformed into a resource of words. . . . The "unpredictable impact" resulting from transforming silence into voice can disturb the stability of the existing social structure. Therefore it is important for the marginalized to see that its silence *can* be transformed to a voice in the dominant discourse, and so lead to social changes. (*Beyond* 22)

Chao's insistence on speech as a tool of empowerment aligns her cultural politics with those of *Inalienable Rice*. This commitment to speech and

writing considers the emergence of a literary corpus by Asian Canadian writers on Asian Canadian topics to be a sign of "social advancement and cultural development." Indeed, *Beyond Silence* claims to respond directly to this development: discussing the increased publication of texts by Chinese Canadian authors during the 1980s and 1990s, Chao declares, "There had never been a time in which so many Chinese Canadian writers were publishing for the first time and being reviewed and recognized! As well, there had never been a time when there was such a need for critical interpretations of Chinese Canadian literature" (*Beyond* xi).

What interests me here is how *Beyond Silence* relies on what I would call a logic of critical mass when it draws our attention to the "accumulation" of resistance or a body of published literary texts as the impetus for recognizing Asian Canadian culture as such. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with this approach per se, as it would be pointless to posit Asian Canadian culture in the absence of any empirical referents. But what can get overlooked in such a move are the meanings and implications of the category itself, which becomes justified on the ground that there is an already existing critical mass of Asian Canadian culture. Left unexamined are the conditions that produce the Asian Canadian and the subjectivities that such a term might describe. Instead, what gets privileged is the completed act of emergence, which marks the culmination of a historical narrative of oppression and resistance, a narrative that finally functions to call into existence and justify the Asian Canadian.

III

Although texts such as *Inalienable Rice* and *Beyond Silence* privilege speech and writing as acts of political contestation, their use of identitarian categories raises other issues that we should consider in the broader context of Canadian multiculturalism. Critics have shown how multiculturalism preserves and even celebrates cultural differences without transforming the social and institutional structures that maintain and reinforce racism. As Kamboureli argues, "The Multiculturalism Act (also known as Bill C-93) recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so by practicing a sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them" (82). She goes on to point out how discussions of multiculturalism in Canada often reveal an obsession with establishing the presence of racially marked ("visible minority") bodies. Addressing the rhetoric of race in mass media,

she describes a recurring "effort to force the national imaginary to confront multiculturalism through body images, images already racialized and ethnicized. When, for example, the media approach the representation of difference through stories that focus on numbers (how many dollars are granted to multicultural projects, or how many people of colour serve on Canada Council juries), they offer a crude way of exposing the power dynamics inherent in such issues" (89).

This focus on bodies produces a "representational econom[y]" employed by "public discourse, and sometimes also by members of ethnic communities" (89) in which ethnic and racial differences are reified. The presence of a critical mass of racially marked bodies, understood as material evidence of an existing multicultural society, has been effectively mobilized in order to construct versions of Asian Canadian identity defined by consumption. Commercial multiculturalism is, after all, dependent on a critical mass of bodies that can be turned into a potential consumer demographic. Across Canada, corporate sponsorship of Asian-themed events such as Asian Heritage Month, Asian-themed film festivals, and Dragon Boat Festivals has become hot business. Moreover, forms of consumption—food, fashion, recreation, culture, and so on—have been presented as (pan-) Asian activities in order to cater to an emerging market of young, cosmopolitan, and affluent consumers.[7] My purpose is not to disparage these developments but to point out their limitations, especially in comparison to the more expansive political visions articulated in *Inalienable Rice* and *Beyond Silence*. The ease with which Asian Canadian identity has been integrated into a globalized economy brings to mind critiques of multiculturalism that identify it as, in Slavoj Žižek's words, "the cultural logic of multinational capitalism."[8]

The problem of commodification alerts us to how the presence of Asian Canadians is always conditional. Since the arrival of Asians in what would later become Canada, the state, as well as culture at large, through numerous attempts at management and control, has determined the terms through which these subjects appear and exist. Through a shifting series of exclusions and inclusions, these apparatuses (re)produce and manage Asian subjects, who have been defined variously (and often simultaneously) as sources of labour, threats to the white mainstream, sexualized bodies, bearers of capital, and so on. To my mind, analytic frameworks based on a rigid division between presence and absence are reductive because they ignore the nuances of Asian Canadian subjectivity. This is not to deny the absence of Asian Canadian history from public discourses or the lack of Asian representation

in mainstream culture. What is problematic, however, is the elevation of such exclusions into the defining characteristic of Asian Canadian identity without paying attention to the conditions under which Asian Canadian subjects have always been made present. If the production of the Asian Canadian as consumer depends on the conflation of identity and economics, then the problem lies not so much in whether such subjects are indeed present as in whether their presence can be mobilized into critical interventions against exploitation and injustice.

Critics concerned with the relatively restricted realm of literary arts and culture remain susceptible to reproducing the logic of presencing. Kamboureli illustrates this point through a critique of Linda Hutcheon's influential account of Canadian postmodernism. Kamboureli writes that for Hutcheon, "ethnic difference is endowed with political value precisely because it is named, because naming allows identities previously ignored and subjugated to become *present*. But this *presencing* . . . makes ethnicity a sign of cultural excess: ethnic identity is one of the many 'ex-centric' identities that Hutcheon's postmodernism embraces and, in some ways, commodifies" (167; emphasis added). For scholars and critics of Asian Canadian literature, the consolidation of an alternative canon remains a pressing task even as we might express reservations about the process of canonization as such. But as Kamboureli suggests, discourses around texts by minority authors often treat texts as stand-ins for marked bodies and represent material manifestations of the "voices" we seek to recover and recentre. The act of discovering and explicating texts thus makes present what has hitherto been erased or suppressed. In the context of the canon and culture wars, texts themselves come to stand in for previously marginalized subjects. In other words, the presence of these texts (in libraries, bookstores, reading lists, syllabi, and so on) signifies a negation of silence.

I am certainly not alone in advocating theoretical interrogation of the terms under which Asian Canadian literature emerges. The focus of the field has gradually shifted from making texts available in order to establish the existence of Asian Canadian literature as such to sustaining a critical interrogation of the conditions of that presence. This shift offers a way to periodize Asian Canadian studies in terms of distinct theoretical concerns even though this division does not translate into neat chronological periods. Chao's reading of *Many-Mouthed Birds* is an example of the first approach in that it seeks to place the text in a genealogical relationship to *Inalienable Rice* as "a new landmark" that signifies the "continuous growth" of Chinese

Canadian literature (*Beyond* 33). In contrast, Roy Miki's widely-read essay "Asiancy: Making Space for Asian-Canadian Writing"—which appeared in print the same year as Chao's "Anthologizing the Collective"—argues that the commercial production and circulation of *Many-Mouthed Birds* reifies ethnic differences and compromises the extent and integrity of its political intervention.

Let me pause here to compare these two essays in greater detail. Both Chao and Miki are committed to an oppositional Asian Canadian literature. Both explicitly refer to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minor literature" in their arguments, but their applications of this model differ significantly. Chao argues in *Beyond Silence* that "one hundred and thirty-seven years after its settlement, the Chinese Canadian community has finally achieved a *reterritorialization* when its first-generation writers started to publish in English," an occasion that allows them to "share their community history and personal experiences through literary forms with a wider audience" (24; emphasis added). Her interest in reterritorialization is consistent with her understanding of contemporary Chinese Canadian literature as a site of community empowerment. The presence of such texts implies access to a broad readership across ethnic and racial groups and signifies the entry of Chinese (and Asian) Canadians into mainstream culture.

In contrast, Miki privileges *de*territorialization. In his discussion of Japanese Canadian writing in "Asiancy" (and elsewhere in the collection *Broken Entries: Race Writing Subjectivity*),[9] he notes how the trauma of internment resulted in lingering psychic and communal wounds: "The touchstone of community had slipped out from under, so no framework existed for reproducing, even identifying in meaningful self-critical patterns, a shared history. Instead, the weakening of community-based values often led to self-denial, self-effacement, passivity, and a fear of politics, qualities that aided in the stereotype of Japanese Canadians as the 'model minority'" (112). In light of these conditions, Miki argues that "the act of '*deterritorialization*' through writing" is "a viable method for resisting assimilation, for exploring variations in form that undermine aesthetic norms, for challenging homogenizing political systems, for articulating subjectivities that emerge from beleaguered community—even at the risk of incomprehensibility, unreadability, indifference, or outright rejection" (118; emphasis added). Resistance, in other words, is located first and foremost in the discursive realm and, more specifically, in the use of language itself. "Asiancy" ends with a call for "a renewed belief in the viability of agency"

(123) expressed through the act of writing as a creative and politically scrupulous engagement with language.

Locating political contestation in the realm of language has important consequences for Miki's treatment of the silence-to-voice paradigm. In his analysis of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), perhaps the most famous literary text dealing with the internment of Japanese Canadians, he traces how many scholars and critics have read the novel as a text in which the silence of the protagonist, Naomi Nakane, is resolved through the emergence of her own voice as well as the recovery of writings by her mother. Discussing the ambiguous implications of the government memorandum against the deportation of Japanese Canadians that Kogawa appends to the end of *Obasan*, Miki argues that its inclusion performs another erasure of Japanese Canadian agency in a manner that evokes the pressure to assimilate into mainstream Canadian society after the Second World War. Miki writes, "instead of resolving the dichotomy between silence and speech, between repression and exposure," *Obasan* "ends within a gap where private and public are dichotomized as a status. Japanese Canadians are still *spoken for*" (117).

For Miki, the ambiguity of *Obasan*'s ending exemplifies the difficulty of establishing an Asian Canadian voice. As a minority literature situated within an often hostile cultural landscape, "coming to voice" requires an engagement with the mainstream in order to overcome cultural and racial barriers. While Chao is certainly aware of this problem, Miki is far more cautious and even pessimistic about the political benefits of such engagements. In addition to his reading of *Obasan*, "Asiancy" includes, as I have already mentioned, an extended critique of the commodification of *Many-Mouthed Birds* (although Miki also points out that many of the pieces in that anthology exhibit "strategies of deterritorialization in the reappropriation of 'English' as the language of dominance and complicity" [122]). Miki finally insists that difference, as the product and legacy of traumatic histories, cannot be superseded in a facile manner. Instead, he strategically mobilizes difference itself in order to unsettle homogenizing discourses and enable the exposure and critical negation of reified identities.[10]

Miki's model of Asian Canadian critique is rooted in a conception of identity as "a network of articulations and theoretical concerns that not only undermine assimilationist pressures but also allow for provisional spaces where writers of colour can navigate diversity within the specificity of histories, languages, and subjectivities" (107). This model of political subjectivity suggests that any move to establish its actuality must also be an act

of discursive space clearing, for which there are never guarantees that resistance and critique will emerge in its wake. As Guy Beauregard has suggested, "Asian Canadian literature as a critical category is not, in and of itself, either subversive or thoroughly regulated; instead, we might productively consider discussions of the term in relation to their institutional locations and histories of resistance they address" ("Emergence" 12).

IV

While it is clear that history is one of the terrains on which Asian Canadian studies endeavours to intervene, I want to suggest that Asian Canadian literature should not only be read as having a responsive relationship to history. The danger of invoking historical master narratives to understand literature is that such moves do not recognize the key role of the literary in constructing the very conditions under which consciousness of the past emerges. Although the writings of Chao and Miki are conditioned by personal experiences of racism, their work as critics and scholars situates them in relation to objective histories that exceed their own experiences. As a result, both are engaged in theorizing an Asian Canadian subject who can remain cognizant of, and responsible to, legacies of anti-Asian racism that permeate Canadian culture and society to this day. This subject always occupies a paradoxical space and negotiates the predicament of being both inside and outside mainstream society. In this context, Chao raises the dilemma of the Chinese Canadian writer whose use of English is both a sign of cultural loss and a potential tool for collective empowerment. Similarly, Miki's discussion of co-optation alerts us to the risks of asserting Asian Canadian identity even while his project necessarily, albeit cautiously, requires such moves.

Instead of reiterating the many arguments that have already been made about the promises and dangers of Asian Canadian identity politics or, indeed, identity politics as such, I want to suggest that a focus on the act or event of cultural intervention might offer useful critical tools for Asian Canadian studies. Let me return, then, to *Inalienable Rice* and Hannah Arendt's notion of action. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt is concerned with how social formations can be changed through the actions of individual members. In her definition, action, which she describes as "political activity par excellence" (9), is instigated by subjects within a social context—that is, in relation to other subjects. Action is generative insofar as it elicits and even inspires responses from others. It enables societies to embark in new directions and to account for the often unpredictable character of collectivities.

For Arendt, the existing social order can be radically interrupted by the emergence of temporary new formations.[11] She writes, "This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. . . . [T]he new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle" (178). The miraculous character of action underscores its contingency, but Arendt also argues that actions are often reabsorbed and neutralized. Indeed, "every body politic" functions to "offer some protection against the inherent boundlessness of action [although] they are altogether helpless to offset its . . . inherent unpredictability" (191).

Arendt is interested not in idealizing action and actors but in describing the nature of political contestation as such. She suggests that actions are important ultimately because they reveal the identities of actors, which in turn become materials for stories compiled in "the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants" (192). As Arendt writes, "*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced and left behind, tells us only *what* he is or was" (186). In the aftermath of action, history is (re)written and disseminated, but it is important to note that actions fundamentally alter the very ways in which we imagine history itself.

To be sure, Arendt does not directly address the racial identity politics that have been the focus of attention in Asian Canadian studies.[12] Nevertheless, her concept of action offers a productive way to think about the disruptive potential of Asian Canadian culture in a way that moves beyond binary frameworks of majority and minority, mainstream and marginalized, white and visible minority. This is not to deny the importance, indeed the centrality, of race in the work of Asian Canadian studies, but it is to consider the possibility that an event such as the publication of *Inalienable Rice* cannot be historicized only within narratives of anti-Asian racism. Instead, the very act of publication establishes the conditions for an alternative history; in doing so, it enacts an identity that is both a site for remembrance and an instrument of political contestation. One of the main tasks of Asian Canadian studies, then, is to identify moments when specific interventions inaugurate social movements and determine the path of future actions, even if such moments are ephemeral in and of themselves.

Paying attention to the act of acting, as it were, brings us back to the banal material (in the sense of the practical) circumstances under which *Inalienable Rice* was produced. According to Terry Watada, one of the contributors, the editors were "tired of the inactivity" and encouraged by community leaders to

> do something—get a grant and put together an anthology, an Asian Canadian anthology. And so they did. . . . *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese & Japanese Canadian Anthology* appeared in 1980 [sic]. . . . [T]he first collection of Asian Canadian writing featured many writers who were later to have a significant impact on Canadian letters and politics. . . . The anthology, a perfect-bound magazine of eighty-three pages with a simple black and white drawing of a bowl of rice, fork and knife and chopsticks on the front cover, was a humble first step for these writers but its importance is obvious when considering future publications [of Asian Canadian literature]. (90) [13]

As a contingent event, the publication of *Inalienable Rice* depended on the efforts and competencies of those involved rather than on historical necessity as such. The "humble first step" has, in the twenty-five years since its publication, turned out to be a foundational event for an emergent canon and cultural movement. While Watada doubts that community leaders and activists from that period "could have foreseen what was to become of their desire for an Asian Canadian culture and community," the results marked a new direction for Asian Canadian literature. Watada concludes, "a spirit was born that created the possibility of an Asian Canadian writing. I am still affected by it—my own writing of poetry, music, plays, and fiction thrives on it" (90).

What I find most revealing about Watada's comments is his sense of surprise, a sign of his dual role (in Arendt's terms) as actor and historian. About a decade after the publication of *Inalienable Rice*, Paul Wong expressed similar sentiments about the art exhibition *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*.[14] Wong writes, "We can start to see what links us as Asians and as Canadians. We can see similar sensibilities at play and at work, we can start to see and to understand the differences. There is an Asian Canadian sensibility, there is an Asian Canadian contemporary art, there is an Asian Canadian photo, film and video community. Produced against all odds, *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* is a testimony that we do indeed exist" (12).

One can well imagine the range of odds – practical, financial, conceptual, and so on – that this type of cultural activism might encounter. Overcoming such challenges does not, of course, imply the overcoming of racism. Indeed, Wong is careful to tell us that he is not idealizing the Asian Canadian subject and implying that conditions of equality and emancipation exist where

they do not. Nevertheless, his comments articulate the sense of surprise that reveals something of the nature of action: the enactment of the Asian Canadian is an actualization of the improbable if not the impossible—in the final reading, nothing short of a miracle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Guy Beauregard for offering the opportunity to write this essay and his patient work with this special issue. I gratefully acknowledge the fellowship support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

NOTES

1 For information about poetry written in immigration detention centres, see Lai. Much has been written about the Eaton sisters and their writing; useful background information can be found in Ferens, and White Parks.

2 As Donald Goellnicht has pointed out, the first anthology of poetry by Canadian writers of Asian descent was Stephen Gill's *Green Snow: Anthology of Canadian Poets of Asian Origin* (1976), but Gill's volume is defined primarily in ethnic (most of the writers featured are of South Asian origin), not *panethnic*, terms. While Gill offers interesting insights into Asian writing in Canada, the text, in my opinion, does not make a marked social intervention in the manner of *Inalienable Rice*.

3 Goellnicht's essay offers a thorough account of Asian Canadian literary history. His wide-ranging investigation describes many of the figures and institutions (e.g., journals, community associations, and academic ethnic studies) that would play large roles in an emerging Asian Canadian literature and addresses the unique racial politics of Canada and the significance of multiculturalism. Goellnicht situates his account in a comparative framework *vis-à-vis* the development of Asian American literature in order to investigate the reasons for the relatively slow development of Asian Canadian literature. One of his important observations concerns the continuing use of "Asian Canadian" primarily to refer to Canadians of *East* Asian descent, thereby leaving out the well-published South Asian community. Like Goellnicht, I am interested in theorizing the emergence of a distinctly *Asian Canadian* literature, but I am concerned in this essay with specific acts that have, in retrospect at least, been foundational in its establishment.

4 See, for example, Chao, Introduction; Lai and Lum; and Quan.

5 Since *Beyond Silence* is a study of Chinese Canadian literatures in English, Chao does not address the interethnic aspects of the text.

6 Guy Beauregard makes a similar observation in his essay "The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature': Can Lit's Obscene Supplement?" in which he briefly discusses Chao's essay. Like Beauregard, I am suspicious of claims to voice, but our theoretical approaches are somewhat different.

7 For example, *Banana* magazine enjoyed great acclaim when it debuted in 1999 (it was run by a group of progressive editors and writers). Part of its success lay in its ability to present an Asian (Canadian) lifestyle that extended to food, fashion, and recreation (the

subtitle of the publication was *asian-canadian lifestyle and culture magazine*). Although the magazine is no longer published, it demonstrated the existence of a market for Asian Canadian themes.

8 Žižek argues that renewed investment in ethnic identities, of which contemporary multiculturalism is a prime example, merely reinforces the domination of a universalizing capitalism. From that perspective, the production of "other" cultures serves to underscore the normativity of a global order. As Žižek writes, "multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism. . . . [I]t 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community" (44). For a related argument that engages more specifically with the conditions of North American race relations, see San Juan, Jr.

9 "Asiancy" was first presented as a paper at an annual conference of the Association for Asian American Studies in 1993 and first appeared in print in the 1995 essay collection *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*; see Okihiro et al.

10 Also see Miki's recent book *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*, which chronicles his personal participation in the Japanese Canadian redress movement. This text builds on the reflections about race and writing in *Broken Entries* by focusing on a specific political movement that mobilized identity politics.

11 For a discussion of the immediate contexts addressed by Arendt, see Isaac. A more extensive account of Arendt's background can be found in Canovan.

12 That being said, Arendt frequently returned to topics such as anti-Semitism and civil rights throughout her career, which was deeply affected by her own experiences as a Jewish émigré fleeing fascist Germany. For a discussion of the relationship between Arendt's political thought and contemporary identity politics, see McGowan, who includes an extensive discussion of the relationship between action and identity.

13 Watada's essay appears in a special issue of *Canadian Literature* on *Asian Canadian Writing,* edited by Glenn Deer, as a personal account of Asian Canadian cultural activism in the 1970s and 1980s. For a more extensive history of Asian Canadian activism, see Li. Capturing the momentum of Asian Canadian literature, Deer traces the trope of forced mobility (the example he cites is the arrival of Fujianese migrants in British Columbia in 1999) but ends by turning it into a source of hope as he calls for "the kind of mobility" that would enable Asian Canadians to "move beyond the constraints of racial categories and into the ongoing assertions of identity in borrowed or invented voices that we might call our own" (15).

14 Wong's comments were made in his essay "Yellow Peril: Reconsidered," also the title of an exhibit he curated that has since been recognized as an important event in Asian Canadian cultural activism. For a discussion of the theoretical implications of the event, see Koh.

WORKS CITED

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Beauregard, Guy. "The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature': Can Lit's Obscene Supplement?" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 67 (1999): 53-75.

Canovan, Margaret. *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992.

Chao, Lien. "Anthologizing the Collective: The Epic Struggles to Establish Chinese Canadian Literature in English." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 57 (1995): 145-70.

—. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: TSAR, 1997.

—. Introduction. *Strike the Wok: An Anthology of Contemporary Chinese Canadian Fiction*. Ed. Lien Chao and Jim Wong-Chu. Toronto: TSAR, 2003. vii–xiv.
Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop and Powell Street Revue. *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology.* Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop and Powell Street Revue, 1979.
Deer, Glenn. "Asian North America in Transit." *Asian Canadian Writing*. Ed. Deer. Spec. issue of *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999): 5-15.
Ferens, Dominika. *Edith and Winnifred Eaton: Chinatown Missions and Japanese Romances*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002.
Gill, Stephen M., ed. *Green Snow: Anthology of Canadian Poets of Asian Origin*. Cornwall, ON: Vesta, 1976.
Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 1-41.
Isaac, Jeffrey C. "Situating Hannah Arendt on Action and Politics." *Political Theory* 21.3 (1993): 534-40.
Kamboureli, Smaro. *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 2000.
Koh, Karlyn. "At the Edge of a Shattered Mirror, Community?" *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen.* Ed. Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004. 149-69.
Lai, Chuen-Yan David. "Heritage Reruns: A "Prison" for Chinese Immigrants." *The Asianadian* 2:4 (1979). 16-19.
Lai, Larissa, and Jean Lum. "Neither Guests nor Strangers." Wong, ed. 20-24.
Lee, Bennett and Jim Wong-Chu, eds. *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians.* Vancouver: Douglas, 1991.
Li, Xiaoping. *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2007.
McGowan, John. *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998.
Miki, Roy. "Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing." *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998. 101-24.
—. *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice.* Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004.
Okihiro, Gary Y., et al., eds. *Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies*. Pullman: Washington State UP, 1995.
Quan, Andy. Introduction. *Swallowing Clouds: An Anthology of Chinese-Canadian Poetry.* Ed. Andy Quan and Jim Wong-Chu. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1999. 7-10.
San Juan, Jr., E. *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalism Ideology and the Politics of Difference*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002.
Watada, Terry. "To Go for Broke: The Spirit of the 70s." *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999): 80-91.
White Parks, Annette. *Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995.
Wong, Paul. "Yellow Peril: Reconsidered." Wong, ed. 6-12.
—, ed. *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*. Vancouver: On Edge, 1990.
Žižek, Slavoj. "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28-51.

Iyko Day

Must All Asianness Be American?
The Census, Racial Classification, and Asian Canadian Emergence

> [N]othing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies.
> —Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words* (131)

I begin this paper with the observation that "Asian Canadian" seems to be in the process of shedding its quotations, those real or imagined marks suggesting the tentativeness of its relatively recent installment in the academy. With this shedding, the Asian Canadian classification appears to have arrived at a certain sense of categorical self-possession and legitimacy, no longer carrying itself as a hesitant cultural modifier. Perhaps this development is vaguely reminiscent of the cultural nationalist period of Asian American cultural criticism that saw the dropping of the hyphen from "Asian-American" to assert the integrity of a fully constituted "American" identity, rejecting the hyphen's function of consigning "Asian" to the status of a subordinate qualifier. But despite the way that the Asian Canadian category may be demonstrating a bit more poise, it strikes me that it can't quite shake a certain furtiveness over the context of its emergence. In particular, while Asian Canadian studies continues to enjoy steady growth, its main context of representation has been in the realm of literary culture—its renaissance inaugurated chiefly by literary academics rather than activists[1]—so much so that it remains unclear to what extent Asian Canadian panethnicity exists as a social and political identity outside the academy. The purpose of this essay is therefore to explore the emergence of "Asian Canadian" as a *social* category against the backdrop of a distinctive Canadian racial formation and in the shadow of Asian America.

It is not surprising that since the 1990s significant attention in the Asian Canadian field has been directed at exploring its affinities with its Asian American neighbour (see Beauregard). Corresponding histories of labour exploitation, exclusion laws, disenfranchisement, and internment have provided a material basis for a diasporic alliance between these panethnic configurations. The incorporation of key Asian Canadian texts in Asian American literary studies has also encouraged scholars to examine the significance and function of border-crossing texts such as those by the Eaton sisters and Joy Kogawa.[2] The results of these particular developments have included facilitating the growth of an attendant bridging term, "Asian North America," under which comparative examinations of Asian Canadian and Asian American texts have been undertaken (see Ty; and Ty and Goellnicht). In addition, there have been eager pronouncements of a renewed commitment to foregrounding debates about "race" in mainstream Canadian academic discourse (see Coleman and Goellnicht). In following these directions in the field, however, I often get the sense that Asian Canadian emergence and development are often reliant, even parasitic, on the association with Asian American literary studies and on US conceptualizations of race. Without a social movement to anchor its development, the Asian Canadian field continues to subsist as an armchair academic variant of a socially rooted Asian American model.[3] What I'd like to examine more closely here is whether it is possible to view Asian Canada as a social category that is part of a distinctly Canadian racial formation, one that cannot be seen through the US prism of race. Or, to pose a variation of one of George Elliott Clarke's questioning titles, must all Asianness be American?[4]

To clearly link my exploration of Canadian racial formation with the particular contours of Asian Canadian emergence, I have organized my discussion to respond to questions raised by Donald Goellnicht in his extensive institutional history of Asian Canadian literary studies published in 2000. I respond to Goellnicht's essay not only because it offers the most detailed account of Asian Canadian institutional emergence but also because it offers provocative grounds for the absence of race consciousness in Canada that could have facilitated, as in the US, the social emergence of Asian Canadian panethnicity. Moreover, as an Asian Canadian writing from a US ethnic studies department, I am indebted to his essay for pushing me to consider more seriously the differences between Canadian and US discursive productions of race without yielding to the clichés of Canadian "multicultural" tolerance. The outcome of this historical investigation is an appeal against

the transposition of a US conception of race into different national contexts. This is far from saying that race does not exist as a social fact outside US borders; rather, it's an insistence on loosening an American grip on the sign of race.

With these considerations in mind, this essay responds to three characteristics that Goellnicht ascribes to the Canadian situation. These are for him the principal characteristics that have inhibited the political mobilization of Asian Canadians: first, the lack of a substantial Black Power movement to inspire panethnic Asian Canadian political mobilization and race-based activism in general; second, the race-evasive practices of state institutions such as the academy; and third, the problematic segregation of South Asian and East Asian cultural and political concerns. To engage with the merit of these characterizations, I offer a comparative examination of the history of racial classification in Canada and the US by looking at decennial and quinquennial censuses since 1960.[5] Turning to these classificatory systems in both countries, my goal is to reveal the historical circumstances that caused shifts in the approach of the census to racial classification that helped to shape race discourse by affecting popular understandings of race, levels of racial identification, and political mobilizing around race.

My main objection to Goellnicht's assessments of the field is that they rely inordinately on US racial formation to evaluate what he sees as the failed development of a panethnic Asian Canadian social movement. Rather than transpose a black-white colour line in Canada to hypothesize the so-called absence of race-based mobilizing, therefore, I suggest that we look toward a much more expedient Canadian colour line that is conspicuously absent in his essay: one that involves ongoing race- and gender-based movements undertaken by Aboriginal activists against Euro-Canadian tactics of cultural genocide.[6] Furthermore, by considering the political circumstances surrounding South Asian inclusion in the Asian Pacific Islander (API) category in the US against the inclusion of West Asian and Arabs in the visible minority category in Canada, I call attention to the often arbitrary delimiting of "Asia" in either country.[7] Finally, those who disavow race in favour of ethnicity in Canada may not be living in false consciousness, as Goellnicht implies. Instead, ethnic identification in this case is a symptom of both a classificatory system that does not rely on a structure of race-based rights as it does in the US, and a historically racialized definition of ethnicity in Canada. By probing the history of Canadian racial formation, we can identify the autonomous features of Asian Canadian emergence.

Census and Racial Identification

While judging the extent of one nation's racisms against another's is a slippery undertaking, state definitions of race often uncover more stable discursive constructions for comparison. Census classifications not only reflect racial ideologies but also are often responsible for shaping the very discourse of race in Canada and the US. Although the levels of stability are different in both countries, the force of state-defined racial categories has rested on their power to determine legal rights,[8] citizenship, access to immigration and naturalization, marriage laws,[9] and more recently rights to affirmative action or employment equity legislation. Not only do censuses present definitions of racial difference, but also, as Melissa Nobles explains in her comparative examination of US and Brazilian censuses, "censuses register and reinforce the racial identifications germane to citizenship through the process of categorization itself" (*Shades* 5). In addition to citizenship, state classifications have been instrumental in the formation of group identities. On this feature, Yen Le Espiritu and Michael Omi observe that US census classifications have become the "de facto standard for state and local agencies, the private and nonprofit sectors, and the research community" (50–51). Indeed, that there are groups and community formations organized under "Hispanic" and "Asian or Pacific Islander" labels underscores some of this state classificatory influence. In Canada, similarly, the historical need for data on the ancestry and phenotypical characteristics of Canadians has been determined by laws, politics, and broader societal perceptions of race and ethnicity (Boyd, Goldman, and White 33). Today multicultural and employment equity programs require public and private organizations to comply with state definitions of race as reflected in census classifications. The manner in which these classifications are presented on the census also plays a large role in determining individual identification or disavowal of race and ethnicity. Thus, by comparing decennial censuses in Canada and the US, we can examine the extent to which census classifications reflect differing racial ideologies and practices of racial identification.

Since the first national censuses in 1790 in the US and 1871 in Canada, five notable differences have distinguished each nation's practice of enumeration: the significant historical volatility of racial data collection in Canada versus the US; a largely top-down approach to classification in Canada versus a combined top-down/bottom-up approach in the US; the state recognition of panethnic racial groups in the US versus the recognition of an aggregate visible minority population in Canada that is distinct from the classification of Aboriginal

populations; less stable definitions of race and ethnicity in Canada than in the US; and, perhaps most importantly, a political structure of minority rights built into the logic of racial data collection in the US that is absent in Canada. These rights are based on civil rights legislation to promote racial equality by monitoring racial discrimination and creating a structure of minority access to federal contracts, grants, and other programs. I argue that this manner of civil rights distribution is the most significant structural factor that affects and differentiates conceptualizations of race in Canada and the US.[10]

Resistance and Classificatory Change

As Goellnicht explains in his comparative account of racial formation, social movements of the 1960s and 1970s had an enormous impact on systems of racial classification in Canada and the US. My analysis of these movements differs, however, in terms of defining which social movements are central in this period and interpreting what effect they had on race discourse in both countries. In the US, the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement led by individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X would have a significant effect on solidifying the concept of race through the structure of minority rights that required racial self-identification. In Canada, race-based social movements initiated by Aboriginal populations would lead to the introduction of multiple ethnic origins on the census while reaffirming the special status of Native peoples in Canada. If it had not been for these social movements in Canada and the US, the US would have followed Canada's lead in dropping race from the census, a category that had become unpopular by 1960. As Yen Le Espiritu explains, "At the time of the 1960 census, the race question had become discredited and would have been excluded in 1970 had it not been for the passage of the civil rights and equal opportunities laws, which made it necessary for the census to continue to compile racial statistics" (120). In Canada, at a time when the population was predominantly white, the fight for special status undertaken by Aboriginal people led to a need for further disaggregation of Native populations to obtain more reliable statistics. Their efforts would also highlight the structural disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and visible minorities in Canada and ultimately result in the introduction of employment equity and human rights legislation requiring statistical data on racial minority populations. What I would like to suggest is that race-based activism spearheaded by African Americans in the US and Aboriginal groups in Canada shaped the discourse of race in significant but contrasting ways.

In the US, the civil rights movement initiated by African Americans, many who had risked their lives for the country in its wars abroad, fought successfully for domestic civil rights that led to the creation of significant new legislation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and 1968, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967 dismantled the most extreme structures of racial inequality, such as black disenfranchisement, Jim Crow segregation in the South, residential red-lining, and bans on white/nonwhite interracial marriage. With this legislation came opportunities designed for racial minorities—legally identified as Native, Hispanic, Black, and Asian—that included access to federal contracts, government funds, and project grants. These programs required proof of disadvantaged status from bodies charged with monitoring civil rights compliance that relied on racial data from the census. Therefore, while the new legal discourse of civil rights addressed the monitoring of equality and affirmative action, it did not address the meaning of race directly. So, rather than taking racial classification off the census after 1960 and eliminating its prior function to differentiate the rights of nonwhites from whites, race was "born again" after the civil rights movement. As a result, it became difficult to discern what race was without making reference to its prior role in confirming immutable, biological difference in the distribution of rights. But one thing became certain: in contrast to the previous function of racial data collection, the US census became an *ally* of civil rights legislation. Since racial categories had been the basis of discrimination in the past, it was taken for granted that they would be the basis of the remedy.

Removing past associations of biological objectivism, race nevertheless became imbued with a new kind of political objectivism linked to equity issues. As a result, the census has become a site of intense battle in which groups lobby for recognition and rights, a battle that Melissa Nobles argues arises from "an ethnic group's anxiety about its own fecundity vis-à-vis that of another group [and] combines with fear of political domination" (*Shades* 17). Following the 1970 census, which was heavily criticized by racial minority lobbying groups for undercounting people of colour, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), working with the Census Bureau, issued *Statistical Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting*, which defined the five racial/ethnic classifications. These classifications, which would be used in the census, were designed to enable better enforcement of civil rights legislation by requiring all federal agencies to report statistics of these five geographically oriented

categories, which were as follows: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black; and white. In observing the various changes made after 1970, which included adding the "ethnic" Hispanic category and reclassifying Asian Indians from the white to the Asian or Pacific Islander category, we are immediately confronted with the political nature of racial classification.

In Canada, the concept of social mobilization has been overdetermined as French due to continual bouts of moral panic generated by the ever-present threat of Quebec separation. These claims for Quebec sovereignty articulate a politics of white settler nationalism, which Goellnicht also gives weight to in his essay, regardless of the FLQ's self-characterization as the "White Niggers of America" (see Vallières). Similar to the effect that the civil rights movement in the US had on shifting the discourse of race toward strengthening self-identification through minority rights legislation, the nationalist and feminist-nationalist Indigenous movements that began in the late 1960s shaped race discourse in Canada in particular by legitimizing mixed-race identity and loosening ethnic or racial self-identification with only one group. By increasing attention to issues of equal rights, gender discrimination, and cultural difference at a time when Canada was ninety-five percent white (Driedger and Reid 152), and while Statistics Canada continued to draw lineage arbitrarily from the paternal side, Indigenous peoples in the 1960s and 1970s made visible Canada's racial formation. It is therefore due in large part to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis social mobilization—which has increased since the 1970s—that the government has recognized the structure of racial and gender inequality and attempted, as had the US, to craft legislation to redress social inequality through employment equity, human rights, and multicultural laws. However , because of the acceptance of mixed-race identity in Canada in the early 1980s, facilitated by Native protest, entitlement claims do not rely solely on singular racial identification as in the US. Thus a different form of racial identification prevails in Canada, one informed by Aboriginal rather than Black organized resistance.

If *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 was the catalyst for the 1960s-70s civil rights movement in the US, Pierre Trudeau's 1969 White Paper served a similar function in Canada. Shortly after Trudeau was elected Liberal prime minister—after he had campaigned for a "just society"—he actively pursued policy modifications that would replace collective rights with individual rights. Under this mandate of individualism, the White Paper was presented by then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Jean Chrétien

to terminate the special legal position of Status Indians and the reserve system. Manipulating the discourse of equal rights culled from the US civil rights movement to advance a politics of colour blindness and forced assimilation, the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* made clear that Native people would once again be the unwilling recipients of social change: "The Government believes that its policies must lead to the full, free and non-discriminatory participation of the Indian people in Canadian society. Such a goal requires a break with the past. It requires that the Indian people's roles of dependence be replaced by a role of equal status, opportunity and responsibility, a role they can share with all other Canadians." Native people responded to the White Paper immediately and collectively, signalling the birth of a nation-wide activist movement. Among the famous counterattacks to the White Paper was Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians*, which manipulated Trudeau's campaign slogan to argue that the White Paper policy "betrayed [Indians] by a programme which offers nothing better than cultural genocide. . . . [It is] a thinly disguised programme of extermination through assimilation" (1). In 1970, with the support of the National Indian Brotherhood, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta authored *Citizens Plus*, a document that came to be known as the Red Paper. Presented to the federal cabinet, the Red Paper lambasted the fraudulence of the government's claim that the White Paper was the product of negotiations with Native peoples. It also argued that Aboriginals should be recognized as citizens who enjoy equal rights and who possess supplementary rights as "charter" members of Canadian society (see Cairns 65–71). The result of Native protest was the defeat of the White Paper for approximately ten years, until it resurfaced under several different guises: the Constitution Act of 1982 and the failed Meech Lake Accord of 1987, both of which would again galvanize Native peoples across Canada to assert their rights.

The defeat of the White Paper marks an important historical turn in race-based activism in Canada. In the 1970s, a period of global decolonization, the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) became internationalized by participating in the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference, another international organization, brought Native people from various Arctic regions to discuss transnational concerns (*Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, hereafter *RCAP*). In addition, the breakthrough Supreme Court decision in the 1973 *Calder* case concerning Nisga'a title to territory led the federal government to establish its first land claims policy, beginning a process that continues today. As a result

of coalition building of Native groups across Canada, awareness of Aboriginal issues in Canada grew, giving rise to non-Native coalitions such as the Canadian Association for the Support of Native People and Project North that was organized to demand that the government recognize Aboriginal right to land and self-determination (*RCAP*). In 1979, the Inuit and Dené presented a proposal for the creation of Nunavut, marking the beginning of a twenty-year struggle for an Inuit province. The 1970s would also see significant Aboriginal obstruction of the flow of capital, particularly in confrontations involving state expropriation of natural resources such as the James Bay hydro project, the Mackenzie valley pipeline, and the northern Manitoba hydro project (*RCAP)*. Throughout these turbulent years, increased public attention on Aboriginal issues forced the government to respond not only by allocating funding to Aboriginal groups but also by substantially changing the system of classification to improve the enumeration of Aboriginal peoples. As John Kralt notes of his experiences as the officer charged with the development of the 1981 census, "Although the 1981 Census question was meant to enumerate status Indians, the major reason for collecting the ethnic data in 1981 was to obtain an official estimate of the number of Métis and non-status Indians" (19). In addition, he notes that the use of the paternal ancestry criterion since 1951 had become problematic as it was "considered sexist by many staff and persons consulted during the development of the 1981 Census" (21). Changes to the 1981 census included creating a separate question designed specifically to enumerate Aboriginal populations, replacing confusing terms such as "Band" or "Non-Band Indian" with "Status" or "Registered Indian," and substituting "Inuit" for "Eskimo." Perhaps the most notable conceptual change was inclusion of "Métis" as an Aboriginal category. Prior to 1951, the Métis had been subject to varying modes of classifications and after 1951 according to paternal lineage, resulting in either a European or an Aboriginal assignment.[11] These changes reflect both an awareness of the diversity of Native peoples of Canada and the sexism inherent in the classification system, changes that were influenced by the vexed intersection of gender politics and Native nationalism.

The undercounting of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, a significant impetus for classificatory change, is the result of both the colonial logic of the Indian Act that stripped legal status from Native women who marry non-Native men and a classificatory system that forced single ethnic origins from the paternal line. In the former, a provision in the Indian Act meant that Status women who married non-Status men lost their Status and their housing on

the reserve while granting Status and housing to non-Native women who married Status Native men. As Nancy Janovicek notes, migration patterns of women and men differed and created "a disparity that grew over time" (548). The intersection of race and gender is therefore central to the analysis of Native classification. In the midst of the growing nation-wide Native activist movement in the 1970s, we find in this conflict over the classification of Aboriginal women in Canada one of the most important examples of women-of-colour feminism and social change in North America.

Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act discriminated against Status women by taking away their and their children's status if they married a non-Status man. Adding to this gendered and assimilationist legal structure, as Bonita Lawrence outlines, "Section 12(1)(a)(iv), known as the 'double mother' clause, removed status from children when they reached the age of 21 if their mother and paternal grandmother did not have status before marriage" (13). For decades, Aboriginal women fought these discriminatory statutes in the face of major opposition, both from the Euro-Canadian legal system and from Native groups such as the National Indian Brotherhood, which argued that this fight put Native nationalism in jeopardy by privileging "individual" over collective rights. In 1971, Jeannette Corbière Lavell from the Wikwemikong Reserve and Yvonne Bedard from the Six Nations Reserve both lost their status for marrying non-Status men and took their cases to court. In 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against them, citing that by losing their Indian status they *gained* the legal rights of white women, construing the Indian Act as inherently nondiscriminatory. In 1977, Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman from the Tobique Reserve in New Brunswick who had also lost her Status through marriage, bypassed the Supreme Court and took her case to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. In 1981, the United Nations ruled that the Canadian government was in breach of a number of rights contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which included the right to protection from discrimination, equality of men and women, protection of the family, equality of rights and responsibilities in terms of marriage, and the right to enjoy her own culture (Kallen 252). But out of fear of massive Native opposition to amend the Indian Act, the government would not present Bill C-31 until 1985, finally eliminating the gender discrimination from the act and reinstating approximately 100,000 people to the status Native population, one-seventh of the total (Cairns 69). Problems remain with Bill C-31, but this change was a significant victory. As Lawrence states,

"Gender has thus been crucial to determining not only who has been able to stay in Native communities, but who has been called 'mixed-blood' and externalized as such" (15). Therefore, whereas segregation gave rise to resistance movements in the US, forced assimilation gave rise to a nationalist and feminist nationalist Aboriginal movement in Canada. This difference is most pronounced, perhaps, in the assertion of "separate but equal" status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, a structure that for African Americans was at the root of inequality.

It is out of this crucible of race and gender struggle that the classificatory system changed in Canada, shifting the discourse of race toward a recognition of racial mixing and away from single ethnic origins on the paternal side in order to more adequately account for Native populations of Canada. If the census presented some kind of mirror to the composition of Canada's society, it was no longer possible to view it as one made up of discrete racial and ethnic groups, as it had been in the past. Census enumerators could no longer rely on arbitrary strategies of dealing with mixed-race or ethnic individuals who marked more than one group, as many did in the 1971 census, by assigning individuals on the basis of the darkest pencil mark on the form (Kralt 17). As Kralt notes, "the problems census-takers have encountered over the past 115 years with the collection of ethnic data suggest that this rather static and simplistic view of Canadian society was and is simply not valid" (27). Renewed attention to race mixture and race difference reflected in the 1981 census—influenced by Native mobilizing since the late 1960s—aroused attention to other visible minorities and the racial barriers that they faced. By 1983, although there was still considerable interest in Aboriginal data, there was also a further demand for data on visible minorities that would effect further changes in classification on the 1986 census.

Because the 1981 census was self-enumerated, census officials had to determine how best to ask the question of multiple ethnic origins. In the US, the civil rights movement had shifted race discourse from an emphasis on the biological sense of race to a social politics of racial self-identification. But in Canada, after much debate, census officials concluded that a question on "ethnic roots" rather than "ethnic identification" would result in greater accuracy in the enumeration of multiple ethnic origins. Again, these considerations were primarily influenced by the desire of Statistics Canada to gather more accurate data on Aboriginal populations. As Kralt notes, "it was considered important to know not only the numbers of persons who identify with a given ethnic group but also the numbers who could *potentially*

identify with this origin" (21; emphasis added). Ultimately the idea of "roots" prevailed as a more tangible determination of ethnic origin than self-identification. Therefore, despite the significant shift in race discourse that would from that point enumerate and socially recognize mixed-race individuals such as the Métis, this shift did not precipitate an increase in racial self-identification, as it did in the US, because of the recognition of multiple rather than singular racial origins, the "roots" criterion, and the absence in Canada of a minority rights structure dependent on racial self-identification.

The shifts in racial classification that followed the civil rights movement in the US and the Native nationalist and feminist movements in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate the growing cleavage in race discourse in both countries, represented most palpably on the 1980 and 1981 censuses in the US and Canada respectively. In the US, self-enumeration forms would require individuals to self-identify with one of four racial categories—Black, White, Asian, American Indian—and one of two ethnic categories: Hispanic and Non-Hispanic. With the exception of the Hispanic ethnic category, the US census recycled the same racial categories whose prior function was to distribute rights and privileges along colour lines, whose purpose now was incorporated into a structure of minority rights aimed at redistributing access and wealth to people of colour. Although self-classification was possible before 1980,[12] the structure of rights guiding OMB's *Statistical Directive No. 15* was instrumental in further solidifying the concept of race as an identity and encouraging political mobilization around those racial categories. Because the structure of minority rights was contingent upon racial identification with only one of the categories outlined by the OMB, mixed-race individuals were required to choose only one race category "which most closely reflects the individual's recognition in his community" (OMB). This system of racial classification presents significant difficulties to many Latinos, who, analogous to the Métis, are derived of multiple origins. Remarking on the way that this structure of racial classification forces Hispanics to identify as white or black, Clara Rodriguez argues that US decennial classifications perpetuate a "bipolar" structure (65). The result of this classification system is that, until the 2000 census, forty percent of the Hispanic respondents chose "Other Race" as their racial classification in 1980 and 1990 (Omi 14), and of those respondents ninety-eight percent wrote "Latino," which is currently not considered a racial but an ethnic designation.[13] In Canada, Native mobilizing against the White Paper and the Indian Act led to greater awareness of racial difference,

racial inequality, and gender discrimination on a collective scale, facilitating the introduction of multiple ethnic origins and the elimination of paternal single ethnic origins on the census. This shift in racial classification affirmed the social validity of mixed-race individuals such as the Métis, while US Latinos continued to be caught between a choice of black or white. Moreover, the absence in Canada of a legal structure of minority rights similar to that in the US did not require strong self-identification of individuals with "ethnic origins," a classification whose changeable racial and ethnic configuration over the century undermined the potential for self-identification, particularly for visible minorities.

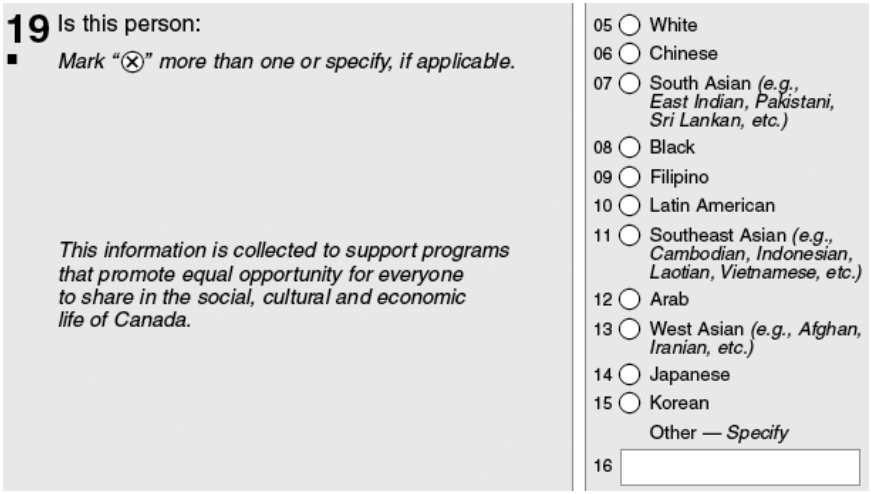
Euphemizing Race in Canada, Neutralizing Race in the US

Since the mid-1980s, the US and Canada have experienced a period of greater convergence in their census classificatory systems. This convergence became especially apparent in 1996 when the Canadian census introduced for the first time a more direct question about race, one that was distinct from and additional to the ethnic origins question. Like the 1981 ethnic origins question, the "race" question allowed respondents to choose as many applicable categories necessary to answer the question. In the US, the 2000 census allowed respondents for the first time to check more than one racial category. Although the censuses in the US and Canada appear to have converged on a similar multiracial course, they remain underlined by significant policy differences that have further conditioned race discourse in both countries.

There are four significant differences between the Canadian "visible minority" classification introduced in the 1980s and the US "race" classification. First, although usage of "visible minority" in the 1970s implied Aboriginal peoples and people of colour, since the 1980s "Aboriginals" have been excluded from the visible minority classification. Pendakur explains that "Aboriginal peoples were included as a separate category because they argued that their situation was sufficiently different to warrant separate treatment" (232). Second, the term "visible minority" is an aggregate classification of all racial minorities in Canada. Therefore, in contrast to the OMB's 1977 *Statistical Directive No. 15*—which disaggregated the population into five racial groups (White, Black, American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Asian Pacific Islander) and one ethnic category (Hispanic or Non-Hispanic)—all nonwhite and non-Aboriginal Canadians, whether Chinese or Haitian, are reaggregated to the visible minority classification. Third, the designation

of "visible minority" status is determined not by the combined top-down/bottom-up efforts of the OMB and lobbying groups as in the US but by the strictly top-down charge of Employment and Immigration Canada.[14] And fourth, the US self-enumerated short and long forms ask a direct question on race, such as in the 2000 census, which states simply and clearly "What is your race?" Canada, in contrast, does not have a specific, direct question that includes the words *race* or *visible minority*. Unlike most Americans, who have a general understanding of "race" given its endurance on the census and in spite of its functional modifications from 1970 onward, Canadians do not have a common reference point for either "race"—which, until the 1970s, was still used to characterize the British and French in addition to racialized minorities—or the newer "visible minority" race euphemism. Perhaps the only similarity in the use of "visible minority" in Canada and "race" in the US is that their respective "race" classifications employ a combination of criteria that include skin colour, geography, nationality, and ethnicity.

A new question on visible minorities was necessary because of the poor visible minority data culled from the 1981 and 1986 censuses. Because of the high number of "Canadian" responses to the ethnic origins question—one of the variables used to calculate the visible minority population—and the tendency for certain racial minorities to identify themselves according to their colonial ethnic origins—Haitians writing "French" and Jamaicans writing "British" as their ethnic origins (Kralt 24)—a more direct race question was required to address increased data requirements for visible minorities. Although Statistics Canada made plans to include the visible minority question on the 1991 census, no question was added because of the poor quality of responses to the census surveys issued after 1986, which included seniors and Québécois classifying themselves as visible minorities and Arabs and Latin Americans classifying themselves as white. As a result, no question on visible minorities was included on the 1991 census, requiring statisticians to once again assign visible minority status to individuals by referring to questions on place of birth, ethnic origin, and language. Unlike in the US, therefore, racial self-identification had never played a role in the census in Canada and was reflected in the weak identification with terms such as "visible minority" and "race or colour." Accommodating the weak racial identification of Canadians—after good test responses from the 1993 National Census Test—Statistics Canada added to the 1996 census for the first time a race question that did not use either the words *race* or *visible minority*:



Statistics Canada 11[15]

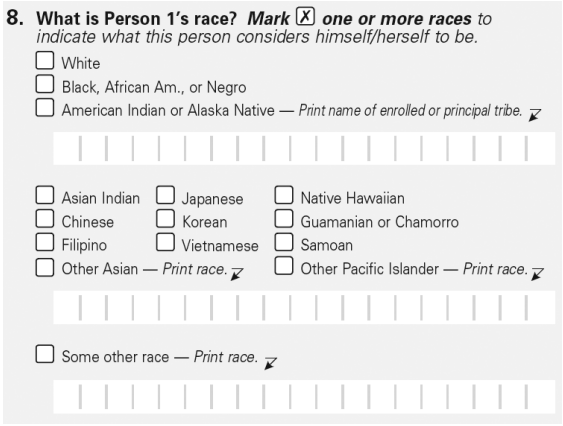
In the US, the major controversy during the 1990s was not over having a race question, which was nothing new, but over the option to check multiple race boxes, an option available to Canadians since 1981, and the reconstitution of existing racial reclassifications. Racial reclassification, like racial classification, is embedded in the structure of minority rights and increasingly in a politics of self-identification. Throughout the twentieth century, various groups were reclassified or threatened with it, particularly Asian American groups. Filipinos, for instance, who consider themselves "brown" and economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis upwardly mobile East Asians, have been successful at the state level in being reclassified as "Filipinos" rather than "Asian Pacific Islanders" in California. Equally remarkable is what Michael Omi characterizes as the "strange and twisted history of the classification of Asian Indians," who were classified as "Hindu" during and after peak years of immigration in the early decades of the twentieth century even though the majority were Sikh (23); classified as Caucasian but not white and thus ineligible for naturalization after the 1923 *US v. B.S. Thind* Supreme Court ruling; classified as white in 1970 after the implementation of civil rights initiatives; and, finally, classified as "APIs" in the 1980 census after Asian Indian leaders successfully sought minority group status. A further complication in the reclassification of South Asians was Chinese American opposition to the inclusion of South Asians in the API category. As Espiritu and Omi remark, "Obviously, at stake were economic benefits accruing to

designated 'minority' businesses" (58). Moreover, many South Asians oppose the API classification by arguing that they are "racially different" from other Asians and that they risk invisibility by being lumped in under this pan-Asian label. Espiritu and Omi found that many South Asians were in fact racially confused, some individuals they interviewed remarking that "A lot [of South Asians] were filling out that we were black [on the census]. Some were saying we were Hispanic. We just did not know" (56). As the case of both Filipinos and South Asians demonstrates, racial classification and reclassification underscore the often unintuitive, arbitrary, and inherently political process of racial categorization.

Before Census 2000, racial reclassification in the US was once again hotly debated, especially in terms of the addition of a multiracial classification. Recommendations were proposed by lobby groups representing white, Hawaiian, Arab, and multiracial identities. Among the white groups were the Celtic Coalition, the National European American Society, and the Society for German-American Studies, each of which argued for the disaggregation of the white category. In particular, the Celtic Coalition recommended that "white" be subdivided into three categories: "(1) as the 'original peoples of Europe', (2) 'the original peoples of North Africa', or (3) 'the original peoples of Southwest Asia (Middle East)" (Nobles, *Shades* 141). The National European American Society wanted to add a "European-American" classification because they thought that their current classification as "white non- Hispanic" was not an identity with a real-life referent (King 196). Hawaiians, Samoans, and Chamoros argued to be reclassified as "Native Americans" and removed from the API classification. These groups called attention to their status as Indigenous peoples and noted that their lower socioeconomic status and educational attainment distinguished them from both the majority white and the Asian American population. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee argued for the reclassification of Arab peoples from "white" to an "Arab American" minority classification (King 196), while the Arab American Institute lobbied for the addition of a "Middle-Eastern" minority classification (Nobles, "Racial" 59). These groups wanted the government to monitor racially motivated hate crimes against them such as those that occurred during the Persian Gulf War. Lastly, the groups creating the biggest classificatory controversy were multiracial groups, including the Association for Multiethnic Americans (AMEA), Project RACE (Reclassify All Children Equally), and Hapa Issues Forum (HIF). AMEA's primary arguments were based on promoting recognition of

multiracial individuals and tracking hate crimes against multiracial people; Project RACE argued that multiracial children suffered from negative-self-esteem issues because they were forced to classify themselves according to the race of one and not both parents; and HIF, a student-based organization of mixed-raced Asian Americans, "aimed at gaining acceptance for mixed-race Asian descent people in the traditional Asian ethnic communities" and "sought recognition based on the ability to check more than one [category] and still be counted with their Asian American brethren and sisters" (King 202). As the various mandates of these lobbying groups indicate, it has become increasingly unclear whether the census is a vehicle for civil rights compliance or self-identification.

In 1997, after an extensive review process, the OMB released *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*. Instead of reclassifying Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders as Native Americans, the API classification was divided into two categories: "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander." As noted by the OMB, "The 'Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander' category will be defined as 'A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.'" This definition excluded Filipino Americans, who are still aggregated under the "Asian" classification despite having origins in the Pacific Islands. The most significant change to the census was adoption of multiple race reporting. Although the OMB rejected the addition of a stand-alone multiracial category, Census 2000 would allow respondents to check more than one of the racial classifications listed. The outcome of these deliberations was the following race question, preceded by the Latino ethnic question:



8. **What is Person 1's race?** ***Mark*** ☒ ***one or more races*** *to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.*

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black, African Am., or Negro
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.*

- ☐ Asian Indian
- ☐ Japanese
- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Korean
- ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
- ☐ Filipino
- ☐ Vietnamese
- ☐ Samoan
- ☐ Other Asian — *Print race.*
- ☐ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race.*

- ☐ Some other race — *Print race.*

Bureau of the Census, *US Census 2000* 1

To properly enumerate individuals who checked more than one race box, the OMB has identified sixty-three mutually exclusive and comprehensive race categories, six single-race categories, and fifty-seven race combinations to classify respondents who chose more than one race.

Although the introduction of multiple race checking on Census 2000 marked a step toward adopting a system like the one Canada employed on the 1981 census, and although Canada's introduction of a specific race question on the 1996 census adopted a long-standing practice in the US, race discourse in both countries appears to be again moving in different directions, a move hinging on different structures of minority rights. For many groups in the US, the option of multiple checking registers a major defeat in the fight against institutionalized racism. For race-based political lobbying groups, multiple race checking reduces numbers and puts in jeopardy civil rights monitoring and enforcement. For example, the National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asians and Pacific Islanders stated that "it becomes difficult to ascertain the salience of biraciality or multiraciality in relationship to the specific provisions and intended benefits of these Federal [civil rights] laws and programs" (qtd. in Espiritu and Omi 82). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) similarly opposed multiple race checking because of the complications that it would present for existing civil rights legislation in addition to research, policy development, and resource allocation. Many organizations led media campaigns urging census respondents to "check only one" to preserve membership counts and civil rights gains. Some see the OMB's identification of sixty-three categories as a sign of racial dissolution, a multiplication of categories to the point that race difference itself becomes a form of sameness. This dissolution has been interpreted by conservatives as a step toward the formation of a desirable "colour-blind" society, which former University of California regent Ward Connerly advocated for in his failed Proposition 54 campaign in 2003, otherwise known as the "Racial Privacy Initiative."

In Canada, because minority rights hinge on membership in an aggregate visible minority population, the political mobilization of panethnic groups to maintain or increase numbers for rights and recognition—often in competition with other groups—has not become controversial. Although there are clearly problems with an aggregate visible minority classification, most obviously in its misleading approach to racial minorities as a culturally and economically undifferentiated bloc who experience race relations in identical

ways, it has nevertheless prevented the formation of competitive racial and ethnic blocs that have formed in the US. Pendakur explains the numerical advantages as follows: "it should be recognized that there are political advantages to being viewed as an homogenous entity. These advantages stem from the fact that there is political strength in numbers, and thus the entire non-white population constitutes a more powerful political block than a single segment of that population" (147). In sum, the addition of a race question in Canada, one that recognizes multiple visible minorities, reflects the increased recognition of the social salience of race while strengthening the ability of state and research agencies to collect data on Canada's visible minority population. In addition, the visible minority population in Canada, although identified primarily by state agencies, is more inclusive than in the US, particularly in its recognition of Arabs, West Asians, and Latin Americans as nonwhite groups that are subject to racial discrimination. In the US, in contrast, the introduction of multiple race checking reveals a weakening in racial recognition that actually threatens to erode civil rights monitoring and enforcement. Although Canadian and US censuses demonstrate greater convergence in terms of racial and multiracial classification, they are surrounded by vastly different policy implications.

Conclusion

We can return to where we began with the three issues that Goellnicht argues have thwarted the development of Asian Canadian panethnicity: the lack of a Black Power or significant race-based movement in Canada, the segregation of East Asian and South Asian issues, and "race evasiveness" in Canada. Taking into consideration the comparative history of racial classification and the historical conditions that contributed to shaping race discourse in Canada and the US, we can respond to each of these characterizations in turn.

Beginning with the claim that Asian Canadian panethnicity was stunted by the lack of a Malcolm X-led Black Power movement—a movement that was responsible for the rise of the Asian American movement in the US—we must refer to the ongoing activism of Aboriginals in Canada. Similar to the centrality of African Americans in the US civil rights movement, Aboriginal activism in Canada has highlighted the intersection of race and gender in the recognition of multiracial cultural difference. Today Aboriginal activists pose the biggest organized obstruction to the capitalist expropriation of natural resources in their protest against the economic and cultural dislocation

of Native peoples. Long before the blockade, occupation, and armed standoff of Mohawks in Oka raised awareness of Native issues in 1990, an organized Native blockade movement in Canada had been one of the few examples in North America of nation-wide race-based mobilizing.[16] In the period between 1980 and 1993, for instance, Nicholas Blomley notes, there were eighty-two blockades across Canada—forty-nine of them in British Columbia—that posed a significant threat to transnational corporations that lost millions a day to blockade resistance.[17] He goes on to explain that these blockades are strategic and mobile "spatial tactics" of resistance that draw attention to questions of the racialization of "mobility, rights, and space" (11, 24). Blockades also register a profound statement of protest against what Blomley describes as the "massive, unsustainable, out-movement of capital and commodities from traditional territories" (18). Therefore, to relate the absence of an Asian Canadian racial project to the lack of a Black Power movement or other race-based movement in Canada is both to transpose a decontextualized colour line into Canada and to erase the instrumentality of Aboriginal activism in Canadian racial formation. As Leo Driedger and Angus Reid noted in a survey in 1995, Aboriginal peoples are thought to pose the most significant threat to mainstream Canada, more than any other group since 1975, with thirty-three percent of the population perceiving that Native groups "have too much power" (170). With these examples in mind, we can conclude that the lack of an Asian Canadian movement has nothing to do with the absence of race-based mobilizing in Canada because such mobilizing has a long history and is ongoing. Perhaps we should ask instead what impact Aboriginal movements have had on more recent race-based social movements such as the Japanese Canadian and Chinese Canadian redress movements or on Asian immigrant advocacy organizations. To what extent is there coalition building among Asian and Aboriginal peoples, connecting the politics of immigrant and Indigenous peoples in a formation that might only be possible in Canada?[18]

Shifting now to the concerns that Goellnicht raises about the various factors that contribute to the segregation of South Asian and East Asian identities—which he claims hampers a truly pan-Asian Canadian formation—we can recognize that his effort to bridge the two is again rationalized by a US racial model. But, even in the US, South Asians occupy a liminal racial position that does not always support their classification as Asian American. As noted above, the 1980 inclusion of South Asians under the Asian American classification was opposed by many East Asian Americans,

who feared the diminishment of rights that would result if another group was added to the minority pool, and by South Asians, who felt racially different from East Asians. What I would like to emphasize here is that, unlike "Asian American" in the US, "Asian Canadian" remains an open social category that is not built into a legal structure of minority rights. This ambivalence introduces several possibilities. On the one hand, given that Arabs and West Asians also originate from Asia—and given that the Canadian government recognizes them as members of visible minorities—why can't an Asian Canadian social formation include these groups? Why should Asian Canadians be delimited according to the highly political and arbitrary boundaries of Asian America, whose configuration in the US is markedly different from that of Asians in Canada? As of Census 2001, Asian Canadian ethnic groups represent 9.65% of the population, including West Asian and Arab populations. This is almost triple the percentage of Asian American ethnic groups, which was 3.6% as of Census 2000 and which does not include West Asians and Arabs who are classified as "White Non-Hispanic." The percentage of Asian Canadians is only marginally lower than the US Latino population and approximately two percent lower than the African American population.[19] Given their size, Asian Canadians have the potential to effect major social change in Canada.

On the other hand, rather than continue to draw lines around which groups should or should not belong to an Asian Canadian classification, we can point to the fact that the main issue that hampers the development of Asian Canadian panethnicity *in the social sense* is—as Goellnicht also underlines—the absence of a political movement, one that may come to light if we consider the recent mobilizing of Arab groups and West, South, and Southeast Asians, particularly Indonesians and Malaysians. Because these groups have become increasingly subject to racial profiling, infiltration, and hate crimes in Canada and the US since September 11th, the coalitions that these groups have formed with one another have created the kind of political loyalty possible only in the context of a social movement. The National Association of Japanese Canadians has stood in solidarity with these ethnic groups by speaking out against racial profiling and the government's Anti-Terrorism Act, whose racist logic can be connected to the mass internment of Japanese "enemy aliens" during the Second World War (NAJC). It is this kind of social mobilization that may help give shape to a pan-Asian social identity. Social formations are not the result of any "natural" affiliation of groups but the outcome of interethnic mobilizing around shared political

issues. Therefore, rather than bridging the gap between South Asians and Asian Canadians in the abstract, or defining the inclusiveness of the Asian Canadian classification for its own sake or for the sake of corresponding with Asian America, it may be wise to commit to a larger category of "people of colour" in Canada by observing the sentiments of Vijay Prashad: to "craft solidarity. . . to negotiate across historically produced divides to combat congealed centers of power that benefit from political disunity" (121–22). In Canada, to craft solidarity includes recognizing potential alliances between and across Asian ethnic groups, Indigenous and immigrant groups, and interracial groups from the Caribbean—all of whom must negotiate the social reality of race in Canada.

Finally, with respect to Goellnicht's critique of Canadian evasion of race and fixation on ethnicity, we have seen how the historical fluctuations of race concepts in Canada have contributed to race discourses and processes of identification that remain distinct from those in the US. Because race and ethnic concepts have been collapsed into each other in both countries at various times, in either a social or classificatory sense, it may be more useful, as Rey Chow argues, "not to insist on an absolute distinction between the two terms at all times, for the simple reason that they are, more often than not, mutually implicated" (23). For now, then, we may keep "Asian Canadian" in quotation marks, as a social category whose potential is still largely unknown, but one whose development will arise out of a distinct Canadian racial formation described in this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to offer belated thanks to Michael Omi, Shauna McCranor, Dorothy Nason, Taiaiake Alfred, and Jackie Price for sharing their expertise and Guy Beauregard for his careful editorial assistance.

NOTES

1 In making this distinction, I am not asserting the mutual exclusion of academic work and activism. Rather, the distinction refers primarily to the lack of an accompanying race-based social movement that helped to initiate the institutionalization of Asian American and ethnic studies programs in the US.

2 For example, Marie Lo responds to the incorporation of Asian Canadian texts in Asian American studies by figuring "Asian Canadian literature as its necessary Other" in the Asian American project of "claiming the nation" ("Fields" 6).

3 The emphasis here is on the sociohistorical foundation of Asian American studies, which grew out of student mobilizing in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than on its later institutional manifestation, which some have criticized as overprofessionalized, depoliticized, and disconnected from community concerns. See Omi and Takagi.

4 The title of Clarke's essay is "Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tightrope Time', or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*."

5 National quinquennial censuses in Canada were standardized in 1956, alternating between collecting data in agricultural and metropolitan areas every five years. Since 1986, quinquennial censuses have been uniform.

6 My use of "Aboriginal" reflects its usage in the *Constitution Act,* 1982, and includes Indian, Inuit and Metis people. Status Indian is defined by the Indian Act. Terms like "Native," widely used in a general sense before 1982 and "First Nations," which became popular when the then Native Indian Brotherhood changed its name to the Assembly of First Nations in 1982, are often equated with Status Indian because these two associations are composed of chiefs of official reserves. However, both terms are also used in more inclusive senses. Many Aboriginal people prefer to be identified by their nation, such as Mohawk, Cree, Anishnabe, etc.

7 By "West Asian" I am referring to nationalities that include, for example, Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, and Moroccan.

8 Among the rights denied to people of colour was the right to census confidentiality. In the 1940s, the government solicited confidential residential information from the Census Bureau to facilitate the internment of Japanese Americans; see Bureau of the Census, "Census Confidentiality." The Census Bureau has also been tied to the deportation of up to one million Mexicans during the 1930s after the 1930 census classified Mexicans as a race, the only year that they were classified as such. See Balderrama and Rodriguez.

9 Racial mixing was restricted through *de jure* and *de facto* discriminatory measures in the US and Canada respectively. In the US, anti-miscegenation laws were in place since the 1600s and were not overturned until 1967. In Canada, racial intermarriage was not directly prohibited by law, but legislation such as *The Women's and Girl's Protection Act* passed in several provinces in the early twentieth century was a *de facto* measure to prevent white women from working with Chinese men.

10 Space limitations prevent me from detailing, beyond a cursory overview, the features of racial classification in Canada and the US prior to 1960. Before and after the turn of the century, census bureaus in both countries collaborated with scientists who employed racial classifications to advance race science and theories of social and biological Darwinism. Although much is made of Canada's elimination of "race" from the census in 1946 to disassociate, at least discursively, from Nazi racial ideologies, much of the visual content of "race" was simply added to the more neutral components of language that attended its replacement term: "ethnicity." Arguably a more significant difference in census classification in Canada and the US prior to 1960 is methodological. In Canada, enumerators were required to ask a series of questions to determine race or ethnicity, while US enumerators determined race solely by observation. Although the US Bureau of the Census claimed that enumerators were able to identify races with reasonable accuracy they had a history of resorting to ad hoc methods of determining nonwhiteness, such as the "brown bag test" in which anyone with skin darker than a brown bag was marked as black or mulatto.

11 See Kralt "Appendix," 442.

12 Respondents were able to self-classify their race in the US in the 1960 census. It was at the discretion of the enumerator to reclassify the respondent if the enumerator observed a discrepancy in the self-classification.

13 In a recent *Los Angeles Times* editorial, legal scholar Ian Haney Lopez suggests that, because approximately forty percent of Latinos check "some other race," many Latinos consider themselves a race rather than a linguistic/ethnic group.

14 The mark-in "visible minority" categories listed on the 2001 census were identified by the *Employment Equity Technical Reference Papers* published by Employment and Immigration Canada in 1987 and included eleven groups: Chinese, Black, South Asians, West Asians, Arabs, Filipinos, South East Asians, Latin Americans (excluding Argentinians and Chileans), Japanese, Koreans, and Pacific Islanders.

15 The only changes made to the 2001 census included removing the parenthetical examples beside the "Black" category and making "Arab" and "West Asian" separate categories, adding "Afghan, Iranian, etc." in parentheses beside the latter.

16 I am indebted to Shauna McCranor for framing Native blockades as a social movement.

17 Blomley points out the financial losses of CN Rail as follows: "the closures of the Duffey Lake Road in the summer of 1990 (which cut off the towns of Pemberton from the east and Lillooet from the west) and the Sto:lo blockade on the main CN Rail line into Vancouver in 1993 (which cost CN around $3 million a day)" (18).

18 Rita Wong notes that the Direct Action against Refugee Exploitation (DAARE) Asian immigrant advocacy organization emphasizes its solidarity with Indigenous peoples; also see her essay on "decolonizasian" in this special issue. In a historical analysis of Chinese head tax legislation during the exclusion era, Lily Cho considers this legislation against the Indian Act and urges scholars to read them as overlapping and interconnected oppressions. In the context of literary studies, Marie Lo has argued that Asian Canadian literature reveals a striking romanticization of and identification with First Nations peoples (see "Native-Born").

19 The breakdown of Asian Canadian groups as of Census 2001 is as follows: 3.5% Chinese, 3% South Asian, 1% Filipino, 1% Arab/West Asian, 0.6% Southeast Asian, 0.3% Korean, and 0.25% Japanese. The largest source of immigrants in Canada is currently from Asia.

WORKS CITED

Balderrama, Francisco E., and Raymond Rodriguez. *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995.

Beauregard, Guy. "What Is at Stake in Comparative Analyses of Asian Canadian and Asian American Literary Studies?" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 217-39.

Blomley, Nicholas. "'Shut the Province Down': First Nations Blockades in British Columbia, 1985–1995." *BC Studies* 111 (1996): 5-35.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Trans. Matthew Adamson. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1990.

Boyd, Monica, Gustave Goldman, and Pamela White. "Race in the Canadian Census." *Race and Racism: Canada's Challenge*. Ed. Leo Driedger and Shiva S. Halli. Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2000. 33-54.

Bureau of the Census. "Census Confidentiality and Privacy: 1790–2002." 2003. 28 February 2005. <www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs>.

—. *US Census 2000: Individual Census Report Form D-20A (Short Form)*. Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2000.

Cairns, Alan C. *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2000.

Canada. *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* [White Paper]. Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1969. 21 Sept. 2005. www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/lib/phi/histlws/cp1969a_e.html.
Cardinal, Harold. *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969.
Cho, Lily. "Rereading Chinese Head Tax Racism: Redress, Stereotype, and Antiracist Critical Practice." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 62-84.
Chow, Rey. *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.
Clarke, George Elliott. "Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tightrope Time', or Nationalizing Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 28.3 (1996): 56-71.
Coleman, Daniel, and Donald Goellnicht. "Introduction: 'Race' into the Twenty-First Century." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 1-29.
Driedger, Leo, and Angus Reid. "Public Opinion on Visible Minorities." *Race and Racism: Canada's Challenge*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2000. 152-171.
Employment and Immigration Canada. *Employment Equity Technical Reference Papers*. Ottawa: Employment and Immigration Canada, 1987.
Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Panethnicity*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992.
Espiritu, Yen Le, and Michael Omi. "'Who Are You Calling Asian?' Shifting Identity Claims, Racial Classification, and the Census." *Transforming Race Relations: A Public Policy Report*. Ed. Paul Ong. Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2000. 43-101.
Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 1-41.
Janovicek, Nancy. "'Assisting Our Own': Urban Migration, Self-Governance, and Native Women's Organizing in Thunder Bay, Ontario, 1972-1989." *American Indian Quarterly* 27.3-4 (2003): 548-65.
Kallen, Evellyn. *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada: A Human Rights Perspective on Ethnicity, Racism, and Systemic Inequality*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 2003.
King, Rebecca Chiyoko. "Racialization, Recognition, and Rights: Lumping and Splitting Multiracial Asian Americans in the 2000 Census." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 3.2 (2000): 191-217.
Kralt, John. "Ethnic Origins in the Canadian Census, 1871-1986." *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial, and Cultural Variations*. Ed. Shiva S. Halli, Frank Trovato, and Leo Driedger. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1990. 13-29
—. "Appendix A: Instructions and Questions for the Ethnic Origin Data, 1871-1986." *Ethnic Demography: Canadian Immigrant, Racial and Cultural Variations*. Eds. Shiva S. Halli, Frank Trovato and Leo Driedger. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1990.
Lawrence, Bonita. "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the US: An Overview." *Hypatia* 18.2 (2003): 3-30.
Lo, Marie. "Fields of Recognition: Reading Asian Canadian Literature in Asian America." Diss. U of California, Berkeley, 2001.
—. "Native-Born Asian Canadian Model Minorities." Unpublished ms.
Lopez, Ian Haney. "The Birth of a 'Latino Race.'" Opinion. *Los Angeles Times* 29 Dec. 2004: B11.
NAJC. *Japanese Canadians Speak Out against War*. 2003. Available <www.najc.ca>. 3 Feb. 2005.

Nobles, Melissa. "Racial Categorization and Censuses." *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*. Ed. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002. 43-70.

—. *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000.

Office of Management and Budget. *Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity*. 1997. 17 Feb. 2005. <www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/print/1997standards/html>.

—. *Statistical Directive No. 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting*. Washington: Office of Management and Budget, 1977. Sept. 2005. <http://wonder.cdc.gov/wonder/help/populations/bridged-race/Directive15.html>

Omi, Michael. "Racial Identity and the State: The Dilemmas of Classification." *Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 15.1 (1997): 7-23.

Omi, Michael, and Dana Takagi. "Introduction: Thinking Theory in Asian American Studies." Ed. Omi and Takagi. *Amerasia Journal* 21.1-2 (1995): xi-xv.

Pendakur, Ravi. *Immigrants and the Labour Force: Policy, Regulation, and Impact*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2000.

Prashad, Vijay. "Crafting Solidarities." *A Part, yet Apart*. Ed. Lavina Shankar and Rajini Srikanth. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. 105-26.

Rodriguez, Clara. *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census, and the History of Ethnicity in the US*. New York: New York UP, 2000.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Stage Four: Negotiation and Renewal*. 2002. 13 Feb. 2005. <www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/2002-templates/ssi/print_e.asp>.

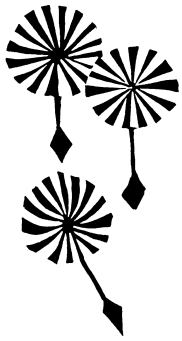
Statistics Canada. *Census 96 (Long Form)*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1996.

Ty, Eleanor. *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004.

Ty, Eleanor, and Donald C. Goellnicht, ed. *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004.

Vallières, Pierre. *White Niggers of America*. Trans. Joan Pinkham. Toronto: McClelland, 1971.

Wong, Rita. "Partial Responses to the Global Movement of People." *West Coast Line* 34.3 (2001): 105-19.



Donald C. Goellnicht

Asian Kanadian, Eh?

As the peculiarly Canadian interrogatory mode of my title indicates, in this paper I raise a number of questions concerning the dynamics of Asian Canadian canon formation, complicate and problematize those questions, but offer speculative rather than definitive answers. Specifically, I explore certain aspects of the Asian Canadian literary canon by focusing on Roy Kiyooka and Fred Wah, two highly successful writers whose creative works have gained a good deal of critical acclaim but have not, until relatively recently, emerged as central texts in the literary tradition that resides under the signifier "Asian Canadian." Kiyooka's and Wah's careers pose a number of significant questions about canon formation and about the efficacy of being identified under a rubric—"Asian Canadian literature"—defined by race/ethnicity and by cultural nationalism and grounded in identity politics, at a time when the postnational, the transnational, the postethnic, and the global appear to be in the ascendancy, at least in academic circles.

What has the term "Asian Canadian" meant in a literary and broader cultural context? What might it mean in the future? Who is served by the use of this term? These questions, among others, have been opened for discussion by Roy Miki in his productively provocative article "Altered States: Global Currents, the Spectral Nation, and the Production of 'Asian Canadian,'" in which he places Kiyooka at the centre of his meditation on how global flows have thrown into crisis Canada's conception of itself and in which he explores "the critical limits of 'Asian Canadian'" as a category of identification in the hope that the field may be reconfigured "to instigate alternative

forms of collectivity" (43, 53). Entering into dialogue with Miki's essay, I will argue that Kiyooka's and Wah's ambiguous, multiply hybridized situations make for a politics of race that is less binarist or explicit, and more nuanced, than the identity politics that we have come to associate with the model of Asian American literature and culture that has had such a profound influence in a broad North American context. Kiyooka's and Wah's peculiarly local and transnational concerns have also been at odds with the thrust of cultural nationalism that has, until recently, dominated Asian North American cultural production and criticism. Further, their often difficult multi-generic experiments and their particular concern with innovative uses of language explain in part their belated recognition as Asian Canadian artists, but these very experiments constitute, to a considerable degree, Kiyooka's and Wah's racial politics.

The formation of a literary canon is, of course, a complex and ongoing process involving a number of forces—cultural, political, social, economic, and ideological—whose interplay results in the valuing and reproduction of certain verbal artifacts and the devaluing and ignoring of others.[1] According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the formation of a "minor literature," by which they mean an ethnic minority literary tradition, depends upon a particularly heightened set of characteristics that include "the deterritorialization of language," or the use of the dominant language by the diasporic minority, "the connection of the individual to a political immediacy" so that "everything in [minority literatures] is political," and "the collective assemblage of enunciation" so that "literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation" against the hegemony of the dominant culture (59–61). Adapting Deleuze and Guattari's argument to canon formation, I would suggest that those texts that have normally risen to canonical status in a minority tradition are politically charged in fairly overt ways—usually in the themes that they tackle—and resonate in a profound fashion with the minority community so that they are deemed to speak with the voice of the collective.[2]

The nexus of factors that has formed the still relatively young and quite small Asian Canadian canon will become clearer, I trust, as my argument concerning Kiyooka and Wah unfolds. One of the most significant of those factors has been the value that the Asian Canadian community, the racial "collective," has placed on certain texts, but academic scholars have also played a strong role in shaping the canon with their preferences. In his discussion of racial minority canons, Henry Louis Gates Jr. goes so far as to

assert that "Scholars make canons" (38).[3] While I would not endorse such a categorical statement—the power of scholars seems to me to be more mediated than Gates admits—I should acknowledge that I belong to a scholarly community that has had a hand in shaping the Asian Canadian canon, and thus I shoulder some of the "blame" for the omissions and lacunae that I will describe here. I would also stress that my views are those of an Ontarian, with the attendant biases and blind spots of that centrist location. I make this announcement because one of the peculiar aspects of examining criticism on the work of Kiyooka in particular and Wah to a lesser degree is how much it has been treated as a western Canadian phenomenon, the project of western scholars. As Kiyooka himself states in response to the centrist-nationalist perspective of Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, "Its my belief that WE who abide in the Westcoast do propose another take" (*TransCanada Letters* n. pag.). Or, to put it more bluntly, central Canadian critics are guilty of not paying enough attention to these important writers.[4]

I should also acknowledge that some of the questions I raise here have been posed previously, in somewhat different form, by Roy Miki in reference to Kiyooka and by Jeff Derksen in reference to Wah. In "Inter-Face: Roy Kiyooka's Writing" (1991), Miki observes that, "On the road map of designated sites along the transCanada canonical way, there won't (likely) be a sign for the writer-Kiyooka, even though the painter-Kiyooka has now been inscribed in Canadian art history. . . . [E]xcept for a few sideways glances in his direction, Kiyooka remains a neglected figure" (54). Although an important conference devoted to Kiyooka's writing and art was held in 1999, resulting in the collection of essays *All Amazed: For Roy Kiyooka* (one of which is by Miki), the situation that Miki describes has changed only slowly since 1991.[5] In "Making Race Opaque: Fred Wah's Poetics of Opposition and Differentiation" (1996), Jeff Derksen outlines a similar, if more focused, set of issues related to Wah:

> In the more than thirty years Fred Wah has been publishing in Canada, his work has not—until very recently—been read by the critics and poets who have written about his work as reflective of or embodying his working-class Chinese-Canadian background. To articulate the cultural context that has elided the racial content of his work and identified him primarily as a member of the *Tish* writers is to unravel the tightly wound thread of national identity, national literature and the roles of official culture and multiculturalism in Canada. (63)

While acknowledging Derksen's argument as valuable and enabling, I wish to suggest some alternative "answers" or speculations in exploring the issue of race in relation to Wah and Kiyooka and to pursue further the question

of how we have read these writers, how we may read them in the future, and how reading them under the rubric "Asian Canadian" may productively shift our understanding of that term.[6]

Roy Kenzie Kiyooka, a Japanese Canadian born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, in 1926, was displaced to Alberta as an "enemy alien" during World War II, before he had finished high school. After the war, in the late 1940s, he attended the Institute of Technology and Art in Calgary to study painting, and then he studied art further in Mexico in the mid-1950s before returning to Canada to take up various teaching posts. In 1959, while teaching at Regina College, the University of Saskatchewan he came under the influence of the famous abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman and committed himself to the rigorous precepts and methods of international modernism. He moved to Vancouver, the city with which he is closely identified, in 1961 and was galvanized by, and in turn had a profound influence on, the emerging local artistic scene. At the height of his powers as a painter in the 1960s, Kiyooka was one of Canada's preeminent abstract expressionists: he won the silver medal for painting at the Sao Paolo Bienale in Brazil in 1965, represented Canada at the Osaka World's Fair in Japan in 1970, and was awarded the Order of Canada in 1978. In 1969–70, however, angered by the international marketing machine that he perceived as having taken over the art world—and, I suspect, by his growing awareness of the imperialism and racism of the West towards Asia at the height of the Vietnam War—he suddenly abandoned painting and modernism, turning instead to postmodern photography, performance art, and poetry as his preferred modes of expression until his death in 1994 after a long career teaching at the University of British Columbia. In rejecting modernist painting, he recognized that the "fame game as it pertained to a Japanese Kanadian artist was just another attenuated form of cultural alienation: I'd clobbered together a belated aspirant's modernist aesthetic, one that intrinsically denied my asian kanadian origins and those immediately around me" (qtd. in Miki, Afterword 317).

Kiyooka's work in the 1960s and the early 1970s is difficult to categorize; he certainly did not wear the label of "asian kanadian" artist unproblematically. Kiyooka was heavily influenced as a poet during this period by the New Americanists Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, and Charles Olson, who belonged to the Black Mountain school of poetry, but his work also reaches across the Pacific to deal with issues of transnational, global capital and

the treatment of labour in Japan, as Scott McFarlane has demonstrated in his insightful analysis of *StoneDGloves* (1970). At the same time, Kiyooka firmly believed in the immediate experience of the artistic moment, in the intense presentness of art,[7] and he remained intimately associated with—even central to—the local scene of avant-garde poetry and performance in Vancouver. He was closely connected to the Vancouver poets who founded the *Tish* poetry newsletter at UBC in the early 1960s, a group that included Frank Davey, George Bowering, David Dawson, Jamie Reid, and Fred Wah, and that gained national prominence despite its stress on the local. Kiyooka himself became increasingly drawn into nation formation projects as he moved on to Montreal for Expo '67 and then represented Canada at Expo '70 in Japan. Once he abandoned painting and returned to Vancouver, however, his local embeddedness made him, as Roy Miki suggests, an especially apt figure for an "Asian Canadian" designation "approached as a 'localism' that exceeds the 'nation'" ("Altered States" 56).

It was Miki who pushed for the inclusion of Kiyooka at the "inception" of Asian Canadian literature *qua* Asian Canadian literature, with the publication of *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology* in 1979. This seminal anthology, the result of years of work by grassroots groups in Vancouver, includes an interview with Kiyooka by Miki in which Miki's somewhat leading questions attempt to fit Kiyooka into a "Japanese Canadian" identity.[8] Brief selections of Kiyooka's poetry have also appeared in venues clearly identified as Asian Canadian such as *Paper Doors: An Anthology of Japanese-Canadian Poetry* (1981) and a special issue of *West Coast Review* on *The Asian-Canadian and the Arts* (1981), which also contains Kiyooka's essay "We Asian North Americanos: A Unhistorical 'Take' on Growing Up Yellow in a White World." Some of Kiyooka's photographs were included in the groundbreaking art exhibition *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*, which toured Canada in 1990–91, showcasing "photo, film and video work by twenty-five Asian Canadians" (Paul Wong, Preface 4). But it was not until Miki edited *Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy K. Kiyooka* (1997), which won the Poetry Award from the Association for Asian *American* Studies, that Kiyooka's writing found a truly secure place in the Asian Canadian literary canon. This is, of course, a posthumous place as Kiyooka died in 1994 without having gained enough recognition as an "Asian Canadian" writer despite Miki's sustained effort to insert him into the emerging tradition. One factor that we need to recognize is that Kiyooka's prominence was gained too early for this designation, which became

commonly used only in the 1990s, although the tradition and even the term signifying this panethnic identity formation was clearly emerging among artists and activists in the 1970s and 1980s (see Beauregard, "Emergence"; and Goellnicht, "Long Labour").

Although much of the work that established an "Asian Canadian literature" went on in Vancouver in the 1970s, resulting in the founding of the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop in 1979, Kiyooka himself seems to have been ambivalent about grounding his artistic identity in concepts of race and ethnicity. He was acutely aware of race and racism in Canada, having experienced an abrupt end to his high school education in 1942 when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the Canadian government interned Japanese Canadians as "enemy aliens." Miki suggests that it was Kiyooka's appearance as Canada's representative at the Osaka World's Fair in 1970 that solidified his sense of being a racialized subject ("Altered States" 52). This overt racialization by the state probably galvanized Kiyooka into recognizing that as a Japanese Canadian he was always already an other, that he could never simply be a "normal" or unmarked Canadian (Euro, white, male, heterosexual), that he could not operate simply as an artist, part of the predominantly white groups of painters to which he belonged.[9] As he remarked of himself in an interview with Miki, "You are of it [Canada], and you are not, and you know that very clearly" ("Inter-Face" 71). It is not surprising, then, that at this point he abandoned painting and the modernist ideology of a universalism that was in fact specifically Eurocentric.

His sense of alienation from "home" emerges strongly in a 1975 interview that Kiyooka gave for the retrospective of his art organized and circulated by the Vancouver Art Gallery, *Roy K. Kiyooka: 25 Years*. When asked by the interviewer, Chris Varley, about his "Japanese heritage," Kiyooka responds with a moving account of his trip to Japan in 1963, but he concludes with a rejection of the "Japanese" label: "I'm truly bored with labels, what they pre-empt, and i'm sick of having my origins fingered. Its as though an utterly 'Canadian' experience couldn't embrace either ocean and what lies on the far side of each. Or a Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan'" (*Roy K. Kiyooka* n. pag.). With astonishing prescience, Kiyooka argues for a Canadian identity rooted in both the *local*—Moose Jaw—and the *transnational*, reaching across the ocean to include his Japanese ancestry. He insists that this transpacific cultural connection is as important as the transatlantic connections that have been credited as the foundations of Canadian culture and identity by the dominant society. He refuses to be limited by such an identity, claiming for

his inheritance the reach across either ocean or both oceans to include his Japanese heritage and the influences of European modernism on his art. He boldly asserts an identity that Miki so accurately describes as "a 'localism' that exceeds the 'nation'" ("Altered States" 56). His is a self-fashioned, expansive identity remarkably different from the state-based "national" one being articulated by central Canadian artists and critics (e.g., Margaret Atwood, D.G. Jones, and Northrop Frye) at the time, based largely on inward-looking distinction from the United States; it may also have been an identity that, in its diasporic sensibility, was too far ahead of the ethnic nationalism of the time for Kiyooka to have been embraced by or to embrace a strictly "Asian North American" or "Asian Canadian" identity as it was articulated by most activists.[10]

The transpacific hybridity and Pacific Rim exchange that Kiyooka adumbrates in his essays and talks are also evident in his poetry from the earliest stages. In "Itinerary of a View" from *Kyoto Airs*, published in 1964, Kiyooka identifies himself as "a Canadian painter / come home [to Japan] to pay homage / to ancestors, samurai among them," but he finds that these ancestors'

> children's children gad about
> in red high heels, twisting to Ray Charles
> and ride together on black motorcycles
> to the Chion-in temple, where in the
> tall green grass between dead men's graves
> they kiss the summer nights away (*Pacific Windows* 23)

The youth of postwar Japan are in many ways like their counterparts in postwar North America. But these treatments of race, ethnic, and national identity are relatively rare in the poetry at this stage, buried amid poems on love, nature, art, and, most important, language. An example of a later poem in which race erupts and his Pacific Rim identity emerges is "Of Seasonable Pleasures and Small Hindrances," which first appeared in *TransCanada Letters* (1975):

> . . . "I" hereby swear
> with my right hand on King James' version of the Holy Writ
> to remember all the Disenfranchisements of the
> War Measures Act. together with the WASP supremacy of
> the Mackenzie King era and furthermore I suggest
> we let the Pope save P.E. Trudeau from further pedestrian
> discomfitures. "Viva la Two Solitudes" . . . I
> thought thinking of myself under a third no less conspicuous
> pacific pilgrim's solitude (*Pacific Windows* 100–01)

Implementation of the War Measures Act in Quebec in 1970 triggers memories of the earlier invoking of the War Measures Act by Mackenzie King to intern and deport Japanese Canadians during World War II. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the architect of Canadian multiculturalism as state policy in the early 1970s and the invoker of the 1970 War Measures Act, is coupled by Kiyooka to Mackenzie King as prime ministers of intolerance. "Tolerant" Canada is less so than it pretends to be, its purported multicultural inclusiveness undone by a narrow nationalism that continues to define itself in relation to the others that it excludes or contains and constrains. Identifying with the oppressed French Canadians, Kiyooka conceives of himself as belonging to a "third solitude," a transnational "pacific pilgrim." Still, he agonizes over limiting himself to the category of racialized artist/writer; he remains reluctant to commit to an identity politics. In the interview for *Inalienable Rice*, he tells Miki that the thought of himself as a "Japanese Canadian" "never entered into the writing": "I don't think 'the Japanese Canadian writer' is important as a parsing of writers into groups" ("Roy Kiyooka" 60, 64).[11]

As late as May 1981, at a Japanese American–Japanese Canadian Symposium held in Seattle, Kiyooka, in a talk dedicated to Joy Kogawa and Tamio Wakayama, warned against what he perceived as a growing tendency to classify racialized minority authors solely by race and victimhood: "I don't want to go on moanin' the old 'yellow peril' blues the rest of my days. Gawd save us all from that fate" ("We Asian North Americanos" 16). In this complex thinking through of his subjectivity at the very time when the publication of *Obasan* was solidifying Kogawa's public identity as "Japanese Canadian" and would soon establish her as a central figure in not just the Asian Canadian but also the Asian American canon, Kiyooka ponders the irony that English is the only language in which he can work and concludes that, "whatever my true colours, I am to all intents and purposes a white anglo saxon protestant, with a cleft tongue" (15). This "cleft tongue," expressed almost as an afterthought but essential to his sense of self as other, sometimes leaves him feeling tongue tied, but at other times liberates him into speaking a hybrid English inflected with other languages. His "cleft tongue" encompasses not only rudimentary Japanese, "my first language, a language I began to acquire even as I suckled on [my mother's] breast," but also "the N[orth].A[merican]. Blackman's (African slave) Blues" and "the cadences of silence" that Kiyooka shared with his father (16). His title, "We Asian North Americanos," also gestures to potential linguistic—and political—alliances with Hispanic/Latino/Chicano culture in the Americas, not a

surprising position given that he came to value Mexican culture during his time studying art in Mexico.[12]

Kiyooka articulates, then, an identity that simultaneously and paradoxically expresses a deep sense of "displacement" that at times leaves him feeling "bereft," and a deep sense of having inherited a rich hybrid language and culture that result from the traumatic history of North America, where cultures have clashed with often horrific results but where Kiyooka refuses to be limited by the horror. Rather, he seeks to ground his sense of self in the local, which at times he narrows even to the individual, insisting that he is "on the side of those who hold to the minority view that we have to attend to our own pulse and extend our own tenacities. . . . It's right here that 'art' (in any tongue) can and does get into the act. . . . I want to insist that everybody is a bona fide member and an activist (each in their own way) in the ongoing histrionics of a given culture" ("We Asian North Americanos" 16–17). In his insistence that the Asian North American artist is an activist, Kiyooka links himself to the Asian North American movement and beyond, to the African American and Chicano movements; at the same time, he considered the experiments with language and the breaking of form that he practised to be a revolutionary act that challenges the aesthetic and political hegemony of the dominant culture.

Before turning from Kiyooka to Wah, I want to suggest that another one of Kiyooka's subjects, his concern with Japanese labour as it operates in a transnational, global context, expressed in his complex work *StoneDGloves*, may also have emerged too early to gain the kind of attention that it deserves within Asian Canadian criticism. *StoneDGloves*, a photo-essay published in 1970, uncovers the exploitation of Japanese labour that is the dark underside of the global capitalism celebrated at Expo '70 in Osaka, the site of the "meeting of East and West." As Scott McFarlane argues, "Roy Kiyooka's *StoneDGloves* insists that globalization's ghosts are many and that they haunt especially those sites and centres of world trade whose stony architecture would trumpet a triumphant democracy. . . . Unnamed and unmastered, the ghostly operatives of globalization [Japanese labourers] 'live on' within cavernous ruins, amongst un-ravelling assemblages that generate a generalized terror" (117–18). There is nothing nostalgic about Kiyooka's vision here, no sentimental longing for Japan as a site of lost origin or "home," although the dedication "to Father & Masako" (his elder sister) depicts his four-month trip to Japan as "a-gain," a type of return and a benefit. In the postscript, Canada is the "home" that the speaker is flying back to as he explains that "the photos show how / the gloves fell / from the hands of work-men"

"on-site at Expo '70 / Osaka"; "the poems link glove / to glove" (*Pacific Windows* 91) in an attempt to unite these exploited labourers through art. In a final anti-capitalist gesture, a denunciation of ownership, a symbolic throwing down of the gauntlet, there is no copyright to this text, for "copyrights, like worn out gloves, are obsolete" (92), and Kiyooka's name appears nowhere, not even on the title page. His gift to workers and readers is complete. The treatment of labour within transnational, global capitalism that we find in *StoneDGloves* has emerged as a central concern of criticism in Asian North American studies only in the past decade or so.[13] Kiyooka was too far ahead of his time for the prophetic, political nature of his art to have been widely recognized until McFarlane's insightful analysis uncovered the implications of this important work.

Fred Wah, one of Canada's most respected poets, is also from Saskatchewan, born in Swift Current in 1939 to parents of Chinese-WASP and Scandinavian backgrounds, although he grew up in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia. As an English and music student at the University of British Columbia in the early 1960s, he was one of the founding editors of the *Tish* poetry newsletter. Like Kiyooka, he left Canada to undertake further study, in his case moving to the United States, where he took graduate work in literature and linguistics at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, studying under Robert Creeley, and at the State University of New York in Buffalo, where he worked with Charles Olson, the same New Americanist poets who influenced Kiyooka. Wah returned to Canada to teach creative writing at a number of western colleges and universities, most notably at the University of Calgary, where he had a long and distinguished career as an English professor. He published his first book of poetry, *Lardeau*, in 1965 and has since published another sixteen, winning the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry in 1986 for *Waiting for Saskatchewan* and the Stephanson Prize for Poetry from the Writers Guild of Alberta in 1992 for *So Far*. After *Tish*, Wah has continued his commitment to formative literary projects both "national" and "regional" such as the journals *Open Letter*, *West Coast Line*, and *SwiftCurrent*.

Wah's early poetic career was very much tied in with the *Tish* group, and Jeff Derksen is right to emphasize that critical approaches to Wah's work have been largely shaped by our understanding of this group. *Tish* as a literary movement had a profound influence on Canadian writing, turning it away from the humanism of the previous generation, with its focus on the

individual self, and toward a focus on "the details of language" (Gervais 9); it also embraced an international aesthetic at a time when nationalist poetics were ascendant in central Canada. According to Frank Davey, *Tish* concentrated on language because the "divine, mysteriously structured and essentially ungraspable" core of things can be apprehended in verse (qtd. in Gervais 8), where the spirit or "breath" of things emerges in pure sounds. Warren Tallman, a UBC professor who was the *Tish*ites' mentor, claims that, although they started off under the influence of the New Americanists or "projective" poets of the Black Mountain school, by the late 1960s they "were out from under the American influence into a Modernism of their own devising" (40). Their lead in stressing language above all else later developed into "sound" and "concrete" poetry.

I don't want to rehearse here the debates over whether the poetry of the *Tish* group was imitative or un-Canadian; what I wish to stress is that, at a time in the early 1960s when literature focused on social and political issues, including issues of race, was growing in importance in the US, this group showed little interest in such issues. In his description of the significance of *Tish*, Davey emphasizes that the group was distinguished by "the sense of belonging to a specific geography, of belonging to the political and social life of that geography, of belonging to both a local community of writers and an international community of writers, of belonging to (rather than possessing and *using*) language, of being *at home* in place, community, and language" (Introduction 19). It seems particularly puzzling, then, that in the early 1960s, when *Tish* was formed, and still in 1976, when Davey wrote this assessment, "the political and social life" of Vancouver did not include a sense of its profoundly racist past (and present).

Wah's and Kiyooka's ethnicities did not go wholly unnoticed, however, but were taken up in a particular way by Tallman in his celebrated essay on the *Tish* group, "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960's." Tallman uses their ethnicities to cast Wah and Kiyooka in the role of exotic others in the group:

> From his father's side Wah inherited a half-strain of Chinese blood which may help account in him, as the Spanish in [William Carlos] Williams, for a certain "otherness" in attitude, perception and proprioception, a more direct awareness of where he is than his more exclusively North American fellow poets can quite command. (60)
>
> Kiyooka's Japanese origins, some inner eye for the fineness in things, may account for the strict formalizing impulse with which he lets words come into

> place. If Kiyooka sees an object in an unusual or grotesque position he has no impulse to interfere. (67)

Apart from the blatant orientalizing impulses in this commentary, what strikes me, first, is that Wah's and Kiyooka's "Oriental" backgrounds are considered solely in terms of the uniqueness of their perceptions expressed in *language* and, second, that their ethnicities are considered to be types of pure inheritance from China and Japan. Political and social issues such as racism *in Canada* and a sense of Asians having a cultural history *in Canada* do not enter the discussions of their writings at this point. Tallman's approach of tracing Wah's Chineseness and Kiyooka's Japaneseness back to an aesthetic sensibility and artistic form plays a pivotal role in the way that the ethnicities of these two poets have often been read since.[14]

In his early published poetry, Wah did not deal explicitly with matters of race and ethnicity either; as Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy observe, "It would take many years . . . for Fred Wah to explore his personal/social history as a racialized subject" (56). His first five volumes, *Lardeau* (1965), *Mountain* (1967), *Among* (1972), *Tree* (1972), and *Earth* (1974), deal, as their single-word titles imply, with landscape; according to Bowering, they established Wah as "a poet who responds to the particulars of his ground with an eye to the singularity of each. . . . In no other writer's work are we able to find such an integration of consciousness & surroundings" (10–11). The poems in these early volumes betray no explicit interest in race matters; the biographical notes on the dust jackets make no mention of Chinese or any other ethnicity. Bowering's discussion of Wah's poetry up to 1980, when *Loki Is Buried at Smokey Creek* was published, deals primarily with landscape, language, and human consciousness, placing Wah in the context of mid-century American poets and the *Tish* group. Bowering celebrates the belief that "the best of his [Wah's] poems are not full of anything—they are themselves emptyings" (18); Wah is the poet of "breath."

By the early 1980s, however, Wah did begin to deal in a concerted way with issues of Chineseness in his poetry, namely in the collections *Owner's Manual* (1981), *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* (1981), *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail* (1982), and *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (1985).[15] An extended interrogative poem in *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* signals Wah's obsession with locating his ancestral roots, with finding his mixed-race father:

> Are origins magnetic lines across an ocean
> migrations of genetic spume or holes, dark
> mysteries within which I carry further into the World

through blond and blue-eyed progeny father's fathers
clan name Wah from Canton east across the bridges
still or could it all be lateral craving hinted
in the bioplasmic cloud of simple other organism
as close as out under the apple tree? (*Waiting for Saskatchewan* 5)

This is the start of a long pursuit of his father—with Wah's patrilinear inheritance and racial memory experienced in his body as well as his mind—extending through several books that increasingly become poetic prose rather than prose poetry. Like Kiyooka's search for his older sister, who was sent to Japan as a child and stayed on through adulthood, Wah's search for his father, who was sent to live in China when he was four and did not return to Canada for eighteen years, takes Wah on his own journey to China, which is recorded and meditated upon in *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail*. On the journey, Wah sees his dead father everywhere, in Hong Kong, Canton, Zhengzhou, Datong, Huhhot, and the recognition of his father's transpacific life cultivates his own transnational sensibility that is grounded in the local and exceeds the national, extending from "under the apple tree" in his backyard to "Canton east across the bridges."

As a quarter-Chinese person in China, Wah must keep asserting his Chineseness to the Chinese guides who remain doubtful, but the effort makes him increasingly convinced of his family's transpacific hybridity. His China journey culminates in an epiphany at Mao's mausoleum, where Wah *"was struck by the very large painting of the mountains along one wall because of a poem I had written years ago as I looked out over the mountains along the Kootenay River from our house*." The perceived links between Mao and his father impress upon him the connectedness of local places that exceed national boundaries and ground his Asian Canadian identity:

Mao, in front of me
the things you cared for too
river, mountain
a town, the whole
blue sky. (*Waiting for Saskatchewan* 56)

Like Kiyooka's, Wah's is a simultaneously local and transpacific identity articulated before the Pacific Rim was taken up as a central concern in Asian North American studies.

The last two sections of *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, "Elite" and "This Dendrite Map: Father/Mother Haibun," the new work in this collection, anticipate in their evocative prose Wah's "biotext," *Diamond Grill*, published in 1996—at roughly the same time as Kiyooka's *Pacific Windows* appeared. But it was

only with the publication of *Diamond Grill*, which is proclaimed on the cover to be "his first published prose work" and which won the Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction, that Wah gained significant attention as an Asian Canadian writer. This is not to say that Wah's poetry has been ignored; in fact, his poetry, which draws heavily on contemporary critical theory, has been highly acclaimed and has even ostensibly been discussed with attention to issues of ethnic Chineseness, at least since Pamela Banting published "The Undersigned: Ethnicity and Signature-Effects in Fred Wah's Poetry" in 1990. But despite some early historical contextualization of Wah's family, Banting's argument centres on formalist elements of the poetry, treated from a dedicated deconstructive position that is entirely appropriate and that illuminates Wah's linguistic concerns but does not dwell on the kinds of political and social issues that have dominated—and continue to dominate—Asian North American criticism.[16] My interest here is not to dispute Banting's perceptive readings of Wah's poetry but to illustrate what has been a dominant approach to his work.[17] The majority of the criticism on Wah's poetry still places it in a tradition that grows out of the *Tish* movement and includes poets such as George Bowering, bpNichol, Daphne Marlatt, Nicole Brossard, Steve McCaffery, and the language poets. This is an approach encouraged to some extent by Wah himself, who frequently refers to European theory in his critical writing and whose position as a professor of English at the University of Calgary has made it easy to label his poetry "academic."

In more recent essays and in recently revised versions of earlier essays, however, particularly those collected in *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity* (2000), Wah foregrounds his interest in racialization. As he explains in the introduction to *Faking It*, it wasn't until the Canadian studies conference on "Twenty Years of Multiculturalism," held at the University of Manitoba in February 1991, that "I was then just coming to the discourses of multicultural, racialized, and ethnic writing" (4). This is a stunning revelation, given that discourses of racialized and ethnic writing had been circulating on the West Coast since the early 1970s, when the Asian Canadian Coalition formed at UBC, followed by the founding of the Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop and the Powell Street Revue in Vancouver.[18] In his "A Poetics of Ethnicity," written for the 1991 conference, Wah "wanted to locate for myself, in the context of an official Canadian multiculturalism, the terms of a writing that had been marginalized by continued attempts to homogenize CanLit" (*Faking It* 4). A concluding note to "Strang(l)ed Poetics," a revised version of the original essay "Making Strange Poetics" that was first published in 1984, announces

that "Through the nineties I've adjusted some of the above poetics to address issues of formal innovation and racialization in writing. . . . Political and social frames have surfaced that enable a broad range of poetic singularities, particularly for marginalized writers (and their histories)" (*Faking It* 44). In "Strang(l)ed Poetics," Wah also adds a section in which he identifies himself as part of a group of "Asian-Canadian writers such as Jim Wong-Chu, Sky Lee, Roy Miki, Gerry Shikatani, and myself, [who] seek to redress and rewrite the colonizing racism of western transnational ideologies" (43).

By "Strangle Two," adapted from "Making Stranger Poetics" (1990), Wah consciously signals his crossing over into what at first appears to be a fully fledged racial poetics by attacking a white, centrist, hegemonic concept of CanLit, as put forward by the likes of Barry Callaghan. He asserts that

> Their Canada isn't. For me. Not the same anything when you're half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp. My hybridity obliges me to locate by difference, not sameness. My sense of place has become informed by distinctive features, particulars, sometimes minute particulars. In fact, the landscape of this large and hypothetical country seems to me best known and valorized by the singular. . . . Place therefore seems specific and particular. Where one is, here, is who one is, albeit contaminated at times by the sledgehammer tactics of the Wasp hive. (*Faking It* 47)[19]

Wah here links his newly emphasized concern with race and ethnicity to his older concern with the "local," with "place": "The immediate 'here,' the palpable, tangible 'here'" (48). In spite of his reaction against the hegemonic notion of white CanLit, however, Wah cannot commit himself wholly to an ethnic cultural nationalism based in Asian Canadian identity politics, perhaps fearing that in itself would be too constraining a position. His reluctance is also understandable in light of his mixed-race heritage, his unique hybridity.[20] He therefore founds his subjectivity on place: "Where one is, here, is who one is." With a brilliant riposte to Frye's famous question "Where is here?"—which was meant to elicit a unified response rooted in a national identity—Wah asserts the local, with its uniqueness, as the ultimate site of *difference*. In *Diamond Grill*, he pushes the significance of mixedness, hybridity, and hyphenation even further: "There's a whole bunch of us who've grown up resident aliens, living in the hyphen. . . . That could be the answer to this country. If you're pure anything you can't be Canadian. We'll save that name for all the mixed bloods" (53).

In the early 1990s, Wah's self-identification as Asian Canadian was announced not only in his essays but also in the venues where his poetry appeared. In 1991, a series of his prose poems, "Elite" from *Waiting for*

Saskatchewan, was published in *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*, and the spring 1994 special issue of *Canadian Literature* on Asian Canadian literature included a piece titled "Seasons Greetings from the Diamond Grill" that is identified as a "poem" but that became part of the "prose" text *Diamond Grill*. The "Elite" cycle, with its determination to recover Wah's "lost" half-Chinese father, had started Wah down a path of racial anger that led to *Diamond Grill*, the text that now stamps him as "Asian Canadian." In 1997, he joined "Prairie Asians" on a reading tour through western Canada, a group that included mainly younger writers, a number of whom had been Wah's students and some of whom—Hiromi Goto, Ashok Mathur, Larissa Lai—have emerged as central figures in Asian Canadian literature. Once Wah self-identified as Asian Canadian, critical articles begin to appear that focus on issues of race in his work, but still few of them place him in the context of an Asian Canadian literary tradition.[21]

In closing this section on Wah's work, I should point out that for Wah, unlike for Kiyooka, identifying as Asian Canadian is a choice; as he explains in *Diamond Grill*, "I don't have to be [Chinese] because I don't look like one," and he admits that in his youth "I become as white as I can, which considering I'm mostly Scandinavian, is pretty easy for me. . . . I only have the name to contend with" (98). He acknowledges that he has led a life "camouflaged by a safety net of class and colourlessness" (138). Unlike Kiyooka, who experienced the racism of being labelled an "enemy alien" as a child, Wah experiences racism vicariously, through his inordinately close bond with his father, who, as a mixed-race person, was subjected to the racism of both the Chinese and the white communities. Although Wah agonizes over the privilege that he has of choosing his ethnicity and race, his somewhat belated decision to self-identify as Asian Canadian has contributed, I would contend, to his delayed inclusion in the Asian Canadian canon, which has up to now been based largely on identity politics.

As my brief account of Kiyooka's and Wah's careers indicates, central to the question of their place in an Asian Canadian literary canon is the issue of genre. Apart from its presence in anthologies,[22] poetry, with a few notable exceptions, has not held as prominent a place as prose fiction in racialized minority literary traditions in North America, in part because these literatures are founded on an ethnic cultural nationalism, and we have come to recognize that prose fiction, particularly the novel, has been essential to nation formation.[23] Before the novel, and continuing even today,

life-writing, particularly prose autobiographies, held a prominent place in the formation of racialized and ethnic minority literatures. In the Asian American tradition, novelistic autobiographies/autobiographical novels such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* are considered central texts, and in the Asian Canadian tradition two novels—Kogawa's *Obasan* and Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, the former with strong autobiographical elements—were arguably the first texts to gain canonical status. This is perhaps not surprising since Kogawa's and Lee's novels deal with material that has, up to now, formed the principal narratives of an Asian North American tradition: the exclusion of Chinese immigrants and the internment of Japanese Canadians and Japanese Americans. No single poetic text or collection of poems in the Asian North American literary tradition comes close to holding the foundational place held by novels and autobiographies.[24] To be sure, these genres have not been treated as unproblematic: many critics have viewed these texts as the type of sociofiction that the dominant culture demands in its voyeuristic desire to know and thus possess the culture of a minority group; others, including myself, have argued that these texts are subversive to the extent that they break and reshape, for political purposes, the literary genres that they inhabit (see Goellnicht, "Blurring Boundaries").

Coupled to the valorization of prose fiction in racialized minority traditions is the view held by some, including prominent academic critics, that poetry is an apolitical form. I don't wish to enter here the long-standing debate about the political and social efficacy of poetry as a genre;[25] I do wish, however, to consider Kiyooka's and Wah's highly self-conscious positions on the literary forms that they employ. In broaching this complex subject, I have found most useful Marlene NourbeSe Philip's productively provocative and inventive essay "Interview with an Empire," in which NourbeSe Philip wrestles with herself over the dilemma faced by all racialized minority poets who write "complex and abstract" poetry in the language of the colonizer or the oppressor race, a poetry that is often considered to appeal only to academics and to be divorced from the racialized minority communities that it is meant to serve. NourbeSe Philip, as the "answerer" in this dialogue with herself, explains her conflicted relationship to language and poetry:

> Essentially what I'm saying is that the potential seductiveness of language is dangerous. I believe many of those poets who are described as language poets begin from this premise. But for me there is another layer of distrust—historical distrust if you will. . . . [I] do not believe that english—or any European language for that

> matter—can truly speak our truths without the language in question being put through some sort of transformative process. A decontaminating process is probably more accurate since a language as deeply implicated in imperialism as english has been cannot but be contaminated by such a history and experience. . . . The only way I can then work with it is to fracture it, fragment it, dislocate it, doing with it what it did to me and my kind, before I can put it back together, hopefully better able to express some of my own small truths. And for me this is where form becomes so very important, because part of the transformative and decontaminating process is also to find the appropriate form for what I'm saying. (196–97)

I quote at length here because I think that NourbeSe Philip echoes many of the ideas about poetic form put forward by Kiyooka and especially by Wah. Wah himself identifies Kiyooka and NourbeSe Philip as writers who "have chosen to utilize more formal innovative possibilities" than writers such as Rohinton Mistry and Joy Kogawa, who, he claims, "operate within a colonized and inherited formal awareness" (*Faking It* 52, 51).

Kiyooka's experiments with the revolutionary or subversive power of language were politically motivated from an early age. In the interview with Miki for *Inalienable Rice*, Kiyooka claims that his "sensibility is grounded in two languages" ("Roy Kiyooka" 59), a foundation for the hybrid, transnational subjectivity that he came to value. He also asserts that a "touchstone" for his poetic practice is "that it be grounded in the actual experience of one's life, that you'd bring the possibilities of language to some occasion in your life" (60), a principle that indicates his commitment to shaping the English language into what he calls an "inglish" that can represent his unique lived experience and resist the hegemony of the dominant culture. At the same time, he recognizes that he has an obligation "to come to articulateness for the sake of the inarticulate among the world you live in," a responsibility to speak on behalf of "tongue-tied" Japanese Canadians, to be "a cultural voice in a collective sense" (60–61). Kiyooka wanted his art to speak for a wider community, but he envisioned that role in terms of his personal experience standing in metonymically for the experience of the larger Japanese Canadian community. His need for his art to have a social function existed in tension with his self-perception and self-presentation as the lonely prophet called to speak to/for his people, the Romantic artist still in touch with the "magic" of his childhood. Ironically, his insistent individualism as manifested in his revolutionary poetics may have contributed to his belated entry to the Asian Canadian canon, where texts have frequently been valued for their accessibility or "relevance" to the wider "community." Experimental poetic practice often alienates the

ethnic communities that it is intended to appeal to and to serve as they consider such art to be elitist, academic, divorced from "reality" rather than speaking with the voice of the collective. Kiyooka is intimately aware of the difficulties that his writing poses for most readers: "I'm the kind of artist that any culture finds very difficult to deal with. . . . And because I've been multi-disciplinary, most of my life, people don't know how to get a handle on me. I think the most critical thing about my activity is the inter-face between myself as a painter and myself as a language artificer. But what has to be understood is how the two inform each other" ("Inter-Face" 73). This is the challenge that Kiyooka's art poses to more conservative conceptions of "Asian Canadian" literature, the invitation that it extends to expand our understanding of the term.

Kiyooka was willing to trust that his critics would come to an understanding of his artistic form as politically radical; Wah, however, theorizes his experiments with language in a way similar to NourbeSe Philip. In "A Poetics of Ethnicity" (1991), he tackles the political implications of innovations in literary form, arguing that formal experimentation along ethnic lines "might properly be called something like 'alienethnic' poetics" (*Faking It* 52). In 1994, when Miki and Wah coedited a special issue of *West Coast Line* titled *Colour: An Issue*, they stated boldly in the preface that "One of the means of resistance to homogenization and the elision of racialization has been the unpredictability of writing in terms of both transference and textuality. In the actualities of language, contemporary writers have located a medium to make visible the subjectivities, histories, narratives, and theoretical issues that surround that four letter word" *race* (5).

In an interview with Wah conducted in the mid-1990s (an exact date is not given in *Faking It*), Ashok Mathur raises the issue of *Diamond Grill* being "touted not only as your first full-length published prose work, but as a departure from your earlier, so-called language-centered, poetry" (97), to which Wah responds, "the prose is also a continuation of the prose poem that started germinating for me as far back as *Breathin' My Name With a Sigh* (1981). The prose poem became more necessary as, through the eighties, my father's visage pursued my writing into a layering of race and identity previously unacknowledged" (98). Here Wah considers again the ways in which his concerns with language in his "language-centered poetry" intersect with, or are even central to, his concerns with race and ethnicity. Like NourbeSe Philip, but more implicitly, he distinguishes his breaking of form from that of white language poets. Part of his purpose in fracturing form is to do away

with a rigid distinction between poetry and prose, although it is interesting to observe that the publisher of *Diamond Grill* chose to emphasize the prose as a new genre for Wah in an attempt to market the book to a wider audience.

By 1997, in "Speak My Language: Racing the Lyric Poetic," Wah identifies a crux that has plagued racialized (and other othered) writers for some time: Can the master's tools ever dismantle the master's house, to paraphrase Audre Lorde's famous question? Wah himself expresses this dilemma as a "split option, political for sure," a choice between asserting that "the revolution will succeed on the common tongue of the people," which in the Americas is almost always the master's/colonizer's tongue, or believing, with feminists, that "there will be no revolution until that (male-based) common tongue is troubled into change" (*Faking It* 109). He is suspicious of attempts to deal with issues of race within what he sees as the confining and containing genres of established Western writing (the novel, the verse paragraph, the central lyric voice), so he seeks to disturb, disrupt, and to some extent dethrone those established forms in all his work. Wah considers that "A racialized poetics might, for some writers, necessitate the adoption of the dominant form of poetic 'speaking' as a way of securing some platform of stability or complicity with power, or, as the case may be, as a critical ironizing" (113), but in the end he remains sceptical of attempts to employ established mimetic forms. He champions, instead, radically experimental writers such as Theresa Cha and Jam Ismail, who use the prose poem to challenge the authority and to escape the containment of the conventional Western lyric, "to trouble a dominant and inherited structure (social or poetic)" (125). It should come as no surprise that he returns, at the end of this essay, to Kiyooka as exemplary of the kind of iconoclastic work that he values.[26]

Critics considering Wah's work have seized upon what they perceive as his revolutionary poetic practice. Derksen champions Wah's concept of radical poetics as politically engaged:

> These poetics risk identity throughout the representational sign, but do not abandon a politicized identity. Identity politics within rather than through language provides an alternative to the containable performances of race, class, and gender and rewrite the limits of identity. These politics are both oppositional and differential. . . . And for Wah, the disunity of alienethnic poetics resists normative narrative strategies. This distrust of literary structures parallels a distrust of larger social structures as these structures have rendered writers of colour invisible through assimilation. ("Making Race Opaque" 72, 74)[27]

As attractive as this argument about the value of experimental poetry in deconstructing conventional racialized performance and subjectivity may be—and I am convinced by much of it—it also raises a number of troubling questions. First, we must recognize that these ostensibly radical poetics are not *sui generis*; they do in fact have a tradition of their own. In the case of Kiyooka, Wah, and the *Tish* poets, the line of inheritance can be traced back to the New Americanists and Black Mountain poets such as Duncan, Creeley, and Olson—and, beyond them, to high modernists such as William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. Certainly, aligning with this avant-garde tradition places these poets outside the concerns of Canadian nationalist centrists such as Atwood and Frye, but at the same time we might ask how "revolutionary" these poetic techniques were by the late twentieth century. I would argue that what began as a revolutionary poetics at the start of the twentieth century had become somewhat conventional, at least within the academic circles of those who read poetry, by the end. Wah, self-conscious as always, himself warns of the danger involved when "the strange becomes familiar" (*Faking It* 37). Further, we need to remember that, for all of the attempts to link this poetics to the working class (and then to oppressed races), the tradition of high modernism from which it derives disdained what it perceived as the philistinism of the lower classes. The other literary school to which the *Tish* group traces its inheritance, this time in its theoretical mode, is Russian formalism, where the primary role of art was one of "estrangement": to use language in unconventional ways in order to shock the reader out of complacency and make her or him perceive objects afresh. These radical techniques were condemned by the Communists, however, as bourgeois remains antithetical to the proletarian revolution.

There is, then, nothing to link these unconventional techniques *naturally* to a particular racialized or classed community. I raise these points not to discount Kiyooka's, Wah's, Lorde's, and NourbeSe Philip's arguments about the fracturing of form as a powerful decolonizing and antiracist project but to caution against overenthusiastic or excessive claims for its effects. Until we have an accurate method of measuring the ability of literary texts to initiate political and social change, we should not dismiss out of hand the revolutionary value of *conventional* narrative forms that employ the master's/colonizer's tools for subversive or radical political purposes. Kogawa's fiction, for example, which Wah categorizes as operating in a colonized form, had a very significant effect on public attitudes during the Japanese Canadian

campaign for redress. Surely it is the end result rather than the tools used to (de)construct it that ultimately matters. Wah and NourbeSe Philip acknowledge this dilemma even though they have come down, in their own writing, on one side of the debate. We would also do well to remember that the master's/colonizer's language was not, by the twentieth century, pure and pristine—if it ever was. English, like all colonizing languages, has been for centuries inflected with, "contaminated" by, African, Caribbean, Native American, South Asian, and East Asian traits, so that it is itself hybrid and transnational. As Susan Fisher reminds us with regard to Wah's and Kiyooka's poetry, Chinese and Japanese influences had a significant impact on early twentieth-century modernist poetry, so evidence of Asian traits in their work cannot simply be accounted for by reference to the perceived ethnicities of the writers.

I close with a series of questions about the possible "advantages" that Kiyooka and Wah may have gained by not being identified solely or primarily as "Asian Canadian writers." Have they, for example, avoided what Kogawa has called the burden of always being labelled "the ethnic writer," made to represent the race? Does race/ethnicity as a category of classification act as a force of containment as much as it does one of coalition for the purposes of resistance and liberation? Is it better to be classified simply as "Canadian," although both Kiyooka and Wah are vitally aware that, despite national acclaim as "Canadians," they are never quite accepted as wholly "Canadian"? As Kiyooka has stated, "You are of it [Canada] and you are not" ("Inter-Face" 71). "Belonging" clearly is not just a matter of self-identification. Up to this point, it seems that the application of the signifier "Asian Canadian" has operated in a complex mixture of self-identification (after Wah said he became interested in racial discourses, he began to be included), of scholarly attention (Miki repeatedly bringing Kiyooka in), and of literary content concerned with race in works by a writer of that "race." Wah complicates the classification by being only a quarter Chinese and able to pass as white. In his case, self-identification in solidarity with Asian Canadian writers is crucial. It also seems clear that the term "Asian Canadian artist" or "Asian Canadian writer" cannot, on its own, adequately describe the life and work of a creator as diverse and multidisciplinary as Roy Kiyooka—painter, poet, photographer, musician, performance artist—or Fred Wah—poet, prose writer, photographer, musician. Rather than allowing the term to confine these multi-genre creators, we might use their diverse

bodies of work and their self-consciously radical experiments with language to expand our understanding of the term, to make the category more capacious. If we are truly to value "Asian Canadian" as a marker of coalition building rather than as a sign that contains and constrains, then we should see that expansiveness, with its accompanying lack of neatness, its classificatory messiness, as a strength.

Although clearly there are certain disadvantages that have accrued to Asian Canadian studies by not being firmly institutionalized in the way that Asian American studies has been for the past thirty-five years, and although Asian Canadian studies may suffer from the fragmentation inherent in Canada's federal system of regionalization, there are also certain advantages to be gained by the Asian Canadian situation. Asian American studies, as Kandice Chuh observes in her book, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*, is currently engaged in the difficult process of redefining itself, a process that involves dealing with its own foundational narrative of political activism rooted in community work toward the goal of social transformation. What role does literature play in that enterprise? What role can it play? Despite its own activist beginnings, Asian Canadian studies perhaps cannot be said to have a strong foundational narrative, but such a "lack" may afford the field the opportunity to define itself more expansively, while not losing site of its role of building collectivity, addressing injustice, and critiquing hegemonic power. The work of writers and artists such as Kiyooka and Wah can push us toward a recognition that the field is not a matter of poetry *or* prose, activism *or* theory, ivory tower *or* real world, community *or* academia, east/centrist *or* west/regional, diasporic or national, local *or* global but a web of negotiated relationships between all of these different nodes with their differential repositories of power, their internal divisions, and their shifting positionalities. More than ever, in our present moment we need a politics of complexity and interconnectedness rather than one of simple binarism and opposition. The work of Kiyooka and Wah points us toward such a complexly negotiated politics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Guy Beauregard and Daniel Coleman for their careful, considered readings of my paper and for their valuable recommendations for revision.

NOTES

1 As Barbara Herrnstein Smith observes, "When we consider the cultural re-production of value . . . , the model of evaluative dynamics . . . suggests that both (a) the 'survival' or 'endurance' of a text and . . . (b) its achievement of high canonical status . . . are the product neither of the objectively (in the Marxist sense) conspiratorial force of establishment institutions nor of the continuous appreciation of the timeless virtues of a fixed object by succeeding generations of isolated readers but, rather, of a series of continuous interactions among a variably constituted object, emergent conditions, and mechanisms of cultural selection and transmission" (47). In order to gain and maintain canonical status, a text must "perform certain desired/able functions particularly well at a given time for some community of subjects, being perhaps not only 'fit' but exemplary . . . under those conditions" (48).

2 We need to recognize, however, that a racialized or ethnic minority community is never itself homogeneous, so that there are often competing evaluations of texts within a "community," and the "community" may not value texts in the same way as scholars from the racialized or ethnic minority do. Often when we speak of "the community" in these circumstances, we refer more accurately to community activists.

3 John Guillory agrees with Gates about the prominent role of academic institutions in canon formation; he argues "that it is only by understanding the social function and institutional protocols of the school that we will understand how works are preserved, reproduced, and disseminated over successive generations and centuries" (vii). Guillory asserts that the school curriculum plays a major role in perpetuating the class structure of capitalist society, which is certainly the case, but we need to recall that ethnic minority curricula were introduced into American higher education in the late 1960s and 1970s as part of a radical pedagogical revision meant to challenge race and class privilege and to make higher education more relevant to and reflective of oppressed racialized communities. The inheritance of ethnic studies approaches in the United States has had a strong influence on the formation of minority canons in North America, including the Asian Canadian one, over the past thirty years.

4 The situation has shifted in recent years with scholars like Cynthia Sugars, Joanne Saul and Sally Chivers attending to Kiyooka and Wah, and with Smaro Kamboureli, a major Kiyooka scholar, having moved to the University of Guelph. Saul observes that "Many of the long poets [including Kiyooka and Wah] were writing from either British Columbia or the Prairies, and, because they refused to define themselves in relationship to what they considered to be the more mainstream literature being produced largely in Ontario, they resisted the category 'Canadian,' focusing instead on the particularities of a given time and space, and their relationship to it" (15).

5 We are now in the midst of a significant revival of interest in Kiyooka's work with the reissue of his *TransCanada Letters* and the publication of an edition of previously unpublished letters, *Pacific Rim Letters*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli, both in 2005. In addition, a series of interdisciplinary conferences organized by Kamboureli and Miki and titled *TransCanada: Literature, Institutions, and Citizenship*—with an obvious nod to Kiyooka, although his work is not the focus—has been taking place since June 2005, while recent publications by Pauline Butling and Susan Rudy and by Joanne Saul position Kiyooka and Wah as central to Canada's radical poetry and biotext traditions.

6 In casting much of the "blame" for the elision of race in criticism dealing with Wah's work on the policy of official multiculturalism in Canada—a policy that I am quick to

acknowledge is full of anxieties and difficulties as it attempts to build a sense of national unity under the guise of celebrating ethnic and other differences—Derksen's argument fails to account for why in the work of some other writers, who operate in the same cultural climate, race *is* recognized as a significant factor and why those writers have been classified as "Asian Canadian" much more frequently, and earlier, than has Wah. Derksen's argument has proved valuable, however, in provoking a number of responses from critics who, in the past decade, have approached Wah's work through the lens of race.

7 "Localism" is a lesson taught, ironically, by the New Americanists and is traceable to modernists such as Gertrude Stein. Kiyooka used Stein's assertion that "The business of art is to live in the complete actual present" as an epigraph to *TransCanada Letters*.

8 Remarkably, the photographs of Kiyooka that accompany the interview show him sitting naked, an apparent gesture of openness and revelation, but wearing a mask, a contradictory gesture of hiding what are believed to be the most salient features of identity. In one of the three photographs, he lifts the mask in a tantalizing gesture of complete revelation, although the presence of the mask acts as a reminder of the performative nature of identity. See Kiyooka, "Roy Kiyooka."

9 Butling and Rudy make a similar point about writers like Kiyooka in relation to the *Tish* collective: "Even the women, mixed race, and bisexual writers associated with the group enacted the dominant male ethos and in so doing participated in a violence against themselves as well as in the group violence against other outsider positions" (56).

10 In the afterword to *Pacific Windows*, Miki tells of having found among the Kiyooka papers "an application for a Canada Council grant to undertake a multidimensional art project in Japan, around his ancestral home in Kochi. He wants to 'get in touch with the pulse of the place,' he says, and admits to 'a barely inscribed Pacific Rim Dialogue—one borne of the time immemorial impact of Asians of N.A. that "i" go on lending my voice to til all the racial epithets disappear into the flux of our multi-national discourse'" (316). No date is given for the application, but again it is clear that Kiyooka conceives of his identity in terms of the Pacific Rim well before it became common for Asian North American artists and scholars to do so.

11 Saul observes that "Although all four writers [Ondaatje, Marlatt, Kiyooka, Wah] are to some degree shaped by their ethnic or immigrant consciousness, they also cannot be collapsed into ready-made ethnic categories" (21).

12 In the interview with Varley, Kiyooka asserts that "Mexico was/is important. It's played a vivid role in the lives of a number of Canadian artists of my generation. . . . Nothing in my own experience prepared me for anything like Mexico" (*Roy K. Kiyooka* n. pag.).

13 Dirlik and Wilson; Kang; Lowe; Lowe and Lloyd; and Palumbo-Liu, among others, have dealt with transpacific connections in Asian American cultural studies.

14 In his introduction to *Loki Is Buried at Smokey Creek: Selected Poems*, written in 1980, George Bowering takes a somewhat different approach to Wah's ethnicity: "his father's side of the family was Chinese, & his mother's side Scandinavian. Thus his background is atypical, but symbolic for the creation of the west" (9). Bowering thus wraps Wah's ethnicity into a liberal multicultural ideology of the time that sees all ethnicities as equal—and treated equally.

15 Sections from *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* and *Grasp the Sparrow's Tale* were incorporated into *Waiting for Saskatchewan*.

16 See Nguyen on the coercive nature of Asian American criticism, which he claims has privileged works dealing with politically left, race-based themes.

17 Even in her expanded treatment of Wah's poetry in her 1995 book *Body, Inc.: A Theory of*

Translation Poetics, Banting relegates Wah's ethnicity to literary form, relating his use of pictograms to Chinese ideograms. She concludes that "Fred Wah is the poet as theor(h)et(or)ician" and that "Wah's Chinese-ing of English syntax encrypts and disseminates between two languages his name, ethnicity and poetic influences, his genealogy, in short" (41, 58). Following Banting, Charlene Diehl-Jones treats *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* as an autobiographical poem that "is willfully knotted: the self, the life, the writing—auto-bio-graph—all enter an equation that stubbornly resists resolution. . . . The self is, finally, a name that is a sound that is a breath, a signifier that refuses its gifts" (144). Her treatment of Wah as an autobiographical figure does not include his ethnicity. In "Faking It: Fred Wah and the Postcolonial Imaginary," Smaro Kamboureli places Wah—again very productively—in the company of Derrida, Butler, and Bhabha before going on to map out the three kinds of postcolonial discourse that she sees operating in Canada today.

18 On the political and cultural dimensions of the Asian Canadian activist movement in Vancouver, see Chan; Watada; and Wong-Chu. In none of these firsthand accounts does Wah appear; Kiyooka appears, but not as a major figure. The writers recognized as central to Asian Canadian literature at its inception include Jim Wong-Chu, SKY Lee, Paul Yee, Rick Shiomi, Joy Kogawa, Sean Gunn, and Garrick Chu.

19 In *Diamond Grill*, Wah also blasts Margaret Atwood's notion that "We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here" and refuses the bland platitudes that attempt to smooth over racial difference and racism: "Sorry, but I'm just not interested in this collective enterprise erected from the sacrosanct great railway imagination dedicated to harvesting a dominant white cultural landscape" (125).

20 Early in *Diamond Grill*, Wah proclaims "Hybridize or disappear" (20); "Race makes you different, nationality makes you the same. Sameness is purity. Not the same anything when you're half Swede, quarter Chinese, and quarter Ontario Wasp" (36). On hybridity in *Diamond Grill*, see McGonegal.

21 Robert Budde, Jeff Derksen, Cynthia Sugars, Julie McGonegal, and Smaro Kamboureli deal with issues of race, often in the context of postcolonialism, while Lien Chao places Wah in a Chinese Canadian tradition. Guy Beauregard and Lily Cho treat Wah's work in an Asian Canadian cultural context in their doctoral dissertations, and both discuss it in the context of Chinese diasporic literatures in their essays in *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English*. Joanne Saul's book, which appeared after I had initially completed this paper in 2005, devotes considerable attention to race and ethnicity in the work of Kiyooka and Wah.

22 On the importance of the anthology as a tool for building ethnic community, see Chao 32–50.

23 The "notable exceptions" would include the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement, although in the latter much of the poetry was considered occasional and so did not survive into the written tradition. In a Canadian cultural context, dub poetry is a powerful exception; it too depends significantly on performance and so is transmitted primarily through sound recordings. Poetic biotexts that are difficult to classify as either poetry or prose have also been influential, but largely in academic communities.

24 An examination of an influential introduction to the subject, the MLA *Resource Guide to Asian American Literature* (see Wong and Sumida), reveals fifteen essays devoted to "Book-Length Prose Narratives" (including *Obasan*), six essays devoted to "Drama," and four essays devoted to "Other Genres" (two on poetry, one on anthologies, and one on short fiction).

25 For a sustained debate on the political valence of Canadian language poetry, see Derksen, "Where"; and Nichols.

26 Miki observes that Kiyooka has been considered a "slippery writer to comprehend, especially because his texts resist the formal expectations of anglocentric Canadian taste by undermining the customary lyric stance of much canonical poetry" (*Broken Entries* 54).

27 Building on Derksen's position, Budde takes up and pushes further the argument about radical, deconstructive poetics in relation to Wah and Miki, relating their poetics to antiracist activism and concluding with the bold and, for me, naively optimistic assertion that "Form undoes 'race'" (293).

WORKS CITED

Banting, Pamela. *Body, Inc.: A Theory of Translation Poetics*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1995.

—. "The Undersigned: Ethnicity and Signature-Effects in Fred Wah's Poetry." *West Coast Line* 2 (1990): 83–94.

Beauregard, Guy. "Asian Canadian Literature: Diasporic Interventions in the Work of SKY Lee, Joy Kogawa, Hiromi Goto, and Fred Wah." Diss. U of Alberta, 2000.

—. "The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature': Can Lit's Obscene Supplement?" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 67 (1999): 53–75.

—. "The Problem of Diaspora: On Chinese Canadian Cultural Production in English." Khoo and Louie 129-49.

Bowering, George. "The Poems of Fred Wah." Introduction to Wah, *Loki* 10–11.

Budde, Robert. "After Postcolonialism: Migrant Lines and the Politics of Form in Fred Wah, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Roy Miki." *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*. Ed. Laura Moss. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003. 282–94.

Butling, Pauline, and Susan Rudy. *Writing in Our Time: Canada's Radical Poetries in English: 1957-2003*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2005.

Chan, Anthony B. "Born Again Asian: The Making of a New Literature." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 11.4 (1984): 57–73.

Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: TSAR, 1997.

Cho, Lily. "On Eating Chinese: Chinese Restaurants and the Politics of Diaspora." Diss. U of Alberta, 2003.

—. "'How Taste Remembers Life': Diasporic Memory and Community in Fred Wah's Poetry." Khoo and Louie 81-106.

Chuh, Kandice. *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

Davey, Frank. Introduction. Gervais 15–24.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. "What Is a Minor Literature?" *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Ed. Russell Ferguson et al. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1999. 59–69.

Derksen, Jeff. "Making Race Opaque: Fred Wah's Poetics of Opposition and Differentiation." *West Coast Line* (18) 29.3 (1995–96): 63–76.

—. "Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone? Inside/Outside the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Site." Huk 41–65.

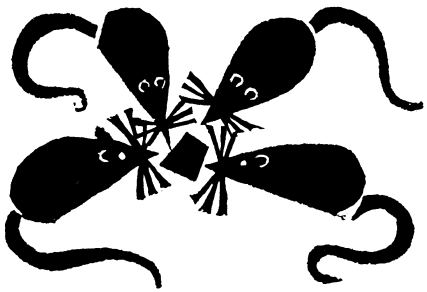
Diehl-Jones, Charlene. "Fred Wah and the Radical Long Poem." *Bolder Flights: Essays on the Canadian Long Poem*. Ed. Frank M. Tierney and Angela Robbeson. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1998. 139–49.

Dirlik, Arif, and Rob Wilson, eds. *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994.

Fisher, Susan. "Japanese Elements in the Poetry of Fred Wah and Roy Kiyooka." *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999): 93–110.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. "Canon-Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told." *Afro-American Literary Studies in the 1990s*. Ed. Houston A. Baker Jr. and Patricia Redmond. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989. 14–39.
Gervais, C.H., ed. *The Writing Life: Historical and Critical Views of the* Tish *Movement*. Coatsworth, ON: Black Moss, 1976.
Goellnicht, Donald C. "Blurring Boundaries: Asian American Literature as Theory." *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. Ed. King-Kok Cheung. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. 338–65.
—. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 1–41.
Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
Huk, Romana, ed. *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2003.
Kamboureli, Smaro. "Faking It: Fred Wah and the Postcolonial Imaginary." *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies* 54 (2003): 115–32.
Kang, Laura Hyun Yi. *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.
Khoo, Tseen, and Kam Louie, eds. *Culture, Identity, Commodity: Chinese Diasporic Literatures in English*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP; Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2005.
Kiyooka, Roy. *Pacific Rim Letters*. Ed. Smaro Kamboureli. Edmonton: NeWest, 2005.
—. *Pacific Windows: Collected Poems of Roy K. Kiyooka*. Ed. Roy Miki. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1997.
—. "Roy Kiyooka: An Interview." With Roy Miki. *Inalienable Rice: A Chinese and Japanese Canadian Anthology*. Ed. Garrick Chu et al. Vancouver: Powell Street Review and Chinese Canadian Writers Workshop, 1979. 58–64.
—. *StoneDGloves*. Toronto: Coach House, 1970.
—. *Transcanada Letters*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975.
—. *Transcanada Letters*. Ed. Smaro Kamboureli. Afterword by Glen Lowry. Edmonton: NeWest, 2005.
—. "We Asian North Americanos: A Unhistorical 'Take' on Growing Up Yellow in a White World." *West Coast Review* 16.1 (1981): 15–17.
Lee, Bennett, and Jim Wong-Chu, eds. *Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre; Seattle: U of Washington P, 1991.
Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke UP, 1996.
Lowe, Lisa, and David Lloyd, eds. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.
McFarlane, Scott Toguri. "Un-Ravelling *StoneDGloves* and the Haunt of the Hibakusha." O'Brian, Sawada, and Watson 117–47.
McGonegal, Julie. "Hyphenating the Hybrid 'I': (Re)Visions of Racial Mixedness in Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 177–95.
Miki, Roy. Afterword. Kiyooka, *Pacific Windows* 301–20.
—. "Altered States: Global Currents, the Spectral Nation, and the Production of 'Asian Canadian.'" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35.3 (2000): 43–72.
—. "Inter-Face: Roy Kiyooka's Writing: A Commentary/Interview." *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998. 54–76.
—. "Unravelling Roy Kiyooka: A Re-Assessment amidst Shifting Boundaries." O'Brian, Sawada, and Watson 69–83.

Miki, Roy, and Fred Wah. Preface. *Colour. An Issue*. Ed. Miki and Wah. Spec. issue of *West Coast Line* 13–14 (1994): 5–6.
Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
Nichols, Miriam. "A/Politics of Contemporary Anglo-Canadian Poetries: The Toronto Research Group and the Kootenay School of Writing." Huk 66–85.
O'Brian, John, Naomi Sawada, and Scott Watson, eds. *All Amazed: For Roy Kiyooka*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, Belkin Art Gallery, Collapse, 2002.
Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
Philip, M. NourbeSe. "Interview with an Empire." Huk 195–206.
Roy K. Kiyooka: 25 Years. Exhibition organized and circulated by Vancouver Art Gallery, 1975.
Saul, Joanne. *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006.
Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988.
Sugars, Cynthia. "'The Negative Capability of Camouflage': Fleeing Diaspora in Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 26.1 (2001): 27–43.
Tallman, Warren. "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver during the 1960's." Gervais 27–69.
Wah, Fred. *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981.
—. *Diamond Grill*. Edmonton: NeWest, 1996.
—. *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*. Edmonton: NeWest, 2000.
—. *Grasp the Sparrow's Tail*. Kyoto: privately printed, 1982.
—. *Loki Is Buried at Smokey Creek: Selected Poems*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980.
—. *So Far*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991.
—. *Waiting for Saskatchewan*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1985.
Watada, Terry. "To Go for Broke: The Spirit of the 70s." *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999): 80–91.
Wong, Paul. Preface. *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*. Ed. Wong. Vancouver: On Edge, 1990. 4.
Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia, and Stephen H. Sumida, eds. *A Resource Guide to Asian American Literature*. New York: MLA, 2001.
Wong-Chu, Jim. "A Brief History of the ACWW." *Rice Paper* 1.1 (1994): 1–2.
—. "Ten Years of Asian Canadian Literary Arts in Vancouver." *Asianadian* 5.3 (1984): 23–24.



Marie Lo

The Currency of Visibility and the Paratext of "Evelyn Lau"

> I was relieved that I wasn't being slotted into yet another panel of women writers or multicultural writers struggling to say something about their multiculturalism when for some of them it made little impact on their work.
> —Evelyn Lau, "Getting Heard" (88)

The apparently deracinated nature of Evelyn Lau's work has rendered her an ambivalent figure in Asian Canadian and Asian American literary studies.[1] Lau's characters, often racially unmarked, are instead scarred by their longing for human connection, and they drift in and out of generic spaces or cloistered back rooms that are untethered to the specificity of the world outside. Her stories of prostitution, sadomasochism, obsession, and unrequited love do not lend themselves easily to the interpretive frameworks that have characterized Asian American and Asian Canadian literary studies.

Defined in opposition to dominant literary traditions, these studies have historically often foregrounded the "claiming" of a place in the social, political, and cultural landscapes of the United States and Canada.[2] This privileging of oppositionality, however, argues Viet Thanh Nguyen, produces a binary between the "bad subject" and the "model minority," and naturalizes this binary as the measure by which authors and their works are granted value, canonized, and understood. The bad subject is idealized as resistant to dominant ideology and critical of the demands and terms of assimilation. The model minority, in contrast, is figured as co-opted by dominant ideology, eschewing political critique in favour of upward mobility. Both, for Nguyen, are functions of the political economy; despite the bad subject's disavowal

of the economic enticements of assimilation, the bad subject trades on the resistant value of his or her ethnicity, and it is the commodification of race and resistance that grants the bad subject such currency within minority discourse.

Although Nguyen's examination is based on Asian American literary studies, the premises of his argument are useful when examining the range of responses to Lau's work. The lack of engagement with Lau's writing in Asian American literary studies is instructive, particularly if we consider this silence alongside the critical efflorescence generated by Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*.[3] *Obasan*'s crossover appeal suggests that the lack of interest in Lau stems not from the attention to national specificity but from the absence of certain racial and ethnic signifiers that have become the condition of interpretive and disciplinary possibility for texts defined as "Asian." Ironically, it is outside Asian American literary studies that critics have examined Lau's work in a binary similar to that outlined by Nguyen. Some critics, such as Lien Chao and Fred Wah, argue that Lau's rehearsal of conventional literary devices and poetic voice is potentially accommodationist and is perhaps a reason for her popular reception in Canada. Others, such as Elaine Chang, Peter Georgelos, Sneja Gunew, and Charlotte Sturgess read Lau's work as transgressive to the extent that they view her work as blurring the borders that constitute identity and difference. As Misao Dean notes, one of the central frustrations regarding Lau's work is that it seems to "lack many of the signposts that readers use to determine the moral or political perspective of a piece of writing" (24). Given the dichotomy of responses to Lau and her work, what are the "signposts" that lead to such responses? Moreover, in the politics of representation, which epistemological assumptions render a signpost recognizable as a "signpost," and how do these signposts orient our critical analyses within the terrain of Asian American and Asian Canadian literary studies?

The neglect of Lau in Asian American literary studies is a missed opportunity to re-evaluate its interpretive paradigms as well to examine the cross-border convergence of Asian racialization in North America. Recent scholarship on Lau by Rita Wong and Lily Cho, for example, situates Lau's work within an expansive ethnic and racial politics and moves beyond gauging Lau's oppositionality. Wong's analysis suggests that an emphasis on Lau's autobiographical details and accommodation overlooks the "supplement the market forces on a text" (123). Through examining the commodification of Lau and her work, Wong suggests that Lau's writings open up a space to examine how the cultural, emotional, and sexual labour of

women trouble the distinctions between the personal and the commercial. Cho frames her analysis of Lau within a diaspora figured as a condition of subjectivity. Despite Lau's refusal to affiliate with disaporic groups, her work demonstrates an "overwhelming commitment to the genealogical in its melancholic return to the sadness of overlapping losses (family, community, love, belonging)" (176).

My reading builds on their work by synthesizing how the ethnic, racial and sexual commodification of Lau is a function of cross-border racialization. Through the figure of Lau, I argue that though model minority discourse in the United States and visible minority discourse in Canada are nation-specific formations, their logic and effects are not reducible to them. This cross-border racialization, in spite of its apparent absence, plays a prominent role in how Lau's texts circulate and are commodified. The frustration that Dean highlights over the lack of identifiable signposts in Lau's work, I would suggest, in part stems from *where* we have been looking and what has counted as identifiable directives. Rather than read the content of Lau's work for indices of resistance or complicity, in this article I read *around* it, paying particular attention to what Gérard Genette calls the paratext—the text's nonliterary structural features that are mediated by market considerations. The paratext, Genette argues, is more notable for the "convergence of effects" of a "heterogeneous group of practices and discourses" than the diversity of their aspects (2). My reading around Lau's work is, of course, inseparable from my reading *in*, for reading around always imbricates reading in, and vice versa. Broadening our interpretive coordinates to examine the ideological work of the paratext reveals how model minority and visible minority discourses converge to orient our analyses of texts such as Lau's. As I will argue, this convergence—what I call "the currency of visibility"—is an index of the commodification of racialization within a visual economy that equates, if not privileges, "visibility" as a particular form of political agency or subjectivity.

Model Minority Discourse as Paratext

Although the model minority thesis first appeared most explicitly in a 1966 article in *U.S. News and World Report*, it remains a powerful example of containment and stratification in the United States and beyond. Appearing at a time of social upheaval and unrest, the representation of Asian Americans as an exemplary minority, able to achieve financial success and assimilate without special economic or institutional support, held particular political

purchase. These Asian American "success stories" not only constituted a critique of "blacks who sought relief through federally supported social programs" but also "diffused the black militant's claim that America was a fundamentally racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinated position" (Osajima 450). Despite its coinage at a particular historical moment, the logic of model minority discourse predates the 1960s, and its effects are not reducible to national borders.[4] As David Palumbo-Liu notes, as early as the 1930s "scientific" conclusions that Asian intelligence was comparable to (and in some cases higher than) that of whites foreshadowed later manifestations of the model minority thesis that touted Asian economic achievements and stellar academic abilities (151). Such an example of what Frank Chin and Jeffery Paul Chan term "racist love" is reaffirmed in the 1982 work of University of Calgary Professor Emeritus Philip E. Vernon, *The Abilities and Achievements of Orientals in North America*.[5] In a move fundamental to model minority discourse, Vernon cites the achievements of Asians to undermine Black critiques of systemic racism: "poor living conditions, poverty, overcrowding, and discrimination and repression by the white majority are often cited as the major reason for the low intelligence scores of blacks. But oriental immigrants were subjected to at least as much deprivation and oppression" (275). Vernon concludes that it is not "adverse environments" that affect IQ and success but "superior motivation to achieve academically, and personality characteristics such as docility and industriousness. Whatever the difficulties, oriental parents have continued to rear their children in much the same traditional manner" (275). In attributing success to personality traits and cultural tradition, Vernon's work underscores the irrelevance of national specificity between Canada and the United States even as it is precisely the Orientalist belief in these innate traits and the unassimilability of these tradition-bound Asians that justified exclusion and the patrolling of national borders against Asian "infiltration."

Model minority discourse's valorization of Asian economic achievement as both the condition of assimilation and the sign of assimilability dramatizes the extent to which Asians in North America have been figured as exemplars of "exceptional capitalist achievement," to borrow Tomo Hattori's phrase (231). Hattori suggests that Asian American studies needs to interrogate how the ethnic subject is produced by and within capital. Examining the Asian American subject as a "human form of racial capital," he argues, enables a move away from the idealist investment in resisting mainstream cultural ideology to an examination of the pragmatist strategies of survival

underwritten by "cultural interpellation under capital" (239).The divergent attitudes toward the Eaton sisters within Asian American literary studies, for example, in which Edith is valorized as resistant and Winnifred is vilified for being a sellout, ignore the ways in which both writers calibrate and calculate the opportunities enabled and disabled by the commodification of ethnic identity. According to Hattori, the work of both sisters must be understood as effects of model minority discourse, a "system of signification that emerges from the institutions of multiculturalism that use racialized human subject tools for the advancement of a civil society under capitalism" (228).

Hattori's notion of model minority discourse as a function of multiculturalism and state capitalism parallels Nguyen's analysis of the oppositional politics that define Asian American Studies—in both their works, the viability and currency of minority discourse are inextricable from the commodification of ethnic identity even as Asian American Studies defines as its object the undoing of that commodification. This commodification, variously described as an effect of the "marketplace of multiculturalism," "boutique multiculturalism," or "corporate multiculturalism" (see, respectively, Nguyen 10-11; Fish; and Chicago Cultural Studies Group), underscores how capital *models* minorities—that is, how certain models or "forms" of minoritized identity are granted currency or cultural capital and intelligibility, while others are not.

The commodification of ethnic identity helps to contextualize the popularity of model minority narratives that deal with what Palumbo-Liu calls "the ethnic dilemma." These narratives chronicle the "problem" of racial, ethnic, and gendered identities (395). According to Palumbo-Liu, the success of model minority narratives stems from the resolutions offered to this predicament. Such narratives

> constitute a specific model of assimilation, held to be the natural working out of the "ethnic dilemma," that reroutes social critique into introspective meditation. In much the same way that the model minority myth worked to place the responsibility for the minority subject's success or failure squarely within his or her personal "capabilities," so the logic of model minority discourse argues that an inward adjustment is necessary for the suture of the ethnic subject into an optimal position within the dominant culture. In both cases the sociopolitical apparatuses that perpetuate material differences remain unchallenged and even fortified. (397)

This inward epiphanic shift that leads to narrative resolution and personal healing (i.e., what was once a fragmented self produced by this ethnic dilemma becomes whole) not only diverts interrogation of the dominant culture

but also reduces its effects to a plot complication in the drama of the ethnic dilemma. Moreover, representing resolution in terms of personal healing reinforces the liberal individual as the locus of meaning and agency, rendering the sociopolitical apparatuses that define and police the boundaries of nation and subjectivity invisible if not irrelevant.

The features that Palumbo-Liu identifies as definitive of model minority narratives are inextricable from the paratext, which shapes how these texts are marketed and read. In his theory of the paratext, Gérard Genette argues that the paratext is made up of *peritextual* elements—such as the cover, title, epigraph, preface, chapter headings, and so on—and *epitextual* elements—such as interviews, book reviews, and private letters—that are outside the book proper. Since the definitional boundaries of what constitutes the epitextual elements are fuzzy, there is "the potential for indefinite diffusion" of the epitext (346). Together these elements constellate the paratext or the "threshold of interpretation" through which the reader passes, orienting reader-text relationships. The paratext is simultaneously on the fringes and central to how the text is read and understood. Genette continues:

> Indeed this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it. (2)

Essentially, Genette's theory of the paratext is a theory of mediation that examines how "literary and printerly conventions . . . mediate between the world of publishing and the world of the text" (Macksey xvii). While determining the extent of Lau's role in authorizing and legitimating the paratext is a highly speculative endeavour,[6] what is salient to the present discussion is Genette's identification of the economic dimensions of the paratext that not only improve reception and increase sales but also direct a "more pertinent reading" of the text. It is this more "pertinent" reading, I would suggest, through which we can understand how model minority discourse is an integral part of the paratext. While model minority discourse, as Palumbo-Liu points out, is not necessarily coextensive with the texts themselves, it designates a "mode of apprehending, decoding, recoding, and producing Asian American narratives" (396). What, then, does it mean to refer to the paratextual or nonliterary features of model minority discourse that designate this mode highlighted by Palumbo-Liu?

The Currency of Visibility

To answer that question involves an initial detour into how this "mode of apprehending, decoding, recoding, and producing" is also informed by visible minority discourse. The power of the discourse on visibility as a central lens by which racial difference is understood and apprehended has been extensively explored. In *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*, Eleanor Ty neatly sums up the ambivalence of situating racial difference in terms of visibility. "The politics of the visible," Ty notes, deals with "the effects of being legally, socially, and culturally marked as 'visible,' and paradoxically, with the experience of being invisible in dominant culture and history" (11–12). *Visible minorities*, as defined in Canada by the Employment Equity Act (1995, c. 44, s. 3), refers to "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." Intended to ensure equal employment opportunities for people of colour, the term "visible minority" ironically postulates "visibility" as both the sign of recognition conferred to those rendered invisible by racism and the mark that is the condition of their marginalization. Robyn Wiegman's concept of the visual economy is particularly instructive in understanding this slippage. The visual economy, as Wiegman argues, defines "the visual as both an economic system and a representational economy" (4). Within this visual economy, the discursive formation of race as a primarily visible and corporeal phenomenon cannot be understood independently from a hierarchy of value accorded to differentially racialized bodies. Visibility, within the visual economy of race, is the currency of exchange; its value is secured by a liberal discourse invested in "recognition" as the means to agency and subjectivity such that visibility or being visible eventually becomes an end in itself. Within this visual economy, visible minority discourse does not simply circumscribe the terms of oppression as well as the terms of emancipation; the condition of oppression—that is, one's visibility—returns and is proffered as the term of emancipation.

Like model minority discourse, visible minority discourse is a discourse of containment. The supposed transparency of racial markers that belies visible minority discourse presumes racial markers to be apprehensible independent of the process of racialization. The unmediated "visibility" of racial difference simultaneously naturalizes the body as the sole site of racial meaning and, in turn, shifts attention from how discursive formations racialize the body and reduces racial oppression to an effect or by-product of difference. Just as model minority narratives ascribe the minority subject as "responsible" for his or her personal healing, framing racial difference as a corporeal

sign "blames" the body—and not racism's inscription of the body—for racism. Furthermore, the term "visible minority" raises the question, visible to whom? For many people of colour, we have always been conscious of the "fact" of our visibility.[7] Within the logic of Canadian multiculturalism, visibility becomes the privileged signifier of recognition, spatializing the relations of recognition such that those doing the "seeing" are always on the inside. "The disciplinary naming of the not-so-white body as 'visible minority,'" Roy Miki argues, "maintains the normative value of whiteness" (*Broken Entries* 208).

The complicated configurations of model minority discourse, in which Asians are racialized by and within capital, and visible minority discourse, which presumes the transparency of race, reveal the currency of visibility exemplified by the controversies that surround Lau and the rich paratext that surrounds her work. In an opinion piece for the *Globe and Mail*, Lau explains why she decided not to participate in the 1994 Writing thru Race conference, which was organized to provide a space for Canadian writers of colour to discuss both their writing and the politics of race and publishing:

> I decided fairly early to stop accepting invitations to "multicultural" readings, although I needed the $100 or so that these readings provided. I didn't want to have any more opportunities based on my colour that would separate me from the equally struggling white male writer next door.
>
> Despite all this, I am aware of having an advantage. When I walk into a convention room or a reception hall full of writers and publishers, I realize with a tiny thrill that I am one of the very few non-white faces. In a sea of writers and would-be-writers, all of them hard-working and ambitious, a visible minority is at least visible. ("Why I Didn't Attend")

Lau's characterization of multiculturalism, where meritocracy and fairness have been overshadowed by an uncritical promotion of women writers and writers of colour, reveals the currency of visibility, which functions here on multiple registers. Lau's rejection of the opportunities afforded to visible minorities is based on her equivalence of an extra "$100 or so" to the value of one's "colour." Furthermore, the contrasting scenes laid out here—the unfair and opportunistic racialized space of "multicultural readings" and a democratic publishing convention or reception made up of "hard-working and ambitious" writers—naturalize whiteness as the inevitable configuration of a meritocratic system, where "hard work" and not the commodification of ethnic identity determines success. In Lau's version of multiculturalism, it is the labour of the "struggling white male writer" that is devalued and ethnic identity that is overvalued. Political recognition and popular reception

are conflated such that her status as a visible minority desecrates the "level playing field" and becomes the sole ground on which popular reception and recognition are conferred. Simultaneously, though, the thrill of difference, of being "one of the very few non-white faces," can only be sustained by her singularity from other "visible minorities" who do not inhabit the writing world. What her formulation does not address is this: if the playing field has been levelled, then what provides this thrill? Where are the other visible minorities? In effect, being a visible minority has made her a minor celebrity. Her apparent reluctance to capitalize on the supposed cultural cachet of "visibility" is simultaneously undermined by the thrill of difference, reflecting her acknowledgement that, in spite of how she would like to be identified, she is still always visible as a minority.

In contrast to the deracinated subject matter of Lau's writing and her refusal to identify as a writer of colour, the media interest that sustains her public incarnation ironically seems to revel in her status as such. In fact, the marketing and popular reception of her work have been inseparable from the titillating details of her life, titillating because they simultaneously mark her as "Asian Canadian" while distinguishing her as anything but representative. In spite of Lau's later success as a writer and poet (Lau became the youngest writer ever to be nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry), she is still best known for her first major work, *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*, a memoir that documents her time on the streets from the ages of fourteen to sixteen. Since its initial publication in 1989, *Runaway* has been translated into six languages and has spawned a made-for-television "Movie of the Week."[8] Given the success of *Runaway*, the following autobiographical details are not only common knowledge but also consistently invoked: born in 1971 to Chinese immigrants, this sensitive, straight-A student was left with no option but to run away because her abusive and traditional parents forbade her from pursuing her dreams of becoming a writer; they wanted her to be a lawyer or a doctor. To survive on the streets, Lau turned to prostitution and drugs, all the while struggling to be a writer. The transformation from "street kid" to "writer" is the narrative propulsion of *Runaway*, and the work's success seemed to forever wed Lau to this narrative teleology.

Aside from the fascination with youth overcoming adversity, the sensationalism that attends Lau's debut on the public stage also derives from her apparent challenge to the model minority stereotype. In an interview with Lau, award-winning journalist and memoirist Jan Wong writes, "Now I

left my comfortable Montreal home at 19 to voluntarily haul pig manure in China during the Cultural Revolution. But I have trouble understanding why someone so smart would drop out of school and run away from home at 14 and end up as a junkie-whore" (C1). Wong's description of Lau reveals the pervasiveness of the dichotomy outlined by Nguyen and others. While Wong describes her own youth as animated by political commitment and idealism, she figures Lau's actions as incomprehensible because she is "so smart." "Overnight," Wong continues, "she went from a straight A student to every parent's nightmare." Wong's professed inability to understand, however, is undermined by her details of Lau's physicality. Her interview opens with the following description: "Evelyn Lau is wearing a baggy oatmeal sweater. So it's not immediately apparent she is one of the few surgically unassisted Chinese women in the world to require a DD-cup bra." In an interview that tries to make sense of Lau's personal history and artistic drive, this detail about Lau's unnaturally large Chinese bust potentially naturalizes her body as a part of the explanatory framework for why, unlike "millions of Canadians who have overcome such traumas," Lau was unable to overcome hers, therefore ending up a "junkie-whore." What Wong poses as incomprehensible because Lau is "so smart" therefore has nothing to do with Lau's brains but with her body. Coincidentally, when Lau appeared on TV's *Geraldo* in the fall of 1989, a banner flashed across her chest with the blurb "Hooker at age 14." As one reviewer explains, the tabloid sensationalism that surrounded Lau reflected the extent to which "Interviewers were anxious to meet someone [like Lau] who had so thoroughly upended the stereotypical image of the clean, young Chinese-Canadian" (Hluchy 73). Lau's putative divergence from the model minority stereotype is expressed through sexualizing her singularity. Ironically, despite Lau's disavowal of her ethnic identity and her reluctance to cash in on it, it is her apparent difference from popular assumptions about her ethnic identity that fuels media interest.

Lau's perceived difference from the conventional "clean, young Chinese-Canadian" also relies on readers racializing her texts as the point of reference by which her singularity is gauged. The covers of the U.S. and Canadian versions of *Runaway* and of two poetry collections, *You Are Not Who You Claim* (1990) and *Oedipal Dreams* (1992), feature her photo, a disembodied face emerging out of a dark, shadowy background.[9] The cover of *Oedipal Dreams*, according to Misao Dean, "evokes the classical face of Chinese Opera. Sold under the sign of 'oriental girl,' who is stereotypically both the mincing and modest virgin and the mysterious and sexually skilled courtesan, Lau's

books are marketed in a way that evokes both racist and sexist stereotypes" (24–25). On the cover of *You Are Not Who You Claim*, Lau's intense eyes stare up from under her dark permed hair, and her body disappears into the simple blankness of the cover. Her expressions are the same—defiant and yet searching. Like the cover of *Oedipal Dreams* and an early edition of *Runaway*, her face is the central if not the only focus, collapsing the distance between author and text by insistently racializing the text through invoking the proximity of the racialized authorial body. Just as Wong's piece on Lau literally and metaphorical frames Lau's body as a point of entry into understanding her work, at the end of each poem in *You Are Not Who You Claim*, the initials E.L. appear in script to approximate handwriting—rhetorically punctuating each poem with the immediacy of Lau's presence and the authenticity of her authorship.[10]

What are minor references to Lau's ethnic and racial background in her work often become touchstones for analyses and evidence of her rejection of her ethnic heritage; her running away from her parents is figured as synonymous with running away from the markers of race and ethnicity. According to Lien Chao, "By denouncing her parents as the sole cause of her running away from home, the sovereignty of the autobiographical narrator is obtained, though at the expense of her parents' subjectivity being depicted as Other" (163). Indeed, the prologue of *Runaway* seems to suggest such a reading:

> I was born in Vancouver to Chinese immigrants. I was a shy and introspective child, exceedingly sensitive to the tensions and emotions around me. My parents were strict, overprotective and suspicious of the unknown society around them. By kindergarten, I was already expected to excel in class, as the first step, in my pre-planned career as a doctor or lawyer. (1)
>
> My parents did not approve of my writing or of my involvement in the peace movement. They forbade me to write unless I brought home straight A's from school, and right up until I left home at fourteen I was not allowed out of my house except to attend school and take piano lessons—not on weekends, not after school. (4)

Here Lau's parents and their middle-class "model minority" aspirations are juxtaposed against her political beliefs and artistic dreams. Aside from these early references, there is little mention in her memoir, poetry, and fiction about issues of ethnicity and race. However, it is the constant repetition and referencing of these "ethnic traces" that demonstrate how her visibility as a minority holds currency and sustains public fascination.

In many instances, Lau's running away is attributed to the restrictive upbringing defined as Chinese culture. One writer notes that Lau's account

of her life on the streets is "less remarkable than Lau's reason for leaving home: her conservative parents wouldn't allow her to pursue her interest in writing" (Dafoe C1). Another writes, "She ran away from home at 14, when her parents, Chinese immigrants, refused to let her write" (Walker E7). The descriptive modification of her parents, "Chinese immigrants," implies and attributes their Chineseness as an explanation for their refusal to let Lau pursue artistic expression. If this is the popular narrative of Lau's emergence as a writer, then the logic behind her explanation for not attending the Writing thru Race conference becomes an even more powerful means of constituting and affirming whiteness as the invisible and transcendent signifier of neutrality and meritocracy. The absence of other visible minorities at the publishing conventions and receptions that she attends is rewritten not as an example of institutional or systemic racism but as a function of crass Chinese materialism and lack of aesthetic appreciation. One only needs to note the uproar over Vancouver's "monster houses" to see how Asian capital is racialized as antagonistic to the aesthetic harmony of pastoral Vancouver neighbourhoods.[11] Lau's singularity and currency, then, arise not because she has "successfully" run away from the markers of ethnicity so much as she persuasively embodies the liberal myth of inclusion through meritocracy upon which a racialized political economy depends.[12]

To further naturalize Lau's visibility, thereby obscuring the insistent marketing of her image as initial point of mediation to her work, her books' back cover descriptions and reviews continually laud Lau for the unmediated authenticity of her poetic voice. In Irving Layton's review, which appears on both the back covers of *Oedipal Dreams* and *You Are Not Who You Claim*, Lau's "lines and images" are described as "compellingly fresh. Her observations are free of literary jargon. If early success doesn't weaken her rage, doesn't soften her indictments, her future success is inevitable." Another blurb, this time a *Globe and Mail* review on the back cover of *Fresh Girls*, applauds Lau for the courage in maintaining her vision: "Lau has urgently offered herself as raw material in her prose—stripped, unselfconscious, her words ringing with a rare verisimilitude. . . . she blends startling prose talent with a fierce determination to be true." Rawness, truth, authenticity, realism, and independence seem to be the refrain of the reviews that sing Lau's praises. This insistence on the unmediated nature of her work and her independent voice—Lau has yet to be tainted by cultural and economic capital or by the identity politics and theory often assumed to have "hijacked" literary studies—reflects the value accorded to visibility. Transparency

or resistance to mediation is here the index of value for ethnic literature because it leaves the logic of capital and racialization intact. Just as the proximity of the authorial body is invoked to authorize the work as "ethnic," the representation of her work as unmediated and powered by a defiant authenticity simultaneously authenticates the "raw materiality" of the authorial body, thereby naturalizing the visibility of racial signifiers. In other words, this authority of the authorial body is constituted through the denial of its discursivity—its visibility is constituted as transparent and prediscursive.

Furthermore, if the ethnic dilemma is denoted paratextually, then the textual subject of Lau's poetry and fiction can be read as the possibility of transcending this dilemma. Whereas Palumbo-Liu argues that the popularity of model minority texts hinges on the resolution of the cultural conflict between the generations while leaving the sociopolitical context in which the conflict takes place unexamined, the absence of cultural conflict in Lau's works marks the possibility of resolving this conflict. Yet it is only through reference to these images of Lau as a visible minority whose "visibility" comes to function as a notation for the ethnic dilemma that the textual absence of cultural conflict is able to be registered as an example of transcendence, a transcendence that ironically foregrounds the particularity and individualism that sustains the discourse of Lau's presumed authenticity. In the context of Canadian racial politics, then, the "ethnic dilemma" that Palumbo-Liu locates as a narrative feature of model minority texts need not be found exclusively at the level of plot. As analysis of the paratext around Lau reveals, it is enough to invoke the ethnic dilemma through recourse to Lau's image on her book covers, marking it as the threshold of interpretation. The repetitive references to Lau's relationship with her parents as a drama of cultural conflict and the insistent marketing of her books under the sign of her face reveal how the currency of Lau's visibility is powered by the confluence of U.S. model minority discourse and Canadian visible minority discourse. Her face and ethnic background seem to be invoked as substitutes for the other. Thus, although writers such as Lau may not necessarily deal with the "ethnic dilemma" in the content of their works, the currency of her visibility as a minority functions as a shorthand notation for this dilemma.[13]

Given the paratext's centrality in the apprehending, decoding, and recoding of Lau's work, her work cannot be understood independently of the paratext's economic dimension. As the paratext around Lau reveals, model minority discourse and its ambivalent relationship to racialized capital must be understood in relation to Canada's visible minority discourse and

the liberal ideology that underpins them both. Model minority discourse, in other words, needs visible minority discourse—it needs a concept of visibility that is the currency of exchange in visible minority discourse. The putative successful assimilation and the increased profile of recent Asian American and Asian Canadian writers affirm liberal democracy's recognition of its minorities. As Robyn Wiegman notes, this new visibility of minorities in popular culture "reveals the profound transformations that underlie both the form and structure of contemporary white supremacy" (5). And, simultaneously, visible minority discourse needs the teleology of model minority discourse, such that the trajectory of invisibility to visibility posits upward mobility and economic opportunities as the teleological endpoint or "reward" of recognition. It is telling, in the wake of her success and popularity, that Lau goes on to write about the obsession with home ownership in "I Sing the Song of My Condo." According to Lau, the home buyers brochures depicted "women [who] were blond, with sunny smiles, and their husbands looked both chiselled and paternal." They "were not like anyone I knew." It was then, she notes, that "I wanted to sing the love song of the middle class. I wanted this to be the song of myself—a litany of mortgage payments and car payments, the weeping and gnashing at tax time, maximum RRSP payments and mutual funds, credit cards and credit's twin, debt." In her obsession with home buying and the frustrations that ensued, Lau notes, "when I walked the streets of Vancouver, I glared up at the high windows of the condominiums and felt the owners were not as special as me, nor as deserving. When I gave poetry readings, I looked out at the audience and wondered how many of them owned their own homes." Despite her success and ability to attract a large readership, it is the white middle class signifier of home ownership that Lau registers as the mark and "reward" of recognition. She may be visible as a public figure, but she is still on the margins, looking up or looking out. In this instance, it is model minority's promise of upward mobility and assimilation that powers visibility's value in visible minority discourse.

Indeed, even within minority literary studies, we can detect the convergence of model minority and visible minority discourses and the currency of visibility. For to argue that Lau's work is assimilationist requires one to reference and reinforce the "ethnic dilemma" as constitutive and definitive of texts written by ethnic writers. Yet to suggest that Lau challenges the model minority stereotype is to imply a kind of transcendence that not only characterizes model minority texts themselves but also fosters the conditions for their circulation and currency. The contradictions here also point to the

limits of Asian American and Asian Canadian literary studies to the extent that these contradictions draw attention to how the signposts we have relied on to produce readings of resistance and oppositionality are themselves similarly the products of such interpretive acts informed by paratexts and market forces. In the same way that popular reception of Lau can rely and has relied on the paratextual racialized body of Lau to instantiate their readings of her transcendence, Asian Canadian and Asian American scholars have also invoked the paratextual racialized body of Lau to substantiate our own desires for "resistance," even when those readings conclude with a disavowal of Lau as a resistant figure.

In his essay "Can Asian Adian? Reading the Scenes of 'Asian Canadian,'" Roy Miki calls for an ethics of reading "Asian Canadian," a set of critical practices "that can negotiate the tensions between the material conditions of textual productions that give a text its singularity and its power to see and the normative conditions of reception that shape the subject positions of readers and thereby influence what gets to be seen" (74). The tensions between the "power to see" and "to be seen" are what the premium placed on "visibility" in visible minority discourse erases. Building on Miki's call for a set of critical practices, what I hope to have demonstrated here at this critical juncture is not whether or not works such as Lau's are complicit, but instead, the necessity of tracking the assumptions underlying our own reading practices and the signposts that have come to define for us what counts as resistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the editors of this journal for their keen editorial eyes and to Jane Naomi Iwamura and Jodi Kim for their insightful suggestions and advice.

NOTES

1 Throughout this article, I try to be nation specific rather than use the term "North America" because I want to momentarily fix and highlight the different racial formations and discourses particular to each country to show how these discourses, in fact, travel across the border and inform each other. Although I am ambivalent about preserving the nationalist rubric and the discreteness of difference that my specificity implies, I am wary of the homogenizing potential of the term "North America," where U.S. racial paradigms are the default lens through which we understand racial formations in North America.

2 According to Elaine Kim, the "most recurrent theme in our writing" is "the claiming of America for Asian Americans" (147). Such a formulation can be found in Chan.

3 One exception is Sau-ling Wong and Jeffrey Santa Ana's review essay on Asian American sexuality, which takes into consideration Asian Canadian texts. They read Lau's works

as part of an emergent body of literature that deploys sexuality as a means of defying the model minority narrative. For a comparative analysis of *Obasan*'s cross-border success, see my "Passing Recognition: *Obasan* and the Borders of Asian American and Canadian Literary Studies."

4 In "Rereading Chinese Head Tax Racism: Redress, Stereotype, and Antiracist Critical Practice," Lily Cho persuasively argues that model minority discourse in Canada emerged as early as 1885 in the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration.

5 It is also particularly noteworthy that *The Abilities and Achievements of Orientals in North America* was, in part, aided by a grant from the Pioneer Fund, a controversial U.S.-based organization that has historically funded eugenics research. Although Richard J. Hernstein and Charles Murray, authors of the controversial book *The Bell Curve*, which argued that blacks were less intelligent than whites, have no connection to the Pioneer Fund, one of their key sources is Arthur Jensen, whose work was funded by the Pioneer Fund and whom Vernon also cites extensively.

6 In response to a query about how the shadowy image of her face became the cover for *Oedipal Dreams*, Lau "disclaims responsibility for this image. 'I'm not a studied person. I don't like to put out one image of myself and stick to that image.' The picture itself was a fluke, a *jeu d'esprit* of a *Georgia Strait* photographer who stood over her as she lay on the floor. 'I used to wear a lot of make-up like that, and I had actually made myself up like that when the photographer arrived. That was just me at the time'" (Dean 25). Of course, it can be argued, the disavowal of responsibility and authority for her public images can be precisely the image being cultivated.

7 In Frantz Fanon's formulation, the "fact" of blackness is in fact a "racial epidermal schema" in which "consciousness of the body is a solely negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness" (110).

8 The movie, *Diary of Evelyn Lau*, produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, aired on prime time on Sunday, 13 March 1994, to great media hoopla.

9 Recent editions of *Runaway* no longer feature Lau's picture.

10 According to Lien Chao, Lau's signature illustrates "her desire for authorship and individual success" (160). Although it is not clear to me that Lau has such a direct hand in the layout of her texts, the effect of these signatures does bear the imprint of individual authorship.

11 In his article "The Race of Space," Richard Cavell examines how architectural style is a contested site of racialization. These "monster houses" became synonymous with rich Hong Kong immigrants and referred to their "pastiche" or gaudy kitsch style that ruined the Tudor aesthetic of wealthy neighbourhoods, which had been predominantly Anglo because of the historical legal prohibitions against Chinese and other immigrants from purchasing property in these neighbourhoods. The language of aestheticism and aesthetic value, in this case, effectively masks the economic and racist motivations that underpin the protests against "monster houses."

12 Here I am invoking the work of Lisa Lowe, who persuasively demonstrates how racialization "has been the site of the contradiction between political emancipation and the conditions of economic exploitation" (23). Drawing on and extending Michael Omi and Howard Winant's notion of racial formation and the processes of racialization, Lowe argues that constitutive contradiction of liberal democracy is that its promise of universal equality and inclusion through citizenship relies on racializing the labour forces that it excludes from those rights (24). Similarly, B. Singh Bolaria and Peter S. Li have argued for examining how the production of racial difference is bound up with the reproduction of cheap labour. Thanks to Iyko Day for bringing their work to my attention.

13 The movie *Diary of Evelyn Lau*, in contrast to *Runaway*, foregrounds the conflict between Lau and her parents. According to both Lien Chao and Sneja Gunew, the medium of film shifts the emphasis of Lau's narrative from her life on the streets to her relationship to her parents. Writes Gunew, "The demands of the visual medium mean that the ethnic identity of the protagonist and her family inevitably register and have a certain kind of coded presence" (257). The visual medium, in other words, renders the "coded presence" inescapable and suggests that even the book covers come to authorize this "coded presence" in spite of the content of Lau's works.

WORKS CITED

Bolaria, B. Singh, and Peter S. Li. *Racial Oppression in Canada*. Toronto: Garamond, 1985.

Canada. Department of Justice. *Employment Equity Act*. 1995. c44.

Cavell, Richard. "The Race of Space." *New Formations* 31 (1996): 39-50.

Chan, Anthony B. "Born Again Asian: The Making of a New Literature." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 11.4 (1984): 57-73.

Chang, Elaine. "Where the 'Street Kid' Meets the City: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Runaway Subjectivity." *Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*. Ed. Paul Delany. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1994. 97-120.

Chao, Lien. *Beyond Silence: Chinese Canadian Literature in English*. Toronto: TSAR, 1997.

Cheung, King-Kok. "The Woman Warrior versus The Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" *Conflicts in Feminism*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990. 234–51.

Chicago Cultural Studies Group. "Critical Multiculturalism." *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1994. 114–39.

Chin, Frank. "This Is Not an Autobiography." *Genre* 8 (1985): 109–30.

Cho, Lily. "Dislocations and Disapora: Reading Evelyn Lau's *Choose Me*." *Studies in Canadian Literature* 32.1 (2007): 173-91.

—. "Rereading Chinese Head Tax Racism: Redress, Stereotype, and Antiracist Critical Practice." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 62–84.

Dafoe, Chris. "Nowhere to Hide from the Success of *Runaway*." *Globe and Mail* 14 October 1993: C1+.

Dean, Misao. "Reading Evelyn Right: The Literary Layers of Evelyn Lau." *Canadian Forum* 73 (1995): 22–26.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove, 1967.

Fish, Stanley. "Boutique Multiculturalism." *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*. Ed. Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman. Lawrence: UP of Kansas 1998. 69–88.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Georgelos, Peter. "Deterritorialization in Evelyn Lau's *Runaway*." *Open Letter* 9th ser. 4 (1995): 15-31.

Gunew, Sneja. "Operatic Karaoke and the Pitfalls of Identity Politics." *Literary Pluralities*. Ed. Christl Verduyn. Peterborough: Broadview, 1998. 254-62.

Hattori, Tomo. "Model Minority Discourse and Asian American Jouis-Sense." *Differences* 11.2 (1999): 228-47.

Hluchy, Patricia. "The Pen Is Mightier than the Sordid." *Maclean's* 11 Oct. 1993: 72-73.

Kim, Elaine. "Defining Asian American Realities through Literature." *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. Ed. Abdul R. Janmohamed and David Lloyd. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 146-70.
Lau, Evelyn. "Getting Heard." *Prairie Fire* 12 (1991): 88-92.
—. "I Sing the Song of My Condo." *Globe and Mail* 17 June 1995: D5.
—. *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1989.
—. *You Are Not Who You Claim*. Victoria: Porcépic, 1990.
—. "Why I Didn't Attend the Writing thru 'Race' Conference." *Globe and Mail* 9 July 1994: D3.
Lo, Marie. "Passing Recognition: *Obasan* and the Borders of Asian American and Canadian Literary Criticism." *Comparative American Studies* 5.3 (2007): 307-332.
Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996.
Macksey, Richard. Foreword. Genette xi–xxii.
Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.
—. "Can Asian Adian? Reading the Scenes of 'Asian Canadian.'" *West Coast Line* 34.3 (2001): 56-75.
Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
Osajima, Keith. "Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s." *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader.* Ed. Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood. New York: New York UP, 2000. 449-58.
Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
Sturgess, Charlotte. *Redefining the Subject: Sites of Play in Canadian Women's Writing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003.
Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994. 25-73.
Ty, Eleanor. *The Politics of the Visible in Asian North American Narratives*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004.
Vernon, Philip E. *The Abilities and Achievements of Orientals in North America*. New York: Academic, 1982.
Wah, Fred. "Speak My Language: Racing the Lyric Poetic." *West Coast Line* 31.3 (1997-98): 72-84.
Walker, Susan. "A Different Kind of Writing." *Toronto Star* 12 Sept. 1995: E4+.
Wiegman, Robyn. *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.
Wong, Jan. "Evelyn Lau Gets Perfect Grades in School of Hard Knocks." *Globe and Mail* 3 Apr. 1997: C1.
Wong, Rita. "Market Forces and Powerful Desires: Reading Evelyn Lau's Cultural Labour." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (2001): 122-40.
Wong, Sau-ling C. "Autobiography as Guided Chinatown Tour? Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and the Chinese-American Autobiographical Controversy." *Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives*. Ed. James Robert Payne. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1992. 248-73.
Wong, Sau-ling C., and Jeffrey J. Santa Ana. "Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature." *Signs* 25.1 (1999): 170-226.

Glenn Deer

Remapping Vancouver
Composing Urban Spaces in Contemporary Asian Canadian Writing

The New Wave of Urban Space

How is the phenomenology of Vancouver's urban spaces represented by contemporary Asian Canadian writers? The multiple and multi-generational journeys of Asian Canadians across Vancouver's urban landscape are poignantly captured in "A Map of the City," the last story in Madeleine Thien's award-winning collection of fiction, *Simple Recipes* (2001): the Canadian-born narrator, who is the daughter of Indonesian parents, remembers how she and her parents "would drive across the city, going nowhere in particular, all of us bundled into the Buick. Through downtown and Chinatown—all those narrow streets flooded with people—then out to the suburbs. On the highway, we caught glimpses of ocean, blue and sudden" (178). The narrator's journey here is symbolically important because it represents how the family's movement traverses the commercial downtown core, negotiates the traditional Chinatown enclave, then takes the freeway to the satellite suburbs, and finally glimpses the oft-celebrated ocean views that are unavailable from the traditional lower quarters on downtown Chinatown's Pender Street. Thien's stories use motifs of mobility through recurring images of highways, urban and suburban streets, and maps: moreover, by using both Asian Canadian and non-Asian Canadian narrators and focal characters, Thien avoids positioning herself as an implied author who speaks only from and for an Asian Canadian social space. Her socially mobile urban sensibility gives us a tangible and visceral feel for the hard pavement and prominent signage on Broadway, the frenetic traffic on Knight Street, the aging Hastings Street storefronts, and the well-mown suburban lawns of Burnaby. The range

of travel across the different community spaces within Vancouver and throughout its surrounding regions demonstrates a narrative identity that is obviously not confined to the abjected space of the ethnic Chinatown enclave.

Thien's imaginative remapping of Greater Vancouver belongs to a distinctive group of books by a younger and diverse generation of Asian Canadian writers, including Thien, Nancy Lee, Kevin Chong, and Larissa Lai. Thien's *Simple Recipes* (2001), Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls* (2002), Kevin Chong's *Baroque-a-nova* (2001), and Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) represent significant departures from the earlier modes of civic historical recuperation practised by an older generation of now well-established writers in the national Asian Canadian canon, including Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, and Wayson Choy. The urban spaces explored by Thien, Lee, Chong, and Lai are also significantly more diverse and more preoccupied by problems of social class mobility and globalization than the fiction of another established Asian Canadian Vancouver writer, Evelyn Lau, whose writings are more strictly focused on sexuality, dependency, and power and are precursors to the expansive urban themes of this group. Moreover, Thien, Lee, Chong, and Lai contribute compelling and distinctive visions of different Vancouver regional spaces, and my singling them out for special attention through the urban lens is an exploratory sketch of one arm of an ever-expanding and overdetermined body of urban literature that could conceivably include several dozen writers who have used Vancouver as the source and subject of their representations.[1] What is gained by grouping these writers together for the purposes of analysis is an enhanced understanding of the emerging spatial consciousness of a recent generation of Asian Canadian writers, a group that has been able to speak from greater socially mobile positions than their predecessors. Such an analysis also reveals how they are moving beyond some of the earlier preoccupations with historically racialized enclaves in order to address important contemporary phenomena such as group diasporas and the breakdown of traditional family structures across many ethno-cultural groups (Thien), the gendered spaces of street violence (Lee), the contemporary cults of celebrity (Chong), and the future trajectories of globalization and technology (Lai).

This essay explores the new Vancouver urban environment that is represented in this new "wave" of writers through some selective close analyses of the motifs of space and movement in the texts. I will first, however, outline some helpful principles of the social production of space and the concept of "urbanity" drawn from Liam Kennedy's *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture* (2000). Second, I will briefly summarize

the role of Vancouver in the earlier writers; and third, examine how the concepts of urban transparency and visibility are manifested in both the new Aberdeen Mall in Richmond and Douglas Coupland's *City of Glass*. Finally, I will demonstrate how the modernist promises of transparency, freedom, fusion, and mobility that are troped in the various structures of "glass" in Vancouver are problematized by the urban fictions of the new wave of Asian Canadian writers. Thien, Lee, Chong, and Lai use cityscapes as both the origin and sign of new forms of familial loss, anomie, homelessness, corporate control, and globalized violence. Their uses of urban space, visuality, and staging also suggest the epistemological yearning that Hana Wirth-Nesher, in *City Codes* (1996), identifies as arising from the modern city's perplexing promise of "plenitude" that is confounded by its delivery of "inaccessibility" (8).

Producing Urban Space

The spatial theorizing of Liam Kennedy provides this study with two useful concepts: first, that city spaces are simultaneously "real" *and* socially produced through multiple discourses and genres; and second, that civic forms of "urbanity," or democratically healthy public interaction, have recently been displaced by inward turning architecture and regimes of surveillance.

First, Vancouver's physical geography and built environment have been heavily marketed as valuable *visual* commodities for decades, and tourists, realtors, businesses, and residents have all been attracted to the city's renowned viewpoints of mountain peaks, ocean, beaches, parks, and city architecture. But theorists of urban space remind us that such spaces and views are not simply perceived as unmediated physical settings. Liam Kennedy—who combines the social construction spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey and Edward Soja—emphasizes that urban spaces are social products or a "register of not only built forms but also of embedded ideologies" (8-9), and literary and visual works are important cultural agents that "produce and maintain but also . . . challenge and question, common notions of urban existence" (9). Hence, it is important to analyze literary and other modes of representation, to provide a "critical consideration of the conditions and effects of the signifying practices, discourses and images which give [urban space] legible form" (9). In *Urban Space and Representation* (2000), Kennedy and Maria Belshaw assert that "The production of urban space is simultaneously real, symbolic and imaginary; what it produces is a material environment, a visual culture and a psychic space" (5). This social production aspect of urban space is reiterated by many

theorists, including Deborah Parsons in *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), who reminds us that "the urban writer is not only a figure within a city; he/she is also the producer of a city. . . . [and] the writer adds other maps to the city atlas; those of social interaction, but also of myth, memory, fantasy, and desire" (1). The emphasis on the regular addition of new maps reminds us that no Vancouver writer ever provides a mimetic, totalizing vision of city spaces nor do they simply fabulate independent spatial myths, but combine material history, visual facts, and narrative forms to assert a particular way of seeing Vancouver. Their books represent real contemporary phenomena such as immigration and business failure (Thien), homelessness and street violence (Lee), suburban isolation and celebrity worship (Chong), and the exploitation of labour and environmental collapse (Lai), but they also create forms of spatialized consciousness that are peculiar to the ideological interests of the writers.

A second concept that supplements Kennedy's social definition of urban space is "urbanity," or "the phenomenon of collectivity which emerges from the close proximity of strangers and face-to-face relations in public urban space" (3). Ideal city spaces, according to Kennedy, are designed to valorize social interactions, and the "erotic and aesthetic variety of street life, the close encounters with strangers, the freedoms of access and movement in public spaces" (3) that are essential for democratic citizenship—certainly the quest for the renewed vitality of North American cities has been the goal of urban activists and commentators like Jane Jacobs, in her now classic *The Life and Death of American Cities* (1961), to humanist sociologists like Richard Sennett in *The Conscience of the Eye* (1990). However, this harmonious fostering of plurality is now threatened as "pubic space becomes increasingly privatized, commodified and militarized" (Kennedy 3). In American urban centers (and, arguably, in Canadian cities as well), the loss of civic unity is signaled in such structures of exclusion and apartheid as the "in-turning mall, the indoor atriums of corporate office buildings, the proliferations of theme parks and festival marketplaces, all spaces that are rigourously disciplined through practices of gating, signage, and surveillance" (6). Kennedy illustrates the pervasiveness of surveillance here by noting (and echoing Foucault's famous *topos*) that "The relation between power and vision, for example, is evidenced in many strands of urban life: in the surveillance of the urban population; in the scopophilic and voyeuristic desires (to look, to be seen) associated with the urban street and commodity relations; in the signage which directs and prohibits movement; and

in the sighting of bodies as erotic or dangerous" (10). The displacement of civic interaction by the urban garrisons of the glass residential tower, and the rise of the new regimes of surveillance and visual culture, are figured in different, even contradictory ways by Coupland's *City of Glass* and Thien's *Simple Recipes*, Lee's *Dead Girls*, Chong's *Baroque-a-Nova*, and Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*. But before we can turn to these framings of scopic and often voyeuristic forms of urbanity, I want to consider the traditional ethnic Vancouver spaces that have preceded them as they have been represented in novels by Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, and Wayson Choy. Glass towers, urban voyeurism, and modern forms of surveillance have not yet arisen in the earlier texts that sometimes nostalgically recreate the spaces of a lost urbanity.

The Traditional Enclave

For Kogawa, SKY Lee, and Choy, Vancouver has been a compelling site for their most significant work. Vancouver and the rolling ocean of the west coast are the central absent spaces that are achingly longed for by the Alberta-exiled Uncle Isamu and his niece Naomi in Kogawa's novel *Obasan* (1981). Vancouver's traditional Pender Street Chinatown is the key site of the rise and fall of patriarch Wong Gwei Chang and the saga of his family's power struggles in Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990). This same traditional Chinatown is the setting for the depiction of the nostalgic intergenerational reconciliation between Poh-Poh and Sek-lung and the revelation of tragic Chinese Canadian hostilities towards Japanese Canadians in the 1940s in Choy's interconnected stories in *The Jade Peony* (1995). The images of the city in these texts range from the well-furnished Marpole home on West 64th Avenue (50) that is lost by the Nakane family in *Obasan*[2], to the dragon-chair lined second-floor of the Chinese Benevolent Association building where the cigar-smoking patriarch Wong Gwei Chang holds court (73) in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, to the back alleys of Keefer and Pender Streets where Poh-Poh and Sekky scavenge for cast-off materials for their craftworks and chimes (146) in *The Jade Peony*. While these are selected and diverse locations from amongst dozens of possible examples, they represent fictional reconstructions of communities and city spaces that existed during the 1930s and the 1940s; and, in the case of Lee and Choy, these communities were centered in a marginalized ethnic enclave.[3] In these novels, the writers undertake to restore dignity and complexity to the bodies and communities that were constructed as a "cultural enigma" by the Anglo-European Canadians, "a glint of the Orient in an Occidental setting"

(Anderson 175). Kogawa, Lee, and Choy all explore forms of racist conflict and thereby "unmap"—to use Sherene Razack's term for disentangling the complex layers of racism—the interlocking systems of oppression that conspired to hold their characters captive, whether in the internment camps of *Obasan* or within the bounded and often stifling spaces of Chinatown in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*.

Since these works focus on historic enclaves, it is not surprising that Asian Canadian critics such as Maria Ng have registered considerable impatience with the attention paid to the traditional Chinatown spaces, and her critical intervention in readings of *Disappearing Moon Cafe* attempts to discount the currency of the representative power of the traditional Chinatown spaces of this text. Ng argues vigorously that Chinese Canadian communities have become decentralized, heterogeneous, and mobile, with new immigrants now "established throughout the metropolis and in the satellite suburbs" (168) of Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey. In the case of the Chinese Canadian immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan, their "many varied Chinese residential and business neighborhoods also have changed the urban landscape and culture of cities like Vancouver" (168).

The New Aberdeen Centre

A highly visible sign of how Asian Canadian movements from the older quarters to the new suburbs have changed the landscape is strikingly evident on Richmond's Number Three Road. During the mid-1990s, scores of mainly Anglo-European Richmond residents complained, often in the local newspapers (see McCullough), about the proliferation of Chinese-language business signs amidst the booming development of Asian theme malls such as Parker Place, Yaohan Centre, and the Aberdeen Mall. Over ten years later, the suburban landscape has continued to change due to Asian Canadian developments, but local complaints over such developments have abated (perhaps appeased by the economic benefits fostered by such developments). The Aberdeen Mall has been demolished and re-built, even changing the shape of the municipal roadways that surround it (a rare municipal allowance in Richmond) to conform to the building's curving shape. During the January 2004 unveiling of the new mall by developer Thomas Fung and architect Bing Thom, local design critics were enthralled by its hi-tech design and its "stunning custom coloured glass randomly arrayed over the mall's ever-curving walls, a range of translucent and opaque panels that look equally gem-like by day or by night" (Boddy B1). Fung has brought into this

retail palace of glass not just the Japanese mega-retailer *Daiso*, but over one hundred diverse retailers and restaurants ranging from Trends Corea to Starbucks; and, as a strategy to welcome shoppers from outside the Asian Canadian communities, all the retailers have been required to use English signage and to have staff who can conduct business in English (Boddy B1). The vast sweeping interior of the new mall, its three-storied walls of glass, and its language policy all signify an attempt to create transparency, visibility, and legibility for the potential English-speaking patron. It scripts transparent vistas for a wide range of consumers, a transparency that is obviously different than the enclosed enclave atmospheres targeted by Ng's critique of the orientalized Chinatowns of Pender Street. It would also seem that such design features and signage are signals of a renewal of the urbanity that has been lost in the fortress-like malls and atriums critiqued by Kennedy, those emblems of a spatiality of surveillance and paranoia. However, one could also argue that the Aberdeen Mall reinscribes the culture of surveillance and voyeurism—and certainly commodity voyeurism and technological fetishism—in new ways.

The new urban sensibility that is symbolized in the sweeping glass curves of the new Aberdeen Centre has been identified by architectural critic Trevor Boddy as not just Greater Vancouver's "most visually dramatic retail operation" but representative of a "post-fusion culture now emerging here" (B4). This post-fusion culture mixes designs, languages, and styles and is linguistically embodied in Thom's architectural team for the project, a team whose "20 staff speak 18 different languages"; as well, the post-fusion style is characterized by Thom's key design architect, Chris Doray, who is a "neo-modernist designer . . . [and] an Ismaili Muslim raised in Singapore who studied architecture in London" (B4). But the post-fusion world view is also technologically manifested in the Aberdeen project's most stunning statement: a pulsing light-and-water-fountain installation in the mall's main vaulted reception area, a visual orchestration that emphasizes the interplay of the qualities of luminescence, fluidity, and the sublimity of electronically mediated change. The fountain's coloured spotlights and its pivoting jet-nozzles, which spray arcs of water in rhythmic pulses set to music, both create the spectacle and transfix the watching crowd as part of the surrounding "stage." The mall's commodities and the hyperbolic theatricality of the fountain, thus, are a good example of Charles Molesworth's comment that "the city is the stage where staging itself occurs. . . . the place where everything is both available and vanishing . . . the stage in which all prosceniums are unfolding and

disappearing" (13-14). This staging function of the city collaborates with its market function, according to Molesworth, in order to mediate desire through the fluctuations of the available products of the market and the ever-vanishing, ephemeral effects of the stage. Between the swiveling lights of the Aberdeen Mall fountain and the goods on sale in the shop windows, "desire is always endlessly doubled" (Molesworth 22-23), a condition that might be "the central philosophical 'truth' of urban experience" (23).

Looking Through a City of Glass

Visual transparency, cultural fusion, and the hi-tech illumination of Vancouver's streets for the American film industry are some of the features of contemporary Vancouver that are highlighted by Coupland in *City of Glass* (2000). Coupland, renowned for his satiric fictions of North American popular culture and generational neuroses, provides an alphabetical listing of the landmarks, institutions, viewpoints, and cultural idiosyncrasies that are the ingredients for a complex Vancouver sensibility. His colloquial style, nominal seriations of Vancouver-area objects and products, and quietly comic "West Coast" idioms characterize his comments, which are matched with black-and-white and colour photographs of scenes from Greater Vancouver.

The sky-blue cover of the book contains a photograph of a cluster of condominium towers that were built around False Creek: grey clouds and dark mountains loom in the background, while the spiky masts of docked sailboats remind the viewer of the water which lies out of the range of the camera lens. The tall condominium towers, the visual manifestations of the book's title, have been photographed from an angle that seems to exaggerate their height: they appear to be almost as high as the mountains and the clouds behind them. Coupland classifies the towers in a special entry that he titles "See-throughs," and he states that these symbolize "a New World breeziness, and a gentle desire for social transparency—a rejection of class structures and hierarchy" (126). At the same time, the history of the development of these towers reveals their global and even postcolonial origins, since they were "built as contingency crash pads for wealthier Hong Kong citizens who were bracing for the worst" in the "changeover of rule from England to China" (126). The towers contain contradictory elements of both a "rejection of class structures" and the visible vertigo-inducing power of an affluent social class that has dramatically changed the face of a city in an extremely short period of time. Coupland also notes how the lack of curtains on these buildings has made the area into a site of voyeurism: "A friend from the States told his

mother that Vancouver was a city of glass buildings and no curtains, and everybody gets to watch each other. A voyeur's paradise, so to speak" (126).[4]

Visibility and voyeurism are part of the fusion culture that is constantly highlighted by Coupland's entries. Amongst the fifty-two entries, nine of these deal with aspects of Asian cultural influence in Vancouver, some of these being the predictable "Dim Sum" and "Feng Shui," but others are the offbeat "Japanese Slackers" and "Couples." The "Couples" entry features a black-and-white photo of a visibly Asian female bride and a white male groom, cropped so that their eyes are not visible. But the notion that Vancouver is a city of malleable images, identities, and postmodern indeterminacy is also suggested in the second entry in the book, "Backlot North," which features a photograph of a woman who is about to enter a trailer on a film set. Coupland notes that "Vancouver is North America's third-largest film and TV production centre" (6) often as a stand-in for American cities, and "there's a bit of self-loathing as we let our identity be stolen so regularly" (6). The "City of Glass," thus, is also the city as a projection screen, the background against which American narratives of criminal investigation and paranormal suspense can be imposed in the service of other, non-Canadian views of city life.[5]

Coupland concludes *City of Glass* with an entry on "YVR," the international air travel code for the Vancouver Airport. The entry is accompanied by a slick black-and-white photograph of two gleaming chrome luggage carts in front of the large-paneled panes of glass beside an elevated boarding gate. In the distance is the gleaming curved body of a Japan Airlines jumbo jet. The luggage carts, the walkway, and plane orchestrate an appealing visual sequence of the orderly, clean, and uncomplicatedly transparent formalities and seemingly optimistic pleasures of modern travel (there are no lineups for security checks, immigration officers, or scenes of passport scrutiny here). The airport, in Coupland's words, offers the traveller a crash course in "Vancouver style," with its smooth river rock . . . glass, glass, glass," and a "stunning gathering of West Coast Native art" (151). Coupland eulogizes Vancouver's variety as "a fractal city—a city of no repeats"(151), and in the imaginary voice of the flight attendant who welcomes the arrivals or greets the departures, he concludes: "So if you're arriving, welcome, and if you're on your way out, return again soon, and just think of how good the rain was for your complexion and how green the world truly is" (151).

But these comfortable cultural fusions and leisurely imbibed vistas of rain and glass are not so cheerfully appreciated from the streets inhabited by the characters in the fictions that I will turn to next.

Madeleine Thien's *Simple Recipes*: The Street as Refuge

The Vancouver spaces of the seven stories in Thien's *Simple Recipes* are linked to the breakdown of domestic order and the confusion of private and public space: parental violence frequently forces vulnerable children to escape to the open spaces of the city streets, despite the risks. These stories explore parental insensitivity that is compounded by immigrant insecurity, or failures of adult imagination caused by diasporic exhaustion, and often viewed from the perspectives of the children: they witness the adult lack of charity, adult manic depression, alcoholism, brutality in disciplinary measures, and business failures. The special authority of the children who are witnesses to these adult failures is created through the quality of their own composure: they are dispassionate, clear-eyed recorders of their own suffering and the breakdown of the parent figures.

The climate of Vancouver, the domestic interior spaces, and the escape routes afforded by the streets play special roles in these stories. In the opening story, "Simple Recipes," the narrator poetically describes her connection to Vancouver's natural landscape, inscribing both the similarities and differences between herself and her immigrant father in terms of weather: "While I was born into the persistence of the Vancouver rain, my father was born in the wash of a monsoon country" (7). The abusive temper of the father is demonstrated when he beats his son with a bamboo pole for refusing to eat. When the daughter witnesses this violence, her initial love is transformed "to shame and grief"(18) for the violence has so traumatized her that she feels "loose, deranged, as if everything in the known world is ending right here" (16).

At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes how her father has carefully instructed her in the simple procedures for making rice and preparing fish. The opening domestic atmosphere depicts the comforting smells of cooking and the recollected pleasures of food and commensal ritual:

> In our house, the ceilings were yellowed with grease. Even the air was heavy with it. I remember that I loved the weight of it, the air was dense with the smell of countless meals cooked in a tiny kitchen, all those good smells jostling for space. (8)

This memory of the domestic space of the kitchen changes after the father beats his son. The narrator's rejection of her father is especially evident in her own treatment of her adult domestic space when she states, "In my apartments, I keep the walls scrubbed clean. I open the windows and turn the fan on whenever I prepare a meal" (9). A more obvious rejection of her father's "simple recipes" occurs when she declares that she never uses the rice cooker that he presented as a gift to her, as if its use would also revive memories of his violence.

Other stories in Thien's collection feature sudden travel as a necessary escape from marital discord, parental abuse, imagined infidelity, or alcoholism. The escape routes consist of the coastal highway in "Four Days from Oregon," Vancouver's Granville Street and Knight Street in "Alchemy," the Trans-Canada highway and the Confederation Bridge in "Dispatch," and the intersections and suburban sidewalks of Burnaby in "House." These "road stories" show how the breakdown of the interior domestic order has literally driven families and young people to seek refuge on the streets. The diasporic rootlessness that troubles the Asian families in the opening and closing stories ("Simple Recipes" and "A Map of the World") also grips the other, non-Asian families and focal characters.

In "Alchemy," the narrator Miriam walks through malls, parking lots, and "Granville Street at night with kids and adults panhandling, to a bus all lit up, down a quiet street" (57) to the home of her friend Paula. Traffic noises from Knight Street provide the symbolic ambience in this story, and the narrator's mother warns her that "this was the most dangerous street in the city" (69). But the dangers of this street seem to pale when Miriam learns that Paula is afraid of sleeping alone in her own house—she has been the victim of her father's sexual abuse, assaults that apparently began in the garage when he would roll her under his car on his mechanic's trolley.

In "Dispatch," a Vancouver couple's relationship is tragically damaged when a husband declares his love for a distant childhood friend in a letter, then unintentionally leaves his correspondence on the kitchen table where his wife, who is a writer, discovers it. The old-time friend addressed in the letter rejects the married man's advances, bluntly instructing him to return to his senses, but his relationship with his wife is now strained. One month later, this woman is killed on the Yellowhead Highway in Saskatchewan after making a long-distance Canadian tour that has begun with the crossing of the Confederation Bridge that joins Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. The story, in fact, begins with the image of a car speeding over the Confederation Bridge, as imagined by the wife. Employing the familiar but eerily disengaged second-person point of view ("Your husband has never been unfaithful to you. But only a few months ago, you found the letter he had written to Charlotte" [85]), Thien rhetorically scripts sympathy for the wife of the "unfaithful" husband, and we learn that she is a writer for whom "news is a staple food" (81), and who is writing a "book about glass, the millions of glass fishing floats that are traveling across the Pacific Ocean" (81). Here again, ironically, is that icon of reflection, transparency, and visibility,

and here the glass floats are linked to the theme of global currents and forces; they reinforce how seemingly small symbols or imagined events can have a significant impact on daily living. The husband's own randomly left textual "floats," the letters, wash into the domestic space and change it forever. And his wife, who watches the news and weaves together the deep history of "glass," understands that the witnesses of global events are transformed by the content of what they witness:

> There's a memory in your mind that you can't get rid of. The two of you in bed, lying next to one another like fish on the shore, watching images of Angola. Out on Oak Street there's the white noise of traffic, endlessly coming. Catastrophe. Your husband said that line again, "Too many cameras and not enough food," and the two of you watched a woman weep. (87)

In the final story in this collection, "A Map of the City," the narrator's father is an immigrant from Indonesia who tries to establish a furniture store, the "Bargain Mart" (163), on Hastings Street. His dream of business success is accompanied by the narrator's vivid fantasy of how the store will have the power to attract people from around the diverse communities of Vancouver. Her own fantasy specifically involves overcoming the barriers of space and time with a language of optimistic movement:

> From where we lived in Burnaby, in the spill of houses beneath the mountain, to Maple Ridge and Vancouver, people would flock to my father's store, carting away sofas on their shoulders, tables in their arms. My father standing at the front, hands on his hips, young. (164)

Unfortunately, the father's modest manner makes him a weak furniture salesman, and his forays into other business enterprises fare no better. Never at ease with travel in his new country, he also "was suspicious of Canadian highways, the very ease of crossing such a country" (180). Defeated by his business failures, he embarks on a reverse migration, returning to his native Indonesia and attempting to reclaim some of the consolations of home.

The failed travelling of the father is contrasted to the narrator who is eager to journey across the city. When they drive across Vancouver, from the downtown area, through Chinatown, and then to the suburbs, she confidently declares, "I was the only one of us born in Canada, and so I prided myself on knowing Vancouver better than my parents did" (178). And when the narrator, her father, and her boyfriend examine a "map of the world" to measure how the political boundaries have changed over time, each has their own area of familiarity and expertise, zones that create further divisions between them:

> My father knew Southeast Asia. Will knew the ancient cultures of art, the old foundations. . . . I loved Vancouver, the city wading out into the ocean, the border of mountains. There we are in my memory, each of us drawn to a different region . . . (213)

In Hana Wirth-Nesher's *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, the representation of the breakdown of the home is an important feature that distinguishes pre-modern and modern novels: "In the premodern novel . . . 'home' is a private enclave, a refuge from the intensely public arena of urban life. In the modern urban novel, however, 'home' itself is problematized, no longer a haven, no longer clearly demarcated" (19). In the stories of Madeleine Thien, Vancouver's homes are hardly havens, and more consolation is found on the road, or at least in travelling away from the sites of abuse, betrayal, and abandonment. Such problematizations of domestic space are imbued with even greater menace in the linked stories of Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls*, where refuge is found neither in the homes nor in the streets of Vancouver.

Nancy Lee's *Dead Girls*: The Street as Murderer

Thien's Vancouver streets are often a refuge from domestic violence and abuse, and her characters usually are successful survivors: even the narrator's father in "A Map of the City," who attempts suicide, survives. However, in Lee's collection death is more obviously unavoidable: the stories are also coincidentally linked by a brutal series of murders that luridly filled the front pages of Vancouver's newspapers and the screens of local televisions. The systematic stalking and killing of Vancouver area women, many homeless, vulnerable, and caught in cycles of drug addiction and prostitution, especially haunted the public imagination of Vancouver from 1990 to 2002. Before the recent conviction of the murderer Robert Pickton in 2007, evidence linking the victims to Pickton's now notorious Port Coquitlam pig farm was publicized in 2004 (Culbert A1).

In Nancy Lee's collection of stories, conceived before Pickton's arrest but while the public consciousness was held in thrall by regular reports of the missing women, the lives of most of the fictional female characters are linked to a middle-class suburban Vancouver bungalow with a large backyard where Lee's fictive serial killer, a retired dentist named Coombs, has buried the remains of his victims, many of them prostitutes. These eight stories show how the lives of eight different women, and their friends or families, are either directly or indirectly affected by the murderer: in the first story, "Associated Press," a female librarian is involved in the jury for the trial

of Coombs (4); in "Sally in Parts," a working-class father, whose daughter once required special dental surgery, expresses his disgust for the untrustworthiness of the "middle class" that the dentist-murderer represents (46); in "Valentines," a girl who has not yet turned fourteen is threatened with a knife by a boyfriend who imitates the actions of the killer as a perverse form of humour (81); in "Dead Girls," a drug-addict, whose location and fate on Vancouver's downtown streets are unknown, provokes endless anguish in her parents who are "addicted" to news of her possible discovery, and the televised "hopeful high school photos; dead girls everywhere" (99). In "East," two middle-aged, tough, trash-talking women, desperate for sexual attention yet resentful of male sexual innuendo, find the newspaper photo of the killer dentist "attractive" in a "sick" way (135); in "Young Love," a drug-addicted nurse, ironically volunteering to serve as a first-aid attendant for a high-school dance-marathon to support anti-drug awareness programs, and who has observed Coombs in his dental lab, is tastelessly interrogated by a group of high-school parents about his peculiar habits (166); and in "Rollie and Adele," a homeless teenager, who occasionally works the streets, slimly escapes death at the hands of Coombs when she refuses to enter his clinically "spotless" white car with "the dashboard polished to a high sheen" (193-94).

By linking this cast of characters to the monstrous homicidal pit in the suburban middle-class backyard of the dentist, Lee simultaneously reflects, explores, and intensifies the spatialization of public anxiety about the murder of women on the street. By not confining the killer to the seedy reaches of East Hastings alleyways or the waterfront dockyards, Lee suggests that neither the mean streets of the Eastside, nor the grassy yards of suburban bungalows, nor the pristine chamber of a dentist's office can be trusted. The Vancouver spaces that are arenas or stages for targeting, grooming, and seducing the victims are multiple, both high-end and low-end, and all ranges between: settings range from the glass-windowed condominium in "Associated Press," to the suburban living room in "Valentines," to the prison grounds of "East," to the Seven-Eleven parking lot in "Sisters." Complementing these sites, Lee's narrative pacing and point of view underline the methodical, incremental, and inexorable slide of different women into the grip of male surveillance, power, and violence.

The power of the transparent aerial view from the towering glass condominiums of Coupland's *City of Glass* is fully realized and complicated by the opening and closing stories of *Dead Girls*. In "Associated Press," the first story, a symbolic social allegory of the seduction and nearly fatal constriction

of public memory is personified by a love affair between a public librarian and political journalist, an affair that is displaced by the librarian's second affair with an electronics salesman. The journalist, a regular traveller who photographs scenes of warfare, poverty and political injustice, seems to overwhelm the librarian with "more social conscience than you can bear" (3). Lee employs the second-person narrative voice throughout this story, and several others, to construct a more urgent, imperative, and uncanny personal address, as "we," the readers, rhetorically become the audience who cannot bear this hyperactive "social conscience" whose "love letters are diatribes, global history lessons. He woos you with the blood of political unrest" (3). But the regular absence of the journalist and the librarian's suspicion that he has other lovers—she finds "his toiletry bag stuffed with condoms" (8)—compels her to enter an affair with the salesman, a fellow jury member at the trial of the serial killer, the dentist Coombs.

It is important to note the spatial trappings of the elements of seduction that are employed in "Associated Press," elements that can be allegorized as the capturing of "public memory," represented by the librarian, by the promise of omniscient repose, smooth material comforts, and the modernist fetishes of scenic surveillance, technology, and expensive glassware—again, the recurring Vancouver motifs of glassy "surfaces" are employed in this work:

> This boy, with his high-rise-view suite, black leather furniture and state-of-the-art home theatre system, is seducing you the old-fashioned way. South African Chardonnay in hand-blown glasses. Nina Simone in quadraphonic sound. You let your head loll back against the sofa, indulge in the ease of its smooth surface. (4)

After the initial seduction, the transformation of the librarian's consciousness is figured in her dreams of spatial power, an identification that begins to displace thoughts of her work in the library. Again, the motif of the glass surface is employed, but this time to figure a deepening narcissistic and self-congratulatory gaze:

> This boy's apartment is a refuge, a high glass tank that shields you from the world. While you work your days in the stacks, pulling books for inter-library loan, you dream of the view from his balcony, the dark water of the inlet, the city lights laid out like a jewelled carpet. You imagine your reflection in the sliding glass door, a version of yourself that is cool and smooth to the touch. (20)

As the librarian's relationship with the salesman deepens, she is drawn slowly into riskier forms of sex, including bondage and asphyxiative foreplay: "You lose your heartbeat in his rhythm, then feel its return, an

urgent throb in your neck and head as the belt tightens. . . . You wonder in a moment of swoon if you will die here, a willing captive in your own bed" (17). The relationship comes to an end, however, when the librarian becomes pregnant and has an abortion. Before undergoing the procedure, a news photo of a bombed helicopter reminds her of the social commitment of the journalist, and the librarian then decides to also end her relationship with the man who sleeps "with a clear mind, dreams in quadraphonic sound" (33). It is not clear whether she will reconcile her close relationship with the agent of social conscience, the journalist, but it is clear that this agent of the "library" has avoided both literal and symbolic strangulation by the electronics salesman.

The librarian, agent of public memory, is one of the few women who averts personal disaster. In *Dead Girls*, other women also take risks on the dark edges of the city but with disastrous consequences. In "East," Anna and Jemma cruise the highway in a mini-van, loading up on junk food and cigarettes, pathetically hitting on male teenage store clerks, stopping to smoke pot, narrowly avoiding self-induced combustion, and dissecting their lousy relationships with male losers. As the women weave their intoxicated way "East," they encounter a university student and strip-mall store clerk who explains that "everything bad is east":

> Think about it, what's at the western-most tip of the city? The university, right? . . . So, it's downhill from there. As you move east the population gets poorer, there's religious fanaticism, racial intolerance. . . . book bannings, drive-by shootings, murder suicides. That's why they put the prison out there. (149)

The eastern journey of Anna and Jemma dramatically climaxes in their own self-inflicted arrest in a rain-soaked and muddy field beside the prison. Ironically, they seal their own identification as "easterners" within the moral spatialization of Vancouver that they have unwittingly accepted when they drive up to the walled compound of the prison yard, a central site of social surveillance, punishment, and regulated space. In their irritation with the imagined male prisoners, who are "cocky, confident, at home in their dry place" (154), and projecting Jemma's anger at her husband, the two women begin throwing stones at the prison windows, finally breaking a pane of glass and setting off an alarm. When the police arrive and make sexist comments about Anna's "wet t-shirt" (157), Anna strikes one of them with a rock, and the two women are quickly thrown to the muddy ground and handcuffed, symbolically brought to the same point of captivity and moral censure as the men they have despised.

The final story in Lee's collection, "Sisters," treats the bleak teenage wasteland of Seven-Eleven store parking lots where naive Aboriginal girls, bored with high school and skipping classes, become the prey of devious twenty-something males who lure them into emotional dependency with cheap gifts of cigarettes, rides in cars, junk food, and raucous parties. Lee is adept at recreating the oily machinations of the male character, Kevin, and his succinct but ominous racializing and sexual targeting of Grace. Kevin's attempts to control Grace's body and sexuality fail, but he then succeeds more surprisingly with Grace's older and seemingly more mature sister, Nita. Nita eventually leaves her small town to live with Kevin in Vancouver, sporadically calls home, then disappears into some dark, unknown life on the streets. At the end of the story, Grace travels to Vancouver to find Nita, contacts the police, circulates her picture, and walks several times down Hastings Street, clutching a hand-drawn map of the city. Finding no leads, she is advised at a pawnshop to go to the top of the Harbour Centre tower, where she is told "You'll see it all from there" (282). This final phrase is the promise of urban Vancouver, the promise of Coupland's glass towers, and the promise of the view offered by the electronics salesman's apartment in "Associated Press"—omniscience and transparency. But Lee's stories are subversions of this promise of omniscience, a form of indeterminacy that feminist geographers like Deborah Parsons in *Streetwalking the Metropolis* see as particularly evident in women's experiences of the city (Parsons 7). Lee shows that the aerial views do not offer mastery and that, for those who have lost someone to the streets of Vancouver, its streets are the darkest form of labyrinth:

> At the observation level, she presses her face to the glass, holds her breath and stares at the city, serene and majestic under a perfect blue sky. Row after row of anonymous rooftops, the dense green patches of trees, the dark water of the inlet. She traces the streets below with her finger, the maze of roads traveling away, swimming and multiplying out to the horizon, stretching like ribbon to the ends of the earth. (283)

Kevin Chong's *Baroque-a-nova*: Satirizing Suburban Space

While the fictional representations of Vancouver by Thien and Lee map the perilous sites where families are broken, children must flee, women are abused, and real victims are buried in a tragic urban landscape, Chong's *Baroque-a-nova* uses comic deflation to show a rather different enclave of Greater Vancouver: his territory is the underwhelming retirement zone and bedroom community of Ladner, a suburb that is south of Richmond

and Vancouver, a semi-rural community that thousands of daily commuters pass through on Highway 17.

Ladner's stasis, marginality, and quietude are the environmental factors that provide the perfect inconspicuous cocoon for Chong's central characters: the half-Native slacker, cynic, and high school student Saul St. Pierre, the only kid in his high school "whose father had long hair and didn't hold a regular job"(1); and Ian St. Pierre, Saul's father, an ex-folk rock minor celebrity once married to Helena St. Pierre, a native woman whose ethereal voice and startling beauty catapulted their seventies-era band to pop-cult stardom. Helena's recent suicide in Thailand is the event that begins the novel, and contributes to the retro-revival of the St. Pierre's musical status, along with a German hip-hop band's timely sampling of their pretentiously titled song, "Bushmills Threnody" (more simply, "Whiskey Blues").

Chong's comic technique is stylistically represented in his use of hilarious dialogue, deadpan one-liners, and funny caricatures of music groupies, television reporters, and celebrity biographies. Beneath the hijinks, though, is a distrust of mass media— indeed, a distrust of the urban stages and markets described by Molesworth—and a resistance to an artificial celebrity culture. Moreover, an important part of Chong's arsenal of satirical devices is his use of the suburban setting of Ladner to satirize characters like Ian St. Pierre, who is mired in an empty life (both of his former wives left him), or Saul, who literally watches life pass without him.

Ian St. Pierre's home in Ladner epitomizes the haunt of the washed-up ex-celebrity who has resigned himself to cut-rate anonymity but is only dimly aware of the passage of time and his relationships with others. Ian lives alone and Chong's description of the colour of his house reinforces a sense of Ian's arrested development, as it is "painted a thoughtful, nursery-school blue . . . on a street lined with modest houses, bric-a-brac homes with gnomic statuary and fussy latticed gardens" (8). When his son Saul arrives for a visit, Saul notes that the kitchen has been "gutted, the floors ripped up, a piece of tarp covering a hole in the ceiling," and that his father has finally started to build the "glassed-in porch, a real yuppie add-on" that his second wife had requested many years ago when Ian and Jana were still a couple. Ian complains with an "avaricious refrain" that the project is costing him "Ten thousand dollars," but is unaware of how this effort will have no effect now on a wife who has already left him (9).

Ian's cultural limitations are also ironically symbolized in the description of his living room where an American and colonial "frontier" movie genre,

long outdated, takes up most of the space of the wall and crowds out another conventional symbol of western knowledge, a set of encyclopedias: "The carpet was thick and shaggy, patterned in a gray-black-blue marble swirl. A set of *World Book* encyclopedias and Dad's dubbed movie collection—all Westerns—took up an entire wall" (10). Such renovations-in-progress (but embarrassingly late) and tacky furnishings are certainly far removed from the suave and glossy interiors of the glass condominium suite of the salesman described in Nancy Lee's "Associated Press," but are consistent with Ian St. Pierre's style and even his music: the "genius" of the St. Pierre's band "lay in flimsy balladry, schmaltz, and found success in the seventies churning out folk rock, mid-tempo and sad, with occasional orchestral flourishes . . . . [and] honky electric piano and treacly arrangements, those dated wah-wahs and synths on the last two albums" (8).

There are no aerial views from glassy condominium towers in Chong's overall representation of Ladner, nor are there dingy alleyways lined with brick-walled rear entrances: Chong's Ladner is a mixed residential space of middle-class and more affluent districts where homes have separate suites for teenage children and three-car garages to keep their Range Rovers and Lexus vehicles (54). Characters are shown regularly hanging out at places like Pappalardi's, "a family restaurant popular with old people in sun hats and white belts, and servers scooting around in their mushroom-gravy brown uniforms" (64). The local high school, fast-food drive-throughs, grocery store parking lots, a bowling alley, waterslides, and a karaoke bar provide most of the settings for the social life of the high school students in the novel. The narrator's description of the central street of Ladner highlights the tidy attention to paint, small town renewal, and festive pride, with the past kept at bay through the containment of the "heritage museum"; all of the elements in his description bespeak of fastidious reconstruction, renovation, and renewal. These attempts at recovering a lost "urbanity," or the unity of the public space described earlier by Liam Kennedy, are characterized as superficial and they exert no meaningful effect on the social lives of the Ladnerites:

> Richard's rental car was parked at the end of the drag, in the lot of the IGA. Much pride was taken in our renewed downtown core. There was the main drag with its brick and limestone facades, the fire hydrants newly painted red with white trim, the Home Hardware outlet and the tiny elm trees fenced in black wrought iron. Banners hung from the streetlights: "Renewing our Past!" and "Free Weekend Parking!" and "Visit the Harbor Front Mall!" A fire station had been converted into the new heritage museum . . . . (66-67)

Unlike the tension-filled spaces featured by Thien and Lee, *Baroque-a-nova* features a banal suburban environment: the quiet townhouse complex where the protagonist-narrator lives, is "a collection of narrow salmon-colored buildings encircling a parking lot," where the occupants are "either retirees and divorcees" or "young professional couples": "people on their way up, or on their way down. There weren't any children here. No one, it seemed went to the trouble" (18). The enervated, "slacker" atmosphere is also captured in the narrator's self-deflating depiction of himself. Saul St. Pierre, who skips school at the beginning of the novel to protest the banning of a book that he has not even read, describes himself as "eighteen, slack-jawed and gangly":

> I dressed like a badass, a surly malcontent: I wore sixteen-holed combat boots, dark jeans, and a dull-green button up shirt, a tiny East German flag patched to its right upper sleeve. Yet I couldn't grow a moustache if the fate of nations rested upon it. I was counting away the seconds of my last year of high school . . . . (1)

Saul's apathy is emphasized by his lack of significant movement. He literally meanders between the townhouse of his step-mother, Jana, his father's house in the gnome-filled cul-de-sac, and the suite of his girlfriend Rose, who lives in an upscale area of Ladner, and has her own private entrance in the home of her parents. Chong also uses Highway 17, the freeway that channels traffic to the Vancouver Island ferries, as a contrastive motif in the life of Saul. Saul habitually (and immaturely) walks to the pedestrian overpass that overarches the freeway, and "spits" at selected passing cars. The scenes show Saul's own inertia, stuck as he is in the enclave of Ladner, while an assortment of high-end and even rusty, older vehicles, including a "junky Datsun," pass below him, all emphasizing that everyone is in motion except Saul:

> I stood over rumbling cars at the intersection: sedans pulling motorboats, green Celicas and baby-blue Accords driven by men in suits—sunglasses installed on their prescription eyewear and parking stubs collecting on their dashboards—trucks with cabs, a Volkswagen Passat driven by two women in saris, a BMW with a body board on its roof, a junky Datsun rusted the color of a nosebleed. (16)

Amidst the lethargy of the restaurants, cul-de-sacs, and tacky living rooms frequented by the St. Pierres, the most energized space is that of the high school. Though the students impose their own leisurely style on the school with their "summer peasant dresses and sandals, their cutoffs and Converse All-Stars, their Tevas, muscle-shirts, and pylon-orange track shorts" (89), one group does receive Saul's grudging admiration for their projection of power, ambition, and cool comportment. The Sikh students, who make up

"two-thirds of the high school" (17) are noted for their studiousness and ambition, and Saul's best friend is a Sikh named Navi, a brilliant organizer of social events and rallies, a "student photo artist, poet, musician, disruptive element"(92). Navi is an eccentric, and has a stronger friendship with Saul than with the other Sikh students; but the one unqualified positive space in Ladner's culture seems to be the inter-cultural harmony in the school, and as Saul remarks, despite the absurdities of the book-banning, "we casually approved miscegenation" (45).

Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*: Satirizing Future Space

Amongst the four contemporary Asian Canadian texts considered here, *Salt Fish Girl* is the most experimental, post-realist, and innovative vision of Vancouver as urban space. Her novel shuttles between the mythologized banks of the Chinese Yellow River in the pre-Shang dynasty, providing a creation myth of "bifurcated" (9) human creatures who are imbued with physical desire, then she vaults to a dystopic future Vancouver. Ironically re-named "Serendipity," the walled, meticulously ordered futuristic city is separated from the murky and burned-out shell of the older parts of Vancouver, much of which lies under water after the earthquake of "2017" (111). Not surprisingly, none of the great glass condominium towers that have marked Vancouver's modernist ascension have been left standing, yet this dystopic setting contains important elements of surveillance, staging, and commodity relations.

Salt Fish Girl weaves together myth, dystopic landscapes, and feminist subversions of patriarchal orders, and it also critiques the labour conditions of mass production sweatshops, while employing spatial tropes to allegorize current environmental, bio-ethical, and socio-political problems. The pungent odour of durian fruit—which has permeated the body of the protagonist, Miranda—is a key trope and represents how an organic, non-technologically modified essence can persist and thwart the power structures of Serendipity. Lai's dystopia explores the separation of organic nature from the genetically modified and technologically shaped cyborg beings who inhabit a wasted landscape. She constructs post-apocalyptic, speculative fiction landscapes that have much in common with such films as *Bladerunner* or *The Matrix*, or even the dramatic narratives of Japanese Anime films. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Coupland's city of glass, with its transparency, freedom, fusion, and mobility have been monstrously twisted into a landscape of illusion, entrapment, dangerous mutation, and enslavement.

The illusory nature of the world of Serendipity is ironically signalled by its very name: this is not a city that encourages improvisation, or leaves the discovery process to happy accidents, and the name itself is an illusory sham. This is a brutally regulated world, run by machines. Miranda's father, Stewart Ching, works in Serendipity as a tax collector, and he is required to wear a "business suit" (26) that transports his consciousness into a *Matrix*-like virtual reality. Consisting of a "dark mask" and a tightly-zippered body suit that makes him look like an "executioner"(26), the suit gives him special powers that can be observed by Miranda when she watches a special video screen that shows him in action:

> On the screen I saw a man striding across a burning landscape. Crumpled buildings and burnt-out trucks and tanks were scattered everywhere, all smouldering dully. Inside some, tongues of dying flame still flickered. There was the sound of hammers clanking and sirens blaring and people calling for help. (26)

The father's work as a tax collector here looks initially like a "marvelous adventure" in which he rescues a woman and a child (27) from monstrous razor-clawed crows, and he shoots lightening bolts from his eyes and bullets from his cyborg-machine body. But after he swallows a "thin stream of digits," he is dragged by special policemen to a dungeon where he is brutally beaten by truncheons, and forced to disgorge a "stream of numbers from his mouth" (28). The tax collection scenes, observed by a horrified Miranda through a video monitor show how the pristine surface of Serendipity conceals an ugly and exploitive level of violence, bodily harm, and psychological sacrifice. Lai's walled city reminds us of Lewis Mumford's observation that cities, despite their positive function, can serve as a "container of organized violence and a transmitter of war" (qtd. in Pike 21).

Not only does the future space of Vancouver envisioned by Lai replace transparency with clearly manipulative illusions, but the freedom and mobility promised by modernity and technology have created greater confinement. Lai's fictional spaces here are full of "dungeons" in bombed out streets (28), and these are extensions of past prisons occupied by the historical character, "Nu Wa," who is locked in terrible prisons where guards have hosed "our beds down with cold water, turned out the lights and left us in the dark for three days" (142). The subversive feminist hero Nu Wa is also hunted by men who hope to cage her in a "pig basket" (182); and Miranda is later placed in a plexiglass cage in the ocean so that the villainous Dr. Flowers can observe her reactions to his experiments. All of these settings show how the spaces of Serendipity, past and future, are carceral ones.

Miranda does, however, achieve some limited success in escaping from confinement. Stewart Ching loses his job as a tax collector after Miranda appropriates the business suit for her own use, and employs the special powers to both give away the tax digits to the monster crows and destroy the receiver general with a blast of fire. Her rebel act results in the family's banishment to the "unregulated zone" (81). Here, they open a grocery store, outside the decaying old downtown core, in a building that is over one hundred years old (81). But this site, symbolizing an unregulated, organic, and more individualistic space, does allow the family to prosper. Miranda's mother "laid in a rock garden, scattered with mosses and succulents, and a little pond with lilies and goldfish," and Miranda's brother "developed a side business in bicycle parts and continued to thrive" (84). The narrative of *Salt Fish Girl*, after this relocation, however, does not show an easy solution to the family's conditions, and while the odour of the pungent and embarrassing durian abates around Miranda, her own mother is killed by a falling crate of durian fruit (87).

Salt Fish Girl uses the images of the walled city, illusions, and entrapment to comment on current social and environmental problems endemic to the west coast and to the modern condition. Today in Vancouver we cope with daily evidence of environmental change wrought by human industry, unforeseeable consequences of genetic modifications of foods and animal life, the corporate control of offshore working conditions far removed from the control towers of corporate executives, and the ill-effects of computer-mediated forms of labour that sever the body from feeling, intuition, dialogue, and compassion. All of these social problems are inscribed in the juxtaposition of Serendipity and the Unregulated Zone, social problems that are not confined to fiction but are part of the urban realities that contemporary readers inhabit as well.

Epilogue

Lai's futuristic spaces critique the utopian promises of transparency that are represented in Coupland's *City of Glass* and in the Aberdeen Centre. Lai, like Thien, Lee and Chong, resists the exhilarating allure of the "urban sublime," that mixture of terror and wonder described by Christoph Den Tandt that overcomes a viewer when they "stand on the threshold of the city, beholding it as a mysterious totality" (xi), feeling a mix of "powerlessness and power fantasies," both "negative effects, no doubt, but also exhilaration" (x). The city of the unknowable, dreadful labyrinth is the dark side of postmodern global capitalism that, as Fredric Jameson contends (Den Tandt 7), establishes

illegible and inscrutable structures to control knowledge and maintain hierarchies: "the chief object of sublime dread in our urban societies is the labyrinthine information technology of post-World War II capitalism" (Jameson, paraphrased in Den Tandt 7).

By moving beyond the recuperative historical work of remapping the spaces of the older enclaves, Thien, Lee, Chong, and Lai have generated new perspectives on urban life that compel us to re-examine the ways in which urban spaces are controlled by pre-existing material, political, and economic orders. Thien's stories show how both Asian Canadian and non-Asian Canadian families are affected by difficult and often disastrous adjustments to new homes and the North American market. Lee's allegory of the seduction and near-strangulation of the agent of public memory by the agent of technology is a warning of the false promises of modern systems of surveillance, power, and totalization. Chong's satire undercuts the pretensions of celebrity culture and the urban sublime, yet affirms the possibility of a renewed public conscience through the activist work of the Sikh student Navi. *Salt Fish Girl* is a dramatic representation of the decline of urbanity, the rise of regimes of surveillance, and the extreme commodification and militarization of public spaces.

The books by Thien, Lee, Chong, and Lai imply, in different ways, a political critique of the regimes and conditions that have eroded positive forms of urbanity. At this level, they are partly literary allies of such urban revisionists as Sennett and Jacobs. At the same time, their preoccupations with built spaces, rooms, views, and roadways express the type of epistemological yearning that is described by Wirth-Nesher in *City Codes*. At a higher level of conceptual negotiation, these novelists are city dwellers who confront "the sensation of partial exclusion, of being an outsider, by mental reconstruction of areas to which he or she no longer has access, and also by inventing worlds to replace those that are inaccessible" (Wirth-Nesher 9):

> Cities promise plenitude, but deliver inaccessibility. . . . the urbanite . . . is faced with a never-ending series of partial visibilities, of gaps – figures framed in windows of highrises, crowds observed from those same windows, partly drawn blinds, taxis transporting strangers, noises from the other side of a wall, closed doors and vigilant doormen, streets on maps or around the bend but never traversed, hidden enclaves in adjacent neighbourhoods. Faced with these and unable or unwilling to ignore them, the city dweller inevitably reconstructs the inaccessible in his imagination. (Wirth-Nesher 8)

This urban epistemological social yearning, that desire to reconstruct "inaccessible" lives through the imagination, is manifested in the sympathies

that these writers construct for their characters and their conditions, sympathies that reach through the walls and windows of their worlds. As we read about the effects of diaspora, violence, or displacement, we will hopefully carry these lessons into our daily urban lives, wherever we might live, and perhaps even act to do our part in resisting the decline of urbanity or fostering some form of renewal. This is the hope offered, I believe, in the epistemological social yearning cultivated by the urban writer: that curiosity leads to sympathy, and sympathy will underwrite the actions that will lead to both imaginative alternatives and social change.

NOTES

1 Along with the representations of Vancouver in well-known Asian Canadian works such as *Obasan*, *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, and *The Jade Peony*, there is a rich mix of other Vancouver-centered fiction and poetry, and a brief sampling of some of the essential writing could include the social satires of Anglo-Canadian upper-middle class pretensions in Ethel Wilson's *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (1961); the intricate weavings of history, documentary, and voice in Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston* (1974) and *Ana Historic* (1988); the pathos-infused but playful meditations of George Bowering's *Kerrisdale Elegies* (1984); the laconic and lusty street semiotics of Michael Turner's *Kingsway* (1994); the indictment of poverty and addiction, and the will to rise above the needle-strewn alleys of Hastings and Main, in Bud Osborne's *Hundred Block Rock* (1999); the intricate culinary fusions of Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* (2001), or architectural ambitions in his *Story House* (2006); and the startling step-by-step precision of Meredith Quartermain's syntax of street names and "memorials to the missing" (36) in *Vancouver Walking* (2005). Evelyn Lau's first collection of fiction, the 1993 *Fresh Girls and Other Stories*, is also set in Vancouver and is preoccupied with sado-masochistic relationships between dominatrixes and their various clients: the story "Glass" features the narrator's self-lacerating and suicidal punching through of an apartment window, a gesture that expresses simultaneously her anger at her lover, her self-despair, and her contempt for a culture of surfaces.

2 On the afternoon of September 27, 2003, Joy Kogawa returned to the Vancouver childhood home on 1450 West 64th that had been confiscated and sold during the internment of Canadians of Japanese descent in 1942, and she gave a public reading on this site for the first time. Efforts by the Land Conservancy of British Columbia to preserve the home as a special heritage site and writer's refuge were finally successful in 2006, but a committee continues to solicit public support for the maintenance of the home. Further information can be found at the following website: *www.kogawahouse.com.* See Glenn Deer's recent photo-essay, "Revisiting Kogawa House."

3 Kay Anderson's seminal *Vancouver's Chinatown* provides a cogent analysis of the racialized history of this marginalization.

4 See Ethel Wilson's short story, "The Window," published in her 1961 collection *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories*. Wilson provides an early fictional treatment of voyeurism in Vancouver and its ironic reversal in a satiric story of an Englishman who buys a house

with an enormous window that overlooks Spanish Banks and English Bay. The reclusive Englishman, hoping to escape the social games and company so desired by his former English wife, finds himself the object of social admirers and the gaze of a thief who studies his movements through the window at night.

5 The popular television series about investigators of the paranormal, "The X-Files," was once filmed at various Vancouver locations.

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Kay. *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1991.

Balshaw, Maria and Liam Kennedy, eds. *Urban Space and Representation*. London: Pluto, 2000.

Boddy, Trevor. "East Meets West at Aberdeen." *The Vancouver Sun* 19 Jan. 2004: B1+.

Bowering, George. *Kerrisdale Elegies*. Toronto: Coach House, 1984.

Chong, Kevin. *Baroque-a-nova*. Toronto: Penguin, 2001.

Choy, Wayson. *The Jade Peony*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995.

Coupland, Douglas. *City of Glass*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2000.

Culbert, Lori. "Nine More Women Linked to Pickton Case, Total 31." *Vancouver Sun* 28 Jan. 2004: A1.

Deer, Glenn. "Revisiting Kogawa House." *Amerasia Journal* 33.2 (2007):126-132.

Den Tandt, Christoph. *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1998.

Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random, 1961.

Kennedy, Liam. *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000.

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. 1981. Markham, ON: Penguin, 1983.

Lai, Larissa. *Salt Fish Girl*. Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2002.

Lau, Evelyn. *Fresh Girls and Other Stories*. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993.

Lee, Nancy. *Dead Girls*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002.

Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.

Marlatt, Daphne. *Ana Historic*. Toronto: Coach House, 1988.

—. *Steveston*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974.

McCullough, Dave. "No Use Slamming Victims of Changing Times." *Richmond Review* [Richmond, BC] 27 Jan. 1996: 10.

Molesworth, Charles. "The City: Some Classical Moments." *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*. Ed. Mary Ann Caws. New York: Gordon, 1991. 13-23.

Ng, Maria Noelle. "Representing Chinatown: Dr. Fu-Manchu at the Disappearing Moon Cafe." *Canadian Literature* 163 (1999): 157-75.

Osborne, Bud. *Hundred Block Rock*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1999.

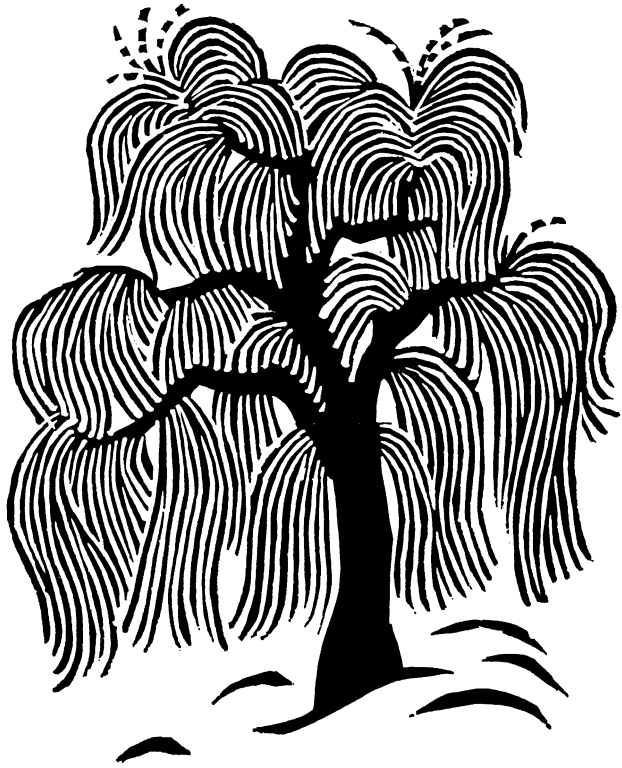
Parsons, Deborah. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Pike, Burton. *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1981.

Quartermain, Meredith. *Vancouver Walking*. Edmonton: NeWest, 2005.

Razack, Sherene, ed. *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002.

Sennett, Richard. *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*. New York: Knopf, 1990.
Taylor, Timothy. *Stanley Park*. Toronto: Knopf, 2001.
—. *Story House.* Toronto: Knopf, 2006.
Thien, Madeleine. *Simple Recipes*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2001.
Turner, Michael. *Kingsway*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp, 1995.
Wilson, Ethel. "The Window." In *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories*. Toronto: MacMillan, 1961.
Wirth-Nesher, Hana. *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.



Roy Miki

Global Drift
Thinking the Beyond of Identity Politics

> We live in a globalized world where imperialist and national structures, differences between the tangible and the intangible, the monumental and the everyday, and even the very notion of humanity are no longer the same as our characterizations of them twenty years ago.
> —Néstor García Canclini, "The State of War and the State of Hybridization" (38)

> History is not the dead and gone; it lives on in us in the way it shapes our thought and especially our thought about what is possible.
> —Daphne Marlatt, "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis" (125)

Lee Maracle's "Yin Chin," one of the stories in *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories* (1990), is dedicated to SKY Lee, author of the well-known novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990). The story is framed through a childhood memory of a Chinese grocer whose store was across the street from Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park in what is now, and was back then, a run-down neighbourhood. The narrator, identified as a writer, does not present her memory directly but explores its effects through a network of memories. The story is formed in her movement between specific events that are separate in historical time but held in her unfolding consciousness as simultaneous.

The narrator begins with her early student years at the University of British Columbia, typified in a moment in the cafeteria when she "instinctively"—and I place this adverb in scare quotes for now—turned away from a table of "Chinese" students who are imagined as "other" to her "Native" identity. The scene then shifts to another moment, again supposedly in the same cafeteria but years later. She is now seated, as a self-identified writer (and presumably not a "Native" student), around the table with many "Asian" writers, and she acknowledges a strong, shared consciousness of a collective struggle against racism and their disempowerment as writers.

Set against these two scenes are two other scenes. In her immediate present, the narrator-writer jumps out of her car on Vancouver's Powell Street. With some risk to her own physical safety, she defends an elderly Chinese woman being harassed by a Native male. While she stands on the sidewalk comforting this woman, her memory segues to the traumatic epicentre of this story: the moment when the "I" of her childhood, in the presence of her mother and the Chinese grocer, her mother's friend, had screamed out the English translation of the title, "Chinaman." The racialized discourse coming out of her mouth had been prompted by a playful gesture of a man outside the grocery store. The story probes the contours of this discourse. Where had it come from? How had it inhabited her childhood consciousness so habitually that she "instinctively" screamed "Chinaman" when she felt threatened? How, indeed, did the formation of her subjectivity, and thus her assumed identity as Native, depend on its relation to "Chinaman" as the other? When we think of going "beyond identity," we would do well to keep in mind the sometimes traumatic circumstances out of which identities arise. As points of coherence, identities are not only positions of power and stability, though they are often seen only in these terms. Instead, as Maracle's story suggests, they function as a provisional nexus in and through which social subjects address the boundaries of cultural and political inequities and their wounding consequences.

In the aftermath of 9/11, I have been haunted by the limits of language to ameliorate the alterations in the core of social and biological existence that only moments before had seemed so much more taken for granted, at least in Canadian terms. An event of cataclysmic proportions had split apart all the apparently organized structures of the social, economic, and cultural determinants that constituted our imagined lives. But to expose what? Nothing could be unequivocally identified. Instead, what appeared were the more amorphous contours of global powers and machinations—economic, political, ideological, and military—suddenly mobilized around a new social script in the United States and, by association, in Canada: a script called "terrorism." The word, as a heavily burdened and moving signifier without a locatable signified, announced in the everyday lives of Canadians the arrival of an elsewhere, a there that became a here.

It was this crisis that set in motion a global drift that initially manifested itself in an emergent inability to tell the time. Not, of course, the regulated time of calendars, bank machines, punch clocks, and so on, but the

substance of the unfolding time we simultaneously inhabit and produce as social and biological beings. I want to emphasize the "social" to remind ourselves that as social beings we seek to locate ourselves through the diverse media of the equally diverse discourses that shape the boundaries of what is representable and, of equal importance, what is not. When our taken-for-granted representations are destabilized or otherwise disordered, as they are at present, attempts to tell the time expose the real possibility that the "foreign" or "alien" elements they can no longer contain may harbour unpredictable and even threatening global signifiers and that these signifiers do not move in accordance with recognized local and national times. This condition of a post-9/11 discourse has brought into circulation the immediacy of "terrorist cells," "biological warfare," and "anthrax," terms that are not "elsewhere" but are "inside" the public spaces that on September 10 seemed known and manageable. In Canadian cultural spheres, the coming of this new time has brought in its wake the signs of trauma, for some or for many, as the local and national formations once mediating the global lose their bearings and are seemingly set adrift.

To speak to—or in resistance to—this moment of transformation is to tempt a back draft of contradictory, uncertain, and even volatile discourses. For me—and I speak in the awareness that this "I" and presumably other "I's" have now been thoroughly diminished—the post-9/11 era has sped up a crisis of time in Canada that has been apparent but not openly recognized during the past decade and more. There is some urgency here, then, to approach global drift not so much from the perspective of its fields of interaction beyond or external to the Canadian nation but through a remembering of the recent past of our cultural history. Such a venture requires a rethinking of the historical trajectory that has shaped the Cold War era of the postwar years, up to the late 1980s, a time that frames the changing social conditions of my own subject formation and memories.

What emerged in the 1950s, as the Canadian nation-state sought to manage and shape the imagined horizons of its citizenry around more centralist forms of management, was the appropriation of culture to produce new forms of a national identity—in the creation of the Canada Council in 1957, for instance. The discourse of being "Canadian," then, began to distinguish the boundary demarking "us" from the US to the south and from the former centre of the British Empire an ocean away, though the cultural and ideological ties to British values would remain strong in English Canada,

creating what many of us kids experienced as the era of heavy anglocentrism. Yet by the 1970s—and this is, significantly, in contrast to the escalating coherence of cultural forms that were forging a Québécois identity—policy makers of English Canada had to manage an increasingly unruly mix of new immigrants and non-Anglo citizens who were making visible a whole slew of cultures out of sync with each other.

A detailed account of this history is beyond the scope of this essay.[1] Such an account would have to involve an examination of various intersecting social movements, inaugurated, for instance, on the basis of gender, ethnicity, aboriginality, sexuality, and race, and they would have to be studied in relation to governmental policies and reactions, institutional and cultural representations, critical and cultural theories incorporated in feminism, minority discourses, critical race studies, and historiography, and especially new cultural production from previously unrepresented groups. What I would like to do is provide a much more modest sketch of recent social and cultural history that I hope will bring us back to the present.

By the late 1960s, in the surge of nationalism during Canada's 1967 centennial year—even at this heightened moment—there were already cracks in the nation's centralist identity. On the one side lay the threat of the cultural sovereignty movement in Quebec, and on the other were the large and vocal non–English Canadian groups being designated as the "others"—the "ethnics"—the European-origin groups such as Ukrainian, German, and Italian Canadians. And, of course, to the south lay the omnipresent shadows of US cultural imperialism, always itching to move its wares across the border. Seen in this social framework, the multiculturalism policy of 1971, itself a discursive act, can be read in political terms—that it was the federal government's response to the heterogeneous cultural identities threatening the coherence of the nation-state and the internal fabric of its historical tactics of control. These tactics had included the racialization of nonwhites, the administrative control of land and First Nations collectives, and the deployment of British imperialist cultural values. The Official Languages Act (1969), which established Canada as a bilingual country and mediated the cultural dissension of French Canadians, had to be balanced with something—though not with the status of an act—for those who were actually designated "the others," whose voices could no longer be ignored.

Always unpredictable, however, are the modes in which policies and the effects they produce will be received and even rescripted by social subjects who, in contrast to the abstract nature of the policies, inhabit the local sites

of the nation that are marked by differences, conflicts, and contradictions. The 1970s and early 1980s, especially in large urban centres, saw the emergence of alternative groups, variously self-identified, whose "voices" resisted and often refused the dominant cultural forms of the Canadian nation by making visible the covered-over or elided histories in the nation's past. Soon we were no longer in search of "a" or "the" Canadian identity, the predominant social quest of the 1960s. Now we had identities in the plural that were seen as differentiated, in relations of inequality, and hierarchically positioned according to the three critical categories that gained prominence in cultural work: gender, race, and class. The arrival of this version of identity politics opened up new discourses and cultural productions that explored the implications of hyphenated identities.

But the social praxis it generated—exciting to many—prompted the reactionary voices of those who lamented the loss of a former "Canada" that, in their eyes, was more stable, more homogeneous, more connected to representations of colonial legacies. The "Canada" invoked in their discontent vis-à-vis voices of previously accommodating "minorities" could be traced to an earlier nation formation—one that had its deeper historical roots in an identity that one political theorist, Jan Penrose, has captured in the following succinct description: "The hegemonic ideal prescribed that, in customs, Canadians would be British; they would speak the English language (though some French had to be tolerated, temporarily at least); they would hold to the Christian faith (preferably Protestant); and, incontrovertibly, they would be white" (27). By the 1980s, the cultural values aligned with this origin—which included, to a large extent, the adjustments necessary to assimilate its European-derived citizens—could no longer account for the increasingly heterogeneous and incoherent cultural and demographic conditions of the nation following the switch in 1967 to a "point system" in Canada's immigration policy. What appeared to be radical disruptions for some, then, for others was the inevitable outcome of the structures of unequal "differences" built into the historical boundaries of the Canadian nation-state.

I want to expand on the more immediate impact of this clash at the crossroads, if the tensions can be so conceived, through the event of the Japanese Canadian redress movement, in which I participated directly during a ten-year period of my life. Even though the origins of redress as a concept can be traced back to the identity politics of the 1970s—Japanese Canadians even celebrated their centennial in 1977—it wasn't until the 1980s,

the period singled out above, that Redress (which then took on a capital R) became a full-fledged collective movement. Of course, for Japanese Canadians this mobilization of consciousness was instrumental in leading them to redefine the uprooting of the 1940s as "democracy betrayed"—the title of their brief to the federal government in 1984—and as a consequence to seek "redress" for the injustices.[2]

I have written on the redress movement in *Justice in Our Time* (coauthored with Cassandra Kobayashi) and in *Redress*, but here I want to propose that its eventual resolution in the Redress Agreement reached with the federal government on 22 September 1988 was woven into the cultural and "race" politics—the so-called politics of representation—that marked the cultural and social tensions of the 1980s.[3] The softer forms of the multicultural sentiments in the 1970s, what critics of the policy see as the staging of its folkloric or "song and dance" phase, had transformed into an energized field of contested discourses, particularly as issues of social and cultural exclusions came to be asked more forcefully. These issues, fortunately but not accidentally for Japanese Canadians, were to intersect with a strategic moment in the public sphere when English Canadian liberalism, through the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, saw the repatriation of the constitution and the scripting of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The latter document would supposedly prevent an atrocity such as the uprooting and dispossession of Japanese Canadians during the 1940s from ever happening again. Japanese Canadian redress, then, found itself as a heightened sign at the crossroads of a nation that was simultaneously establishing its sovereignty and struggling to maintain a unity from being eroded from within by centrifugal forces. As a national issue, redress was drawn into—and produced in—the very contradictions that underwrote its narrative voice.

The fuller social, political, and historical dimensions of redress are difficult to unravel in the confines of this essay, but here let me offer a scenario that is relevant to this discussion of global drift. Understood as a human rights issue involving Canadian citizens whose rights were violated on the basis of racialization, the redress movement allowed Japanese Canadians to be seen as citizens who sought redress as a democratic act and a responsibility of citizenship. As "Japanese Canadians," however, as the instance of a state-identified "visible minority" (the official federal government term for nonwhites), the same citizens were validated in the discourse of a multicultural policy that depended on difference, not sameness. In this framework, the same "citizens" whose rights were violated became part of those "others"

that multicultural ideology sought to incorporate. Oscillating between these two contradictory yet complementary poles of Canadian liberalism, Japanese Canadians were conceived as "citizens" who were wronged and whose redress would redeem the racist past of the nation; at the same time, they were represented as a racialized and cultural minority whose identity had been denied and who, in the current enlightened state of multicultural Canada, were able to reclaim their ancestral connections to become bona fide members of the nation.

We are dealing here with what might be read as a sleight-of-hand situation—now we are normal "Canadians," now we are not—that makes the redress settlement both an occasion to celebrate for Japanese Canadians and a major symptom, or a kind of "fault line," of the large-scale changes to Canadian social and cultural spheres that would occur in its aftermath. As the temporal zone widens, Japanese Canadian redress as an event takes on ambivalent social and historical overtones. On the one hand, redress can be interpreted as a "gift" to the nation by Japanese Canadians; thus, in negotiating the settlement with the federal government, they presented the nation with their traumatic history and in that gesture helped to redeem a blemished Canadian history. On the other hand, in agreeing to the settlement, the nation could incorporate "Japanese Canadian redress" into its continuing efforts to manage the borders of a wavering national identity—with Quebec itself then threatening to separate from English Canada. The Free Trade Agreement, being debated at the time of the redress settlement in 1988, and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall a year later (an act that signalled one "end" of the Cold War era), were the larger symptoms of the rapidly ascending forces of globalization, most visible in the takeover of public discourses by the powerful corporate "voices" of information technologies, finance capitalism, cultural commodification, and so on. All of this has translated into a pattern of declines and substitutions within the nation-state, for instance, in the shift from the "citizen" as a member of a collective to an "individualism" aligned with capital accumulation; from a social contract that valorized health care and welfare to the discourse of "user fees"; from the belief in the social good to the neoliberal scramble to amass wealth and commodities through the global economy.

So, in one sense at least, as we witnessed the undoing of the "identity politics" formed in Canada during the crucial period from the early 1970s to the late 1980s, we would think that those who decried, often with a bitterness that overstated its case, the public anxieties invoked by this politics

should now be able to celebrate its demise. Strangely, there is no audible sigh of relief. On the contrary, in this post-9/11 time, the Canadian version of the politics of identity appears much more generative than the strident identity formations that became visible in the aftermath of 9/11, the extreme of which are the fundamentalisms incapable of going beyond their closed imaginary of "good" versus "evil." Indeed, in light of the global violence produced in the name of these fundamentalisms, the recent history of Canadian cultural formations may perhaps serve a pedagogical function in pointing toward self-critical discourses that can mediate the current time of war, terrorism, and political confrontations.

Today we seem to be witnessing the emergence of social upheavals that have yet to be named or whose names are themselves subject to constant change. It is as if a bundle of counterfeit bills has been inserted into our language so that we can no longer count on the stability of references and meanings. Here I am drawing on a metaphor invoked by Leslie Hall Pinder to critique the legal system's inability to comprehend the oral cultural traditions of First Nations. What words mean, how they mean, how they are heard, how they are articulated, what values they take on in specific circumstances—all these conditions become churning mills for misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and misidentifications.

The apprehension of social language as counterfeit helps to account for a pervasive anxiety that marks Canadian life. The anxiety moves like a network of barely visible seams that contain uncertainties and insecurities. The same news media that, prior to 9/11, heralded the wizardry of biotechnology and its associated industries, and projected its discoveries as a future soon to arrive, are now fixated on bioterrorism and the threat of viruses and microorganisms that can invisibly enter our bodies—the last stronghold of our existence—and possibly terminate large numbers of innocent lives. In this last instance, despite all the powers of governments and their military machinery, despite all the constitutions and agreements negotiated to forestall outright warfare, it may be our existence as living organisms that makes us vulnerable to what still remains unarticulated. In this last instance, the question of identity returns with new urgency.

The critical frameworks out of which I have attempted to think through, however provisionally, the crisis of time have been constituted on the assumption—here I'm following cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall—that identity as such should not be seen as something fixed that determines our

relations with others.[4] This would be evident in an assertion, for instance, that as a "Japanese Canadian" I necessarily relate to others in such and such a prescribed set of social and cultural codes. Rather, identity formations are always being interrupted by shifting spaces and times, forcing further negotiations that transform former states. This is why, more than ever, we need to think through the notion of identity as an always provisional formation—the effect of an ensemble of practices that shape all the variables making up our subjectivities (variables such as racialization, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, geographical location, family histories, language, memory, ability, and so on). Systems of power and the relations that those systems produce are not external to our subjectivities but constitute the flows and processes through which we both act and are acted upon.

This point was brought home to me through Linda Ohama's film *Obaachan's Garden* (2001). One point of urgency in the film is the search in Japan by filmmaker Ohama, her daughter, and her mother for the lost daughters of Ohama's grandmother, Asayo Murakami—lost to her before Asayo arrived in Canada in the mid-1920s. This fact is kept secret as Ohama begins filming what she thought would be a more-or-less conventional documentary biography. But midway through, Asayo, then over one hundred years old, reveals that she had been married before, had lost her two young daughters to a domineering mother-in-law who had also broken up her marriage, and had come to Canada to escape Japan. The film follows the search through records in Japan and the magical meeting with one of the daughters (the other had died a few years earlier), nearly eighty, who thought her mother had died long ago. The film represents the mother and daughter meeting after some seventy-five years of separation, as if in a dream landscape but actually in the reconstructed garden of Asayo's restored home in Steveston, British Columbia, where she and her family lived before they were uprooted during World War II.

By uncovering this secret or concealed history of a woman who came to Canada as a "picture bride"—women married on agreement to Japanese men in Canada, usually after the exchange of photos—the film both widens the lens of history and brings its diasporic conditions to bear on the minutest aspects of daily existence. All through her life and marriage, giving birth to many children, undergoing the ordeal of incarceration, and rebuilding her family after the war, Asayo had carried a photo of her two girls. She had held in her imagination a dream that one day she would be reunited with them, and her dream had come full circle with the remaining daughter.

What I found so compelling was that Ohama's film itself had become, through the unexpected disclosure of Asayo's secret, an effect of a global drift. As Asayo releases her secret, in that very gesture, the identity formation of Japanese Canadians, which had been formed linearly through its negotiations with the Canadian nation-state, was altered by the more malleable and spatially more encompassing signs of "Japan" in their history. We might say that the film performs an opening that releases Japanese Canadians from the need to be constantly vigilant in declaring themselves "Canadian" and not "Japanese." This had been one of the elements of their social survival during the Cold War when, as a racialized minority, they had to maintain an expected "model minority" role as loyal subjects of the Canadian nation-state.

From this perspective, the "Japanese Canadians" who were named in the redress settlement can be taken to prefigure the dramatic global shifts in cultural configurations that are transforming our everyday lives. In their successful struggle to redress the wartime injustices, they were bound up in a nation formation—that is, "identity politics" writ large—that had been historically constituted on the basis of a patriarchal, ethnocentric, raced, and classed system of assumptions. But in the unravelling of this version of the nation, the boundaries of its connective tissues can be seen, thereby allowing for a remembering that potentially opens new critical perspectives.

Many years ago the poet Earle Birney said that the Canadian nation's "lack of ghosts" had shaped the haunted history of its literature. In that phrase, Birney acknowledged the lack of a primary attachment to the lands appropriated to construct a settler society. The lack becomes the condition that forecloses the continuity of ancestral "ghosts" or "spirits" that inhere in those lands. His prognosis remains uncanny but perhaps not in the way he intended. Once we purposefully read against the grain of his provocative phrase, the "lack of ghosts," it becomes possible to invoke the "ghosts" inside the nation who are the others born out of the nation's lack and who come to constitute its exclusionary boundaries. These ghosts become the racialized "Asians," "Blacks," and "Indians" who have been produced in the discursive machinery that scripted the nation. As such, they have appeared in the national imaginary as figures in a haunting of its own making.[5] For this reason, it is crucial to recognize that the voices of those who brought to visibility the suppressed histories of the colonized in Canada were not anomalous; rather, they and the cultural works that announced

their presence signalled a push from within—toward democratic practices that might transform the differential relations of power that limited their subjectivities.

We circle back to the suspended moment in Lee Maracle's story. Returning to the childhood scene, the narrator locates her childhood self, a subject in the process of being formed, inside the grocery store. Her nose is pressed to the window as she intently looks outside. In her mind she stands on guard to protect herself and other Native children from the "Chinamen" who are waiting to abduct them. Somewhere in her consciousness, as she peers through the "large circle" cleared by her hand, she looks upon a space she has produced in relation to the racialized discourses she has already internalized in her "Indian" formation—"Don't wander off or the ol' Chinamen will get you and eat you" (70). This medium frames the limits of what she sees. The sudden appearance of the playful face on the other side thus provokes a reading that has been normalized for her but is a shameful misreading in her mother's eyes. The pall of silence descends on the inside of the grocery store when the word *Chinaman* comes out of her mouth as if she were—and she is at that moment—the vehicle of the fundamentalist mode of thought (i.e., "we" versus "they") that has produced the Canadian nation. In retrieving the scene of the trauma—that past—the story enacts a critical practice built on the recognition that identity formations are malleable and always open to negotiations—but dangerous when used as positions of power. Maracle implies as much in the title of the story, "Yin Chin," a term that SKY Lee in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* suggests is the Chinese/English version of the derogatory term "injun"(3). The reinscription and hence reappropriation of the racialized equivalent of "Chinaman" refuses the internalizing power of dominant discourses to construct borders between those who are themselves marked as others.

We might then argue, on the basis of Maracle's story—which is, indeed, a parable for our times—that the crisis of time can open a fuller consciousness of the creative unfolding of time in our lives. The challenge to remember the recent past need not be an empty academic exercise but can instead initiate a critical process that encourages us—indeed pressures us—to think back and forth simultaneously, thereby breaking the spell of knowledge constructs that situate the knower outside the conditions of the known. More urgent is the need to develop research methods, pedagogies, and ways of locating ourselves that recognize our subjectivities as a vast field of intersecting variables.

We also need to develop modes of understanding identity formations that can recognize these formations to be always complicit with the variables that act on us and through which we ourselves unfold in time to become social agents. It is in this unfolding that history as a mode of remembering returns as the time of becoming—a becoming in which the critical imagination, a powerful source of change and renewal, is able to conceive of alternative, more encompassing cultural formations that can only be dreamed in a time of crisis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this essay was given as a talk at Transculturalisms Canada, sponsored by the International Council for Canadian Studies and the Transculturalism Research Project, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 22 February 2002.

NOTES

1 For excellent studies that include aspects of this history, see Day; and Mackey.
2 See *Democracy Betrayed: The Case for Redress*, a brief issued by the National Association of Japanese Canadians in 1984.
3 A fuller exploration of this point appears in my recent study of the history of the redress movement; see Miki, *Redress*.
4 See, for instance, the essays by and about Stuart Hall in Morley and Chen.
5 For an excellent critical and theoretical discussion of this "haunting," see McFarlane.

WORKS CITED

Birney, Earle. "Can. Lit." *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English.* Ed. Donna Bennett and Russell Brown. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2002. 385–86.

Canclini, Néstor García. "The State of War and the State of Hybridization." *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall.* Ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie. London: Verso, 2000. 38–52.

Day, Richard J.F. *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000.

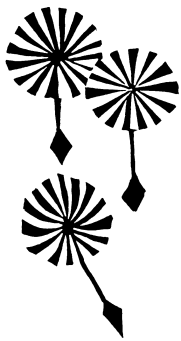
Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Cafe*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.

Mackey, Eva. *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002.

Maracle, Lee. "Yin Chin." *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1990. 65–72.

Marlatt, Daphne. "Self-Representation and Fictionalysis." *Readings from the Labyrinth.* Edmonton: NeWest, 1998. 122–27.

McFarlane, Scott Toguri. "The Haunt of Race: Canada's Multicultural Act, the Politics of Incorporation, and Writing Thru Race." *Fuse* 18.3 (1995): 18–31.
Miki, Roy. *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004.
Miki, Roy, and Cassandra Kobayashi. *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement.* Vancouver: Talonbooks; Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1991.
Morley, David, and Kuan-Hsing Chen, ed. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge, 1996.
National Association of Japanese Canadians. *Democracy Betrayed: The Case for Redress.* Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1984.
Obaachan's Garden. Film. Dir. Linda Ohama. National Film Board, 2001.
Penrose, Jan. "Construction, De(con)struction, and Reconstruction: The Impact of Globalization and Fragmentation on the Canadian Nation-State." *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 16 (1997): 15–49.
Pinder, Leslie Hall. "To the Fourth Wall." *Vancouver Forum: Old Powers, New Forces*. Ed. Max Wyman. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1992. 19–51.



Rita Wong

Decolonizasian

Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature

speak cree you're in canada now
speak siouan
speak salishan
— Rajinderpal S. Pal, "Collective Amnesia" (22)

At the minimal level, Aboriginal thought teaches that everyone and everything are part of a whole in which they are interdependent.
— Marie Battiste and Helen Semaganis, "First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship" (97)

Nestled intimately against the forces of citizenship that have propelled many an Asian Canadian subject to oversimplify herself or himself by declaring "I am Canadian" are other possible configurations of imagined community. What happens if we position indigenous people's struggles instead of normalized whiteness as the reference point through which we come to articulate our subjectivities? How would such a move radically transform our perceptions of the land on which we live? Scott McFarlane has suggested that in the Canada constructed through legislative mechanisms such as the Multiculturalism Act, "people of colour and First Nations people are figured outside the discourse as, for example, immigrants or nonpersons who become 'Canadian' through their relationship to whiteness, as opposed to 'the land'" (22). Oppositionality to whiteness—while logical in the face of racial oppression that was historically codified through instruments such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the War Measures Act, and the Continuous Voyage Provision[1]—still directs energy toward whiteness without necessarily unpacking the specific problematics of racialized subjects who have inherited the violence of colonization. In particular, the challenging relationships between subjects positioned as "Asian Canadian" and "indigenous" raise questions regarding immigrant complicity in the

colonization of land as well as the possibility of making alliances toward decolonization. Turning the lens in this direction, we find ourselves in the realm of the partial, the fragmented, the ruptured, the torn. It is in our brokenness that we come to know the effects of our violent histories as they continue to exert force upon the present. The very language in which I articulate these thoughts, English, is weighted with a colonial history particular to the land called Canada, in contrast to the languages that I might desire to circulate this essay in, be they Cree, Siouan, Salishan, or Cantonese. Through legislation such as the Indian Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), the Multiculturalism Act, and the Citizenship Act,[2] "we" have historically been managed, divided, and scripted into the Canadian nation-state. Today ostensible security measures such as the Anti-Terrorism Act that passed in the wake of September 11th have given the state more power to criminalize indigenous peoples, activists, and people of colour.[3] If, in a move toward both individual and collective survival, a subject decides to direct her allegiances toward indigenous struggles for decolonization and sovereignty, she might consider the values described by filmmaker Loretta Todd:

> Our concept of ownership evolved independent of European concepts of ownership and it persists today. Without the sense of private property that ascended with European culture, we evolved concepts of property that recognized the interdependence of communities, families and nations and favoured the guardianship of the earth, as opposed to its conquest. There was a sense of ownership, but not one that pre-empted the rights and privileges of others or the rights of the earth and the life that it sustained. ("Notes" 26)

Critical engagement with indigenous perspectives can be grounded in materially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices and models; the interdependency and land stewardship that Todd describes provide a focus for alliance building in the face of ongoing processes of racialization and class oppression.

Such alliance building must respect the values identified by thinkers such as Todd, so that the reaction against colonial frameworks is balanced with a generative vision of what one strives toward. Multiculturalism as government policy, while enabling in many regards, has also functioned to manage and contain difference. Although it is necessary to support multiculturalism in the face of white supremacist attacks, it is also important to understand the inadequacies of Canadian multiculturalism. As critics such as Himani Bannerji have pointed out, when multicultural policy was introduced in Canada in the 1970s,

> There were no strong multicultural demands on the part of third world immigrants themselves to force such a policy. The issues raised by them were about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language. In short, they were difficulties that are endemic to migration, and especially that of people coming in to low income jobs or with few assets. Immigrant demands were not then, or even now, primarily cultural, nor was multiculturalism initially their formulation of the solution to their problems. It began as a state or an official/institutional discourse, and it involved the translation of issues of social and economic injustice into issues of culture. . . . (44)

One of the challenges before contemporary cultural workers is to reappropriate "culture" in ways that lead the reader's gaze back to the social and economic injustices neglected and deflected when multiculturalism's lens becomes too narrow. Cultural labour has a role in fostering such a shift in values away from the economic violence and domination that our current neoliberal government normalizes through its submission to bodies such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, bodies that arguably operate against the interests of the majority of the Earth's population (human and otherwise). An analysis that integrates considerations of planetary survival with local indigenous struggles is consistent in the works of indigenous thinkers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Winona LaDuke, and Loretta Todd; this work signals a direction that those in Asian Canadian studies could benefit from. That is, where diasporic communities meet indigenous communities, we encounter a process of contact and invention that deserves more attention than it has so far received.

As a writer and critic who lives on the unceded Coast Salish territory otherwise known as Vancouver, I am faced with the question of how to speak to and acknowledge debts and interdependencies that most of us were trained to ignore. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that cultural representation does not repeat the violence that has already occurred. Yet, in those cases where silence also seems to be an equally and perhaps even more unsatisfying complicity with—and perpetuation of—this violence, tactics of troubled visibility provide an ethical line of engagement that holds promise. As the debates on cultural appropriation in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s remind us, cultural representation is a fraught process, and the best of intentions can nonetheless have terrible effects.[4] However, we can still proceed carefully, humbly, open to dialogue, and attentive to how material conditions and existent power relations can shape the dynamics of whose cultural labour is validated, whose is disregarded, and how. Lee Maracle's warning bears remembering:

> If you conjure a character based on your in-fort stereotypes and trash my world, that's bad writing—racist literature—and I will take you on for it. If I tell you a story and you write it down and collect royal coinage from this story, that's stealing—appropriation of culture. But if you imagine a character who is from my world, attempting to deconstruct the attitudes of yours, while you may not be stealing, you still leave yourself open to criticism unless you do it well. ("'Post-Colonial' Imagination" 15)

In attempting to decolonize and deconstruct oppressive systems, writers racialized as Asian cannot avoid making reference to the First Nations of this land; at the same time, given the inheritance of racist, loaded discourses that have operated to dehumanize, commodify, and romanticize First Nations people, an immense challenge presents itself in terms of how to disrupt and derail these dominant discourses. The process of "doing it well" requires not only technical competency, however one might determine that, but also an understanding of how one is embedded within power relations that must be carefully negotiated. Scanning the textual horizon for novels, stories, and plays that address the complicated relationships between those who have been racialized as "Asian" and those who have been racialized as "indigenous," I see some signs of life: SKY Lee's novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Tamai Kobayashi's short stories in *Exile and the Heart*, Marie Clements's play *Burning Vision*, and Lee Maracle's story "Yin Chin" form part of a growing body of texts that discursively explores the possible relations between those racialized as "Asian" and "indigenous" on that part of Turtle Island also known as Canada.[5]

I. Re-Viewing *Disappearing Moon Cafe*

> In my writing, I straddle the shifting locations of being Chinese, Canadian, contemporary, woman, and feminist of colour (etc). Insider and outsider to my own culture, gender, history and so on. I am able to take risks and transgress the boundaries (of these social constructs) each category imposes.
>
> In *Disappearing Moon Cafe* (1990), the reader's gaze is never fixed due to these multiple locations, and travels through time and space. This is also a strategy of disrupting the conventional way texts are written and read so that the reader can be made more aware of her subject position. This awareness subverts the tendency toward passive consumption and the colonizing gaze.
>
> — SKY Lee, "*Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada" (12–13)

As many readers have noted, *Disappearing Moon Cafe* opens and closes with the relationship between Wong Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, and Kelora, a half-Native, half-Chinese woman of the Shi'atko clan. In so doing, it posits

a potential alliance between two people who were both excluded by the Canadian nation in historically specific, racialized, gendered, and classed ways.[6] Gwei Chang's abandonment and betrayal of Kelora takes on both personal and social significance when we consider the role of cheap Chinese labour in facilitating the appropriation of indigenous land by the Canadian government. The labour of Chinese railway workers supported not only their families but also a Canadian nation-building project based on the exclusion and exploitation of both First Nations and people of colour. The dynamite-blasting process of railway construction entailed both an immense human cost and environmental disfigurement: "[Gwei Chang] imagined the mountain shuddering, roaring out in pain, demanding human sacrifice for this profanity. And the real culprits held out blood-spattered chinamen in front of them like a protective talisman" (12–13). The "real culprits," the captains of industry behind the railway, remain outside the novel's realm, despite the impact of their decisions on both characters and readers. Gwei Chang's effort to retrieve the bones of the dead Chinese labourers depends greatly on Kelora's support in navigating unfamiliar land, for it is Kelora who leads Gwei Chang to safety when he is starving, "as if the barren wasteland around him had magically opened and allowed him admittance" (4). Where the Canadian nation would have refused a Chinese man entrance as a citizen with full rights, Kelora's act allows Gwei Chang admittance into her community as an equal. Kelora makes possible a relationship to the land that is not codified into the property laws of the nation: "she taught him to love the same mother earth and to see her sloping curves in the mountains. He forgot that he had once thought of them as barriers" (14–15). Having interviewed mixed-race families, Lee translates her research into a fictional frame that asserts what has been left out of official Canadian history. Examples of relationships between First Nations people and Chinese people, dating back at least to 1788,[7] are often marginalized in official historical narratives that privilege nation building premised on white dominance. The potential represented in the relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora is not only based on desire and emotional connection but also shaped by the economic and political forces on their lives and by a respect for the land. Living with Kelora's people, Gwei Chang learns to appreciate the Native lifestyle before he rejects it for fear of poverty:

> The sight of all this good food being hauled in got Gwei Chang very excited. It made him feel good to learn the indian ways, because they made him think that he might never starve like a chinaman again.

> But Kelora told him that even with this abundance, her people faced famine later in the winter. . . .
>
> Gwei Chang had often looked into the sallow face of famine. He could see how famine was the one link that Kelora and he had in common, but for that instant, it made him recoil from her as surely as if he had touched a beggar's squalid sore. . . .
>
> In the next instant, he looked at Kelora, and saw animal. (234)

Although famine is the one link that they *share,* the fear of this common threat is what drives Gwei Chang back to China to take a Chinese wife. This fear also drives him to dehumanize Kelora, to see her as "animal," in a way that echoes the first time they met, when he assumed that she was savage. Her elegant rebuke at that time, that "he has no manners" (3), surprises him in a way that makes him feel "uncivilized, uncouth; the very qualities he had assigned so thoughtlessly to her" (3-4). It is symptomatic of dominant power relations that Gwei Chang functions within what might be termed a sino-centric worldview, one that eventually allows him upward mobility within the confines of the ethnic enclave of Chinatown. His trajectory can be read as a negotiation of survival tactics that drive an agent to form long-term relations of perceived racial cohesion rather than adhesion, with the attendant enabling and disabling limits of such moves.

In the context of Canada as a nation-state that historically excluded immigrants racialized as "nonwhite," the importance of organizing formations of Chinese community to offer assistance against the state's restrictions was compelling. In Lee's novel, it is clear that the closeness of the Chinese community formed in part as a survival mechanism against white supremacist hostility in everything from detaining new arrivals to racist legislation. At the same time, the limits and inadequacies of these formations are also signalled by the unhappiness of Gwei Chang at the end of the novel. As he says to Kelora, "I've lived a miserable life, grieving for your loss, bitterly paying" (235). His material wealth accumulated later in his life does not bring with it emotional fulfilment in that his marriage to Mui Lan is an unhappy one and his son Ting An rejects him once he realizes their biological relationship The novel leaves us wondering what would have happened had Gwei Chang challenged ethnic containment and asserted solidarity with Kelora and her community. His failure to sustain such an alliance gestures not only to individual limits but also to the ways in which oppressive social norms and legislative measures—such as the Immigration Act and the Indian Act—have historically scripted and enforced divisions between First Nations and Asian people in Canada. A difficult question arises: how does one assess the ways in which Chinese people have been implicated, albeit inadvertently, in their

own ethnic containment within a Canadian nation-state that is itself a violent imposition upon indigenous land?

If, as Lee suggests at the beginning of this section, a subject is always multiply situated in terms of culture, gender, politics, and class, more comprehensive ways to articulate and understand such evolving, complicated, and often contradictory subject positions remain to be circulated more widely. One way of reading class mobility for immigrants within the Canadian nation-state has been through the filter of racialized categories rather than through the lens of immigrants' relations to indigenous land. In Lee's novel, such categories are constantly troubled and unravelled. Gwei Chang occupies multiple class positions over the course of the novel, from a starving worker in the beginning to a bourgeois patriarch by the end. His upward mobility in the confines of Chinatown arguably depends on his rejection of Kelora and his disavowal of their mixed-race son, Ting An, whom almost everyone in Chinatown knows as an orphan benefiting from Gwei Chang's patronage rather than as his first son. Kelora's own economic status is complicated; Kelora has "no rank" in her community, although her mother's family is "very wealthy, old and well-respected," and her abilities are clearly valued, including her knowledge of how to survive based on the land's natural bounty. She arguably unsettles and disrupts hierarchies of class and race, as does her son Ting An. Within the heart of the novel's ostensibly "Chinese" space, there is racial and cultural hybridity; though Ting An is accepted as "Chinese," he is also part Native, as are his descendants, including the novel's narrator, Kae. As Kae points out, "People used to say that [Ting An] was half-indian—his mother a savage. Before, Fong Mei used to search his face for traces of this, but she only saw a chiselled face, gracefully masculine, like a chinese from the north" (54). The problematic, dominant social scripts of racist othering ("savage") and assimilation ("like a chinese from the north") are inadequate to address the possibilities of mixed-race identifications. Ting An, in a sense the physical product of Gwei Chang and Kelora's relationship, is invited to live upriver with "a group of nlaka'pamux'sin people" but refuses because of his intuitive attachment to Gwei Chang (115). While Ting An is socially pulled into what turns out to be an unhappy life, the untaken alternatives that he has access to raise questions about what a shift in priorities would achieve. Such undeveloped alliances constitute the silences and empty centres upon which contemporary national formations continue to depend.

One could argue that, in *Disappearing Moon Café*, it is the hyper-conspicuous absence of a Native woman, Kelora, that in a sense makes

possible the novel's plot. First, this absence makes visible the uneven relations the "Asian" characters have with the Native peoples of this land, gestures toward the complicated histories between First Nations and Chinese people, and acknowledges the legacy of interracial relationships that have often been marginalized. Second, one might ask what kind of shift in social relations it would require to move from absence to presence(s). What is an ethical way to proceed on this difficult terrain? The figure of the writer, Kae, negotiates a complicated relation of proximity and distance to the figure of a Native woman. Historical distancing operates in the recognition of Kelora as an ancestor within the family tree at the beginning of *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, although this distance is then destabilized and undermined by Kae's retellings of family secrets as well as by Kelora's and Gwei Chang's interactions at the beginning and the end of the novel, putting the onus on the reader to imagine and build a present interracial alliance as compelling as the scene that closes the novel, "the heavy chant of the storyteller turning to mist" (237) in Gwei Chang's head. The question remains: what kinds of changes would enable such moments of looking "backward" to become a looking forward into First Nations and Asian relationships?

It is possible and indeed desirable to read *Disappearing Moon Cafe* into the context of a need to transform the social relations we currently know. The novel makes visible the importance of alliances along cross-racial, feminist, and anticapitalist lines, even though some of these alliances may not be directly achieved or successful in the novel's plot per se. The onus then shifts to the reader, for whom the mourning of lost possibilities frames the generations of turmoil represented in the novel's body. Within the novel, relations between Chinese and First Nations women are an uncharted territory. Although Kelora and Mui Lan are in a sense linked because of their relations to Gwei Chang, they never meet each other. At one point, Fong Mei states, "This was a land of fresh starts; I could have lived in the mountains like an indian woman legend" (188), suggesting that stories of Native women may be symbolic of freedom to her. It is more on the edges, the "outsides," of the novel that the potential of interracial relations is gestured to; on the dust jacket of the book's cover, blurbs by writers such as Joy Harjo and Audre Lorde signal a discursive community of politicized writers whose work has encouraged and inspired activists across North America. This political alignment also presents an obstruction to readings that would evacuate the novel of the resistant sensibilities out of which it partially arose.

Reading *Disappearing Moon Cafe* from this perspective only signals how much more there remains to do if cultural workers are to play a role in supporting alliance building to work toward decolonization. These temporary but strong affective bonds suggest that promise exists, even though it has not been fulfilled. Affective bonds do not necessarily translate into political solidarity, but effective political solidarity is also less likely to happen without a deeply felt understanding of each other's perspectives and the ways in which oppression is both common and different for people racialized as "First Nations" and "Asian." Fiction offers a speculative space and challenges us to imagine the ways in which dialogue and interaction could spark deeper understanding of our interrelatedness.

II. *Exile and the Heart*

In an interview with Larissa Lai, Tamai Kobayashi states, "History trickles down into my work, sometimes it pours" (124). Questioning what constitutes "tradition," Kobayashi rejects conventional assumptions that position "the East" as the site of oppressed, submissive women and "the West" as somehow enlightened. She suggests that her "traditions" may be found in the writers who have influenced her, including Audre Lorde, Hisaye Yamamoto, Joy Harjo, James Tiptree Jr., Wilfred Owen, Octavia Butler, Rampo, and Eduardo Galeano. With regard to Harjo, Kobayashi notes that "the sheer beauty and hope of Joy Harjo's *She Had Some Horses*, how her experiences as a First Nations woman were reflected in her words, also had great impact" (122). As a politically active writer (a founding member of ALOT, Asian Lesbians of Toronto, among many other things), Kobayashi is conscious of how important it is to investigate interracial relationships that do not centre on whiteness:

> Race defines so much of you. I try to reveal this in my work, the quiet moments. Everything is contaminated by the way race has been constructed through history—this construction of people of colour by white people, by the structure of whiteness-as-the-ideal, whiteness-as-the-norm. I mean, think of how many times white people have been at the centre of stories, even if it's not supposed to be about them? *Come to the Paradise* was supposed to be about the internment but Dennis Quaid was the star; *Dances With Wolves* starred Kevin Costner; *Cry Freedom*, a film about Steven Biko, starred Kevin Kline. (124–25)

In her book of stories, *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction*, Kobayashi presents an everyday world where the interactions of Asian lesbians with other lesbians quietly take centre stage, deposing and dislocating whiteness, which still exerts pressure on the characters as a force but which is not the gaze through which perceptions come to form.

The relationship between Kathy Nakashima and Jan Lalonde in the story "Wind," which opens *Exile and the Heart*, draws together a Japanese Canadian woman who burns her family's redress letter of apology from Gerry Weiner and Brian Mulroney and a Métis woman with a "handful of Blackfoot and fistful of Cree" studying *Land Claims in Canadian Law* (13–14). The lovers' road trip through the Albertan landscape takes them to the Old Man Dam, which the government built despite the protests of the Peigan: "They have passed through Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, place names of Cypress Hills, Battleford and Buffalo Jump. What must it be like for her, Kathy wonders, these signposts, this road, that coulee, this river" (12). The narration does not give the reader access to what those place names signify for Jan Lalonde, but we do find out that this place was once hell for her (16). Portrayed as a blight on the land that will be useless in ten years' time because of silt buildup (15), the dam marks an instance of colonial violence on indigenous land.

While this awareness of colonial violation exists throughout the story, it does not allow the lovers' interactions to be defined or reduced to only reacting against colonization. The two characters continue to swim, to show each other affection, to go on relating to one another in subtle ways that affirm their connection. The poetic contemplativeness of the story ends abruptly with the violence of a gas station attendant who yells at Jan, "Get out of here and take your fucking squaw with you!" (16). In the face of the racist ignorance that would equate "squaw" with "Jap," the two women are positioned together, in rage against a common enemy. However, the characters do not stay fixed or united in reaction; their lives continue, and in a later story entitled "A Night at the Edge of the World" Kathy and Jan have broken up. Nonetheless, friendship remains, as Kathy and her current partner Gen host a farewell party for Jan, who is moving to British Columbia to look for her younger sister. Jan reappears in a later story, "Driftwood," seen from a distance in Oppenheimer Park by Kathy's mother, who observes a group of First Nations women tying memorial ribbons for fifteen Native women murdered in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (96). The possibility of relations that sustain and support one another without being tied to codified possession or ownership norms underlies Kobayashi's short, quietly intense stories, which evoke sensibilities and ways of thinking through a complicated, politically engaged, and emotionally deep lesbian-of-colour community. Here relationships are temporal, geographically situated on (de)colonized land, and open to negotiation and change.

III. *Burning Vision*

Awarded the 2004 Japan-Canada Literary Award, Marie Clements's play *Burning Vision* explores powerful connections between "Asian" and "First Nations" characters by following the trail of uranium as it was mined from Dene land and eventually detonated in atomic bombs over Japan.[8] Clements writes as a First Nations woman responding to the history of transnational economic relations that contributed to the devastation marking the end of World War II:

> In the 1940's uranium was mined from the Echo Bay Mine situated on the northeast corner of the Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories. The land it was mined from was on the Sahtu Dene territory. As a descendant of the Fort Norman Sahtu Dene Metis, [I have] always [found it] strange that the uranium that was used to build the first atomic bomb that was dropped on the Japanese in 1945 came from the land of my bones. . . . In the 1990's Dene elders flew to Japan and met with Japanese survivors of the bombing. The story I'd like to trace is the uranium rock that landed inside us. The physical connection of land and features, of visions and machinery, of two worlds meeting over and under land and the burning noise that took the worlds' breath away. (qtd. in Greenaway 8)

In *Burning Vision*, narrative is in a sense torn apart and sundered by the nuclear detonations that begin and end the play, leaving shreds of interconnections and resonances between characters as diverse as Tokyo Rose,[9] a Native widow whose partner dies from mining uranium, a Japanese grandmother, a white woman poisoned from painting radium watch dials, a Dene elder who prophesied atomic destruction, the miners who "discovered" uranium on Dene land, and many others. As multiple worlds collide in dramatic tension and evocative imagery, the play's refusal of linear resolution speaks to the ongoing legacy of violence perpetuated through a process of colonization that encodes theft and violation as "discovery."

A number of relationships in the play enact moments of reciprocity and solidarity between racialized bodies. For instance, *Burning Vision* proposes a relationship between a Metis woman named Rose and a Japanese man named Koji that seems to be geographically impossible (given that he is frozen in Japan in the moment before the bomb drops) but is made spiritually possible through the chain of uranium that brings them together (and through the transformation and hope symbolized in the cherry tree where he waits for his grandmother). When Rose and the Widow talk about Koji, the Widow says of him, "Indian? He looks sorta like an Indian but there's something different going on."[10] Rose's response is that "He's Indian enough from the other side" (105), gesturing to the ways in which both the Japanese

and the Indians have been slotted into the role of "the enemy." However, it is not being made the target of a common enemy that defines their relationship but what they produce out of these circumstances. In the collisions and devastations of a world shattered by the uranium that came from Rose's land, Koji and Rose somehow meet, comfort one another, and make a child. Rose asks Koji, "If you make me yours do we make a world with no enemies?" (95), and Koji reciprocates with "If we make a world, we will make one where there are no enemies?" (96). The mutuality implied by their parallel lines suggests that affiliation can be stronger than common enmity, though of course this possibility remains a question. Alongside the hope that their alliance brings is also the frighteningly faceless and ubiquitous threat to their environment caused by the radioactive mining by-products. Surrounded by the poisonous black uranium dust that the wind blows everywhere (103), even getting into the bread that she kneads, Rose's pregnancy is laden with both hope and danger (114).

In contrast to the tenderness between Rose and Koji, the (white) Fat Man, who finds Round Rose (an aged Iva Toguri, a.k.a. Tokyo Rose) and the (Native) Little Boy in his home, eventually throws them out after having initially accepted them in the subordinate roles of Asian wife and adopted Native child: "I want you two aliens to get the hell out of my living room. You hear me? I said I want you two ungrateful aliens to leave" (98). "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" are of course the names of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, killing over 210,000 people by the end of 1945. While Fat Man functions as a historical reference to World War II, he arguably also embodies the War Measures Act, used against both Aboriginal people and Japanese Canadians.[11] While the character Fat Man soon shows remorse for his actions, actions that so perfectly replicate the colonization and appropriation of North America as a "white" home, Round Rose's words emphasize the inadequacy of remorse:

> You can't really be sorry for something you don't want to remember can you. Selective memory isn't it? Let's be honest, hell, you can't even apologize for the shit you did yesterday never mind 50 years ago. Indian residential schools, Japanese Internment camps, hell, and this is just in your neighborhood. But it's alright . . . everybody's sorry these days. The politicians are sorry, the cops are sorry, the priests are sorry, the logging companies are sorry, mining companies, electric companies, water companies, wife beaters, serial rapists, child molesters, mommy and daddy. Everybody's sorry. Everybody's sorry they got caught sticking it to someone else . . . that's what they are sorry about . . . Getting caught. They could give a rat's ass about you, or me, or the people they are saying sorry to.

> Think about it . . . Don't be a sorry ass, be sorry before you have to say you are sorry. Be sorry for even thinking about, bringing about something-sorry-filled. (100–01)

The connection of this neighbourhood to overseas neighbourhoods is in a sense configured through the Little Boy. A personification of the darkest uranium found at the centre of the Earth, he enters and leaves scenes through the television, embodying the technologies that materialize the human capacity for both creation and destruction. Aligned with Round Rose because they both face the violence of the Fat Man's gun pointed at them, the Little Boy is at once local (from Dene land) and global (beaming into and out of the television). The complex relationships presented in Clements's visionary play interrogate the possibilities and limits of interracial affiliations.

The play's close, after the Japanese Grandmother has transformed into the Dene Widow (120), creates an overlap between two previously separate relationships. Koji's ongoing comments to his grandmother, and the Widow's ongoing talk to her dead husband, merge, so that the Widow's words to Koji bring together a number of previously fragmented relationships. The Widow states, "You are my special grandson. My small man now. My small man that survived. Tough like hope. If we listen we can hear them [their loved ones] too" (121). Although the term "small man" might, in another context, be taken to emasculate the Asian male, here it alludes to and transforms "little boy," positing Koji as a hope that loving affiliations might grow out of surviving historic violence and destruction. The play ends with Koji's words—"They [the Japanese and Dene loved ones] hear us, and they are talking back in hope over time" (122)—and images that merge Dene and Japanese references: *"Glowing herds of caribou move in unison over the vast empty landscape as cherry blossoms fall till they fill the stage"* (122). What brings the characters together is not only shared suffering but also the one Earth on which they all live.

In a question-and-answer period following her reading at the Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design on 4 November 2004, Clements stated that her writing process begins with the land. The land presents itself to her, and then the characters follow, like a musical score. As such, a discussion of the characters' interracial relationships needs to be framed within the structure of the play, which consists of four movements that begin with the fiery explosion and then pass through the four elements: "the frequency of discovery," "rare earth elements," waterways," and "radar echoes." The context

of people belonging to the land, rather than the land belonging to people, suggests that people are but one element in a larger view of the world that respects all nonhuman forms of life as well. Thus, the context that matters for the "small man" at the end of the play is the immensity of the planet itself, the land as the main reference point, not a white masculinity that belittles or emasculates the Asian male. The way in which the play is shaped in movements, not acts (which harken back to human activity), pushes toward a paradigm where land, not people, are the central focus. Thus, the "characters," in their fragmentation and symbolic weight, are not only people but also material signs of how the land has been disrupted and changed by human activity.

IV. "Yin Chin"

Dedicated to SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu, "Yin Chin," by First Nations writer Lee Maracle, offers a number of insights into the realm of Native-Asian relations, naming both the distances and the moments of camaraderie between communities. Published in Maracle's 1990 collection of short stories, *Sojourner's Truth*, "Yin Chin" bravely questions the narrator's own humanity (291) by admitting the insidious effects of racial categorization upon her interactions with other people. While the First Nations narrator is a little scared by how she has "lived in this city in the same neighbourhood as Chinese people for twenty-two years now and [doesn't] know a single Chinese person" (291), she is also aware of the political urgency that links her own struggle against oppression to that of other peoples. A recent memory describes the common recognition of the importance of fighting imperialism among writers from subordinated cultures:

> Last Saturday (seems like a hundred years later) was different. The tableload of people was Asian/Native. We laughed at ourselves and spoke very seriously about our writing. We really believe we are writers, someone had said, and the room shook with the hysteria of it all. We ran on and on about our growth and development and not once did the white man ever enter the room. It just seemed all too incredible that a dozen Hans and Natives could sit and discuss all things under heaven, including racism, and not talk about white people. It only took a half-dozen revolutions in the Third World, seventeen riots in America, one hundred demonstrations against racism in Canada, and thirty-seven dead Native youth in my life to become. . . . We had crossed a millennium of bridges the rivers of which were swollen with the floodwaters of dark humanity's tenacious struggle to extricate themselves from oppression and we knew it.
>
> We were born during the first sword wound that the Third World swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious, and movin'

> on up. We could laugh because we were no longer a joke. But somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks that still tell their kids about old chinamen. (291–92)

How many more sword wounds must follow this first one? There is still a need to share this consciousness of a common struggle against oppression in the face of educational systems and media structures that are not designed for this, that arguably operate to produce docile citizen subjects who do not question the arbitrary borders we inhabit and carry within ourselves.[12] In the space of a few pages, Maracle juxtaposes this larger picture against the daily and often overlooked incidents that materialize internalized oppressions. In particular, she interweaves two anecdotes into "Yin Chin." First, there is her contemporary experience of driving around Chinatown and seeing a Native man bully and harass an old Chinese woman. The narrator assists the old woman by beating the man off. Second, while she listens to the old woman's anger that none of the Chinese men around her had intervened, the narrator recalls a childhood experience with the Chinese storekeeper, Mad Sam.[13]

Having absorbed "the words of the world . . . [words such as] 'don't wander off or the ol' chinamen will get you and eat you,'" the narrator-as-child's internalized racism quietly manifests in her monthly vigil of watching old Chinese men to make sure they don't grab children (293). One might consider how laws forbidding Chinese immigration, making family reunification impossible for decades, might have contributed to such racist myths. Her internalized racism then flares up with a scream when a Chinese man looks through Sam's store window at her. The narrator's childhood response, "The chinaman was looking at me," shames her mother and hurts Sam. Her description of Sam's injured look as "the kind of hurt you can sometimes see in the eyes of people who have been cheated" (294) suggests that racism has systemically devalued people like Sam, who are viewed as dangerous by small children like the narrator through no fault or action of their own. That the child narrator eventually grows to have an analysis of imperialism's effects on racialized peoples requires that she grapple with the contradictions of small, everyday moments such as that brief encounter in Sam's discount food store.

When the old woman is done expressing her frustration, the narrator states, "How unkind of the world to school us in ignorance," and gets back into her car (294). The narrator's words allude to both her childhood anecdote and the contemporary experience of comforting an old woman (who might or might not have an analysis of colonization's effects on First Nations

people) and beating off a Native man (whose violence refuses any affiliations that could be made along racial or gender or class lines). The differences in scale between individual and mass change are made concrete by Maracle's stories embedded within stories, memories within memories.

V. Not a Closing but a Reopening

In an ongoing movement between fictional investigations and the social text, I would like to juxtapose a couple of instances from contemporary society against this discussion of fiction to speculate upon what further associations might be made. In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Winona LaDuke describes the struggle against General Motors's PCB contamination in the reservation of Akwesasne, where about eight thousand Mohawk people live. This twenty-five-square-mile reservation spans the St. Lawrence River and the international border between Canada and the United States, Quebec and New York. It is grandmothers such as Katsi Cook (who jokes, "if you want something done, get a Mohawk to do it") who are leading this struggle for a healthy community. In Vancouver, I had heard of Akwesasne because an article by Peter Cheney and Miro Cernetig in the *Globe and Mail* mentions the smuggling of Chinese migrants through Akwesasne. Straddling the border, the reserve is a hot spot, a place both vulnerable to corporate and governmental threats but also strategically located to challenge the state's authority over national borders. Akwesasne exists concurrently with and alternatively to the nation-state's uneasy partnership with corporate hegemony. That some Mohawks have chosen to assist Chinese migrants—whether for political, economic, or other reasons, in effect putting themselves at risk of police retribution—can have the effect of asserting their independence as well as political solidarity with the imagined Third World.[14]

There is a growing awareness among people concerned about social justice that those who live in this space we call Canada need to educate ourselves about what First Nations people are doing and how we might act in solidarity with them.[15] As Loretta Todd suggests, First Nations land claims should take precedence over international trade mechanisms such as NAFTA, for the preservation of First Nations land rights is in the long-term interests of everyone living on this land, not only First Nations people:

> What could happen is aboriginal title could supersede the Free Trade Agreement, because [the courts] could say that aboriginal title to the water is more fundamental than the Free Trade Agreement. As a consequence, we could potentially have

> some say over how the water is used. So when we talk about the whole land claim issue, we're really talking about restoring the health of the land so that there can be co-existence and co-management of all the people but also of all the animals and resources on the land. ("On Redress" 83)

As the discourse of corporate globalization threatens to recolonize our imaginations, alongside the material takeover of natural resources, I see it as a matter of not just principle but also survival to strive for an international network of locally based alliances challenging the transnational corporate hegemony that is protected and reinforced by neoliberal states.

With British Columbia's referendum on the treaty process in 2002, a dubious, poorly executed referendum that intensified racist violence against First Nations people,[16] globalization returned with a vengeance to questions of local land claims. One of the referendum questions asked people to say yes or no to the following statement: "The terms and conditions of leases and licenses should be respected; fair compensation for unavoidable disruption of commercial interests should be ensured." It can be argued that this clause dovetails with Chapter 11 of NAFTA,[17] which allows private companies to sue states for perceived losses of profits and limits the ability of governments to safeguard environmental, health, and various social values when there are conflicting commercial interests, to prepare the government to further renege on its fiduciary responsibilities to the public, which includes First Nations people. While this might initially seem to be far away from my concerns about cultural production, I would argue that this sets the stage for the destruction of local communities and of course the cultures produced in and by these communities. As such, cultural workers do not have the luxury of ignoring these urgent matters; rather, they need to work with others to strengthen engagement with concepts of Aboriginal title as taking precedence over neoliberal trade agreements such as NAFTA.[18]

By way of concluding my speculations, I would like to turn to the warnings and possibilities raised in the novel *The Kappa Child* by Hiromi Goto, wherein we find a childhood friendship between Gerald, a mixed-race Japanese and Blood boy, and the narrator, who is of Japanese descent. The fluid process of the social construction of racial and gender identity is emphasized in a telling moment when Gerald asks the narrator "You a boy or a girl?" and the narrator asks him back "You Blood or Japanese?" (168). The novel operates in a realm where it is possible to answer "both," thus rejecting the binary divisions that have historically been deployed to systemic, oppressive effect.[19] At the same time that the possibility for better forms of

coexistence hovers, terrible mistakes can also happen. In particular, the narrator, in a moment of weakness and confusion, lashes out at Gerald when he tries to physically comfort her by calling him a sissy boy: "This hateful coil of ugliness twisting in my gut, the words stinging something inside me, but unable to stop" (200). After wrecking her childhood friendship with Gerald, the narrator is given a second chance toward the end of the novel when she encounters him as an adult. What happens next remains outside the text, for the reader to imagine and perhaps enact. The fragile, incomplete, and fraught relationship in *The Kappa Child*—like the broken and dynamic interracial relationships in *Disappearing Moon Cafe, Exile and the Heart, Burning Vision*, and "Yin Chin"—gestures toward how much remains to be addressed and worked through in the process of decolonization. At both the level of individual interactions and the level of larger socioeconomic frameworks, building alliances that respect First Nations values of interdependency and land stewardship is an urgent focus if we are to foster ethical ways of long-term survival on this Earth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Hiromi Goto, Larissa Lai, and Guy Beauregard for their feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

NOTES

1 The Continuous Voyage Provision, enacted in 1908, in effect encoded the exclusion of people from India to Canada. The War Measures Act, in place from 1914 until it was repealed in 1985 (and replaced in 1988 by the Emergencies Act), was used to detain people on the basis of their ethnicity. This power included confiscating Indian reserves from Aboriginal people and the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II (see Sunahara). More commonly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the misleadingly named Chinese Immigration Act barred almost all Chinese people from immigrating to Canada between 1923 and 1947. Prior to that, from 1885 to 1923, Chinese immigrants were the only people charged a head tax ($50 in 1885, $100 in 1900, and $500 from 1903 to 1923) to enter Canada. Due to this racist policy, the Canadian government collected about $23 million from 81,000 Chinese immigrants. Today the so-called right of landing fee (ROLF) is a contemporary head tax that continues to effectively discriminate along class lines that disproportionately affect many people of colour. While the 2006 apology from the Canadian Government for the head tax was an important step in acknowledging the few surviving head tax payers, it did not redress their families. The Chinese Canadian National Council continues its efforts to get redress for the head tax payers' immediate families. As Charlie Quan, who paid the head tax in 1923, stated at a press conference at Strathcona

Community Centre in Vancouver on 7 April 2002, it took him about ten years of hard labour seven days a week to pay off the debt he owed for his $500 head tax. See Chan; Li; and Wickberg et al. for more information about the history of Chinese in Canada.

2 McFarlane points out that the "exclusion of the Yukon and Northwest Territories as well as First Nations and band councils from the [Multiculturalism] Act (Section 2) suggests a crisis of representation with respect to aboriginality. It is through these exclusions that the Act perpetuates two myths of Eurocentrism, providing a rationale for the operation of the liberal nation while at the same time obscuring a colonialist history of violence" (22). For a thoughtful discussion of the tensions between Canadian citizenship and Aboriginality, see Battiste and Semaganis. They note that "the federal Indian Act created new categories and definitions of Aboriginal peoples. Under the policy of divide and conquer, the federal government defined 'Indians' in order to destroy communities by arbitrary criteria of residency, marriage, employability, education, and military service. These definitions, conceived without consent of the Aboriginal peoples, segmented Aboriginal societies into categories of status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty, urban and reserve, and enfranchised and disenfranchised Indians" (105). Given this history, Battiste and Semaganis argue that "current issues in citizenship in Canada . . . drive . . . First Nations relationships, treaties, and self-determination to a bias towards Eurocentric perceptions of citizenship and governance" (93). Immigration legislation further reinforces Eurocentric systems that structurally disadvantage people racialized as nonwhite. For example, with post-9/11 changes, Canada's mechanisms for the already fragile "protection" of refugees have rapidly deteriorated, weakening the "refugee protection" aspect of IRPA. In December 2003, immigration enforcement activities were transferred from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to the newly created Canada Border Services Agency. The transfer of these powers to an agency that reports to the deputy prime minister and the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness has the effect of further associating refugee claimants with criminality. See the Canadian Council of Refugees website at <http://www.web.net/~ccr/agencyrelease.html>.

3 An example of antiterrorism legislation being used against First Nations activists occurred on 21 September 2002 when INSET (the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team) raided the home of John Rampanen, Nitanis Desjarlais, and their children, finding no weapons but effectively intimidating and threatening the family. Rampanen is a member of the West Coast Warriors Society who has been active in supporting indigenous fishing rights. See <http://www.turtleisland.org/news/news-wcwarriors.htm>. Also see <http://scienceforpeace.sa.utoronto.ca/Special_Activities/Galati_Page.html> for a brief analysis of the security legislation's flaws and dangers. As Zygmunt Bauman suggests, "Terrorists are the least likely casualties of territorial wars: the self-proclaimed 'anti-terrorist wars' destroy well-nigh everything except the terrorism, their declared targets. Having torn or frayed the web of social bonds supporting life routines, such wars make the assaulted territory more hospitable to terrorists than ever before" (6). In 2004, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act also provided for the usage of "security certificates" to detain at least five Muslim men without charge or bail on secret evidence that they are not allowed to see (<http://www.homesnotbombs.ca/secrettrials.htm> and <http://www.nowar-paix.ca/action>).

4 One could trace artists' and writers' concerns about cultural appropriation through a number of articles that appeared in *Fuse* from about 1989 to 1993, including Joane Cardinal-Shubert's "In the Red," Lee Maracle's "Native Myths: Trickster Alive and Crowing," Janisse Browning's "Self-Determination and Cultural Appropriation," as well

as most of the summer 1993 issue of *Fuse*, which includes Richard Fung's "Working through Cultural Appropriation," Marwan Hassan's "wordS and sWord: An Anagram of Appropriation," Ardith Walkem's "Stories and Voices," Rozena Maart's "Cultural Appropriation: Historicizing Individuality, Consciousness, and Actions," and more.

5 In a longer article, novels such as Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and *Itsuka* and Kevin Chong's *Baroque-a-Nova* would also deserve discussion, as would instances of racial misrecognition that have been noted in *Calendar Boy* by Andy Quan and *Scared Texts* by Jam Ismail. Films such as *A Tribe of One* also explore the relationships between Asian and Native peoples. *A Tribe of One* tells the story of the Larabees, a half-Native and half-Chinese family that survived the residential schools and Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s in part by denying their Aboriginal background. Directed by Eunhee Cha, the film follows the discovery of a woman raised in Vancouver's Chinatown, Rhonda Larabee. Her mother, Marie Lee, was born into the New Westminster Band, the Qayqayat First Nation. When smallpox reduced the band to fewer than one hundred members, the federal government closed the reservation and effectively wiped out the band. Larabee's efforts to reestablish the New Westminster Band led to her becoming its chief in 1993. See <http://www.cbc.ca/roughcuts/feature_270503.html>. Also see Brandy Lien Worrall's 2007 anthology, *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian and Aboriginal Potluck,* and Marie Lo's 2008 article "Model Minorities, Models of Resistance: Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature."

6 Scott Kerwin points out in his essay "The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia" that very different racist tropes were deployed against the "Oriental menace" and the "vanishing" Indian in the 1920s: "Using the metaphors of the day, the Aboriginal population could easily be 'absorbed' into the bloodstream of British Columbia without 'imperiling' the 'original type.' The dominant stereotype of the Asian population as the 'Yellow Peril' was the polar opposite of the metaphor of the 'Vanishing [Native] American.' British Columbia's white elite feared that a massive influx of Asian immigrants would 'dilute' the bloodstream of the body politic and literally change the face of the nation" (107).

7 See, for instance, *A Brief History of Asian North America* by Jim Wong-Chu and Linda Tzang, which mentions the arrival of fifty to seventy Chinese artisans at Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island on a ship captained by John Meares in 1788 as well as a ship called the *Pallas*, which left a crew of thirty-two Indians and three Chinese seamen stranded in Baltimore in 1785.

8 This play was first performed in Vancouver's Firehall Theatre from 23 April to 11 May 2002.

9 Although Tokyo Rose was a generic name under which a series of women worked, Iva Toguri d'Aquino was singled out as "Tokyo Rose," scapegoated, arrested in Tokyo, flown to San Francisco in 1948, and tried for eight counts of treason. In *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature*, Leslie Bow looks at how the examples of "traitors" such as Yoko Ono and Iva Toguri d'Aquino speak to "a belief in the power of sexual alliances to disrupt other collective alliances, specifically, loyalty to nation and comrades-in-arms." The accusation of "betrayal" then "deauthenticates some affiliations while reconsolidating others" (7).

10 A number of writers have made fun of the ways in which Asians get misrecognized in all sorts of ways, including as First Nations people. Jam Ismail's *Scared Texts* comes quickly to mind: "young ban yen had been thought italian in kathmandu, filipina in hong kong, eurasian in kyoto, japanese in anchorage, dismal in london england, hindu in edmonton, generic oriental in calgary, western canadian in ottawa, anglophone in montreal, metis

in jasper, eskimo at hudson's bay department store, vietnamese in chinatown, tibetan in vancouver, commie at the u.s. border. on the whole very asian" (128).

11 See Sunahara for more detail regarding how the War Measures Act was used to confiscate Indian reserves during World War I. Use of the act to intern Japanese Canadians has also been well documented. See, for example, Miki.

12 Maracle has also written a play called *If We'd Met,* which, through its spirited dialogue between multiracial characters, including Native and Asian women, enacts a process of decolonization through, among other tactics, decentering whiteness.

13 Note that "the mad was intended for the low prices and the crowds in his little store, not him" (292).

14 One must look carefully at who is doing this work and why. Despite the possibilities of political solidarity, there are also problems with the violence that some smugglers have perpetrated on migrating people. What gets interpreted as "crime" is often the effect of poor-bashing systems but can also be considered an unregulated branch of the private sector, as Dara Culhane points out. See also the 2008 film *Frozen River*.

15 For example, in the summer 2002 issue of *RicePaper* magazine, the "Editor's Note" by Alden Habacon states, "We owe much to those who have taken great risks ahead of us to make their voices and histories heard, who have resisted homogenization and being forgotten about and silenced; we are indebted to those who have made efforts to demonstrate the complex diversity of Canadian culture. I am especially inspired by Loretta Todd's film *Forgotten Warriors* (NFB, 1996), which reminds me that ours is not the only worthy cause; that there exists an even greater framework of resistance and cultural identity. I have to acknowledge that any equality I experience—as an artist of color in Canada—is to some degree the product of the First Nations' resistance against the loss of their history, heritage and uniqueness of ethnic experience as well as their desire to be acknowledged by participating in Canadian culture. In gazing deeply upon ourselves, may we not neglect to consider where it is we are, and with whom we share this space: our context." While I am heartened to see Asian Canadian spaces such as *RicePaper* recognize our dependence on First Nations resistance, I am also troubled by how phrases such as "participating in Canadian culture" and "ethnic experience" encode what might otherwise be respectively described as "self-determination" and "survival of ongoing colonization." In the same issue, the relation of "First Nations" to "Canada" also requires more unpacking in Adrienne Wong's article, "Restless Nights: Race and Representation on Vancouver Stages," which discusses the lack of roles for Asian Canadian actors in Vancouver theatre. Wong states, "We need to work . . . together as Asian Canadians—no—as Canadians. . . . We need to form communities and support networks so that promising, exciting artists don't get discouraged and drop out. And we need to start writing and producing plays that specify Canadian culture as multiracial and multicultural. Our society and country are built on the experiences of immigrants and the First Nations populations they stole from" (15).

16 For example, on 12 April 2002, CBC Radio reported that a white supremacist group in Kelowna named B.C. White Pride was conducting a door-to-door leaflet campaign urging people to support the referendum to make British Columbia "a better place for white families." For more information regarding the referendum, see <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/aboriginals/bc_treaty_referendum.html>.

17 NAFTA is available online at <http://www-tech.mit.edu/Bulletins/nafta.html>.

18 Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, of which Canada is a signatory, states that "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their

economic, social, and cultural development." First Nations organizations have at times referred to this international covenant in their struggles for self-determination; see, for example, the delineation of Aboriginal title and rights at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs website, <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/atrp.htm>.

19 Dorothy Christian, a filmmaker who is exploring what she calls her "Chindian" (Chinese and Indian) background, also asks how to live in a way that honours and respects both cultures rather than being forced to choose one over the other (29). Christian was raised as an Okanagan-Shuswap Indian, and for most of her life having a Chinese father was shameful, although this has changed in more recent times.

WORKS CITED

Armstrong, Jeannette. "'Sharing One Skin': Okanagan Community." *The Case against the Global Economy.* Ed. Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith. San Francisco: Sierra, 1996. 160–70.

Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism, and Gender.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' P, 2000.

Battiste, Marie, and Helen Semaganis. "First Thoughts on First Nations Citizenship: Issues in Education." *Citizenship in Transformation in Canada.* Ed. Yvonne Hébert. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002. 93–111.

Bauman, Zygmunt. Interview with Christian Holler. "Global China Shop Part 1." *Springerin* 2 (2003). 20 Jan. 2004. <http://www.springerin.at/en/>.

Bow, Leslie. *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women's Literature.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

Chan, Anthony. *Gold Mountain: The Chinese in the New World.* Vancouver: New Star, 1983.

Cheney, Peter, and Miro Cernetig. "Chinese Gangs Flood Canada with Lucrative Human Cargo." *Globe and Mail* 2 Feb. 1999: A1+.

Christian, Dorothy. "Articulating the Silence." *RicePaper* 9.3 (2000): 22–31.

Clements, Marie. *Burning Vision.* Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003.

—. Reading and talk. Emily Carr Institute. Vancouver, BC. 4 Nov. 2005.

Culhane, Dara. Conversation with Rita Wong. 2 Aug. 2002.

Fung, Richard. "Working through Cultural Appropriation." *Fuse* 16.5-6 (1993): 16-24.

Goto, Hiromi. *The Kappa Child.* Calgary: Red Deer, 2001.

Greenaway, John Endo. "Fire in the Sky." *Bulletin* [Burnaby, BC] 44.4 (2002): 8-9.

Habacon, Alden. "Editor's Note." *RicePaper* 7.4 (2002): 5.

Ismail, Jam. From *Scared Texts. Many-Mouthed Birds: Contemporary Writing by Chinese Canadians.* Ed. Bennett Lee and Jim Wong-Chu. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1991. 124-35.

Kerwin, Scott. "The Janet Smith Bill of 1924 and the Language of Race and Nation in British Columbia." *BC Studies* 121 (1999): 83-114.

Kobayashi, Tamai. *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction.* Toronto: Women's P, 1998.

—. Interview with Larissa Lai. *West Coast Line* 33.3 (2000): 121-26.

Laduke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life.* Cambridge, MA: South End, 1999.

Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Cafe.* Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990.

—. "*Disappearing Moon Cafe* and the Cultural Politics of Writing in Canada." *Millennium Messages.* Ed. Kenda Gee and Wei Wong. Edmonton: Asian Canadian Writers

Workshop Society of Edmonton, 1997. 10-13.
—. Keynote speech at Imagining Asian and Native Women: Deconstructing from Contact to Modern Times conference. Western Washington U, Bellingham. 9 Mar. 2002.
Li, Peter. *The Chinese in Canada.* Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.
Lo, Marie. "Model Minorities, Models of Resistance: Native Figures in Asian Canadian Literature." *Canadian Literature* 196 (2008): 96-114.
Maracle, Lee. "The 'Post-Colonial' Imagination." *Fuse* 16.1 (1992): 12-15.
—. "Yin Chin." *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English.* Ed. Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1998. 290-94.
McFarlane, Scott. "The Haunt of Race: Canada's *Multiculturalism Act*, the Politics of Incorporation, and Writing Thru Race." *Fuse* 18.3 (1995): 18-30.
Miki, Roy. *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice.* Vancouver: Raincoast, 2004.
Pal, Rajinderpal S. "Collective Amnesia." *Pappaji Wrote Poetry in a Language I Cannot Read.* Toronto: TSAR, 1998. 20-23.
Sunahara, Ann. "Legislative Roots of Injustice." *In Justice: Canada, Minorities, and Human Rights.* Ed. Roy Miki and Scott McFarlane. Winnipeg: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1996. 7-22.
Todd, Loretta. "Notes on Appropriation." *Parallelogramme* 16.1 (1990): 24-33.
—. "On Redress for Aboriginal People." *Across Currents: Canada-Japan Minority Forum.* Ed. Roy Miki and Rita Wong. Vancouver: JC, 2001. 72-83.
A Tribe of One. Dir. Eunhee Cha. NFB, 2002.
Wickberg, Edgar, et al., eds. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada.* Toronto: McClelland; Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1982.
Wong, Adrienne. "Restless Nights: Race and Representation on Vancouver Stages." *RicePaper* 7.4 (2002): 13-15.
Wong-Chu, Jim, and Linda Tzang. *A Brief History of Asian North America.* Vancouver: Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society, 2001.
Worrall, Brandy Lien, ed. *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian and Aboriginal Potluck.* Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2007.

Lily Cho

Asian Canadian Futures
Diasporic Passages and the Routes of Indenture

This paper traces possible future directions for Asian Canadian literature within the rubric of Asian diasporic studies and is written in the spirit of the tremendous sense of possibility that I see for Asian Canadian literature. Asian Canadian literature is, of course, not a new phenomenon. As Donald Goellnicht observes in his overview of the emergence of Asian Canadian literature as a field, despite the long history of Asian Canadian writing, "we in the academy seem to operate in an almost perpetual state of *announcing* Asian Canadian literature, a literature that has taken, from our snowblind perspective, twenty to twenty-five years to be 'born'" (2). Goellnicht makes clear that he is referring to the institutional space of Asian Canadian literature rather than the literary works themselves, and that his article is "an exploration of the ways in which institutional formations and practices in North America have attempted to discipline and contain various Asian ethnic groups and their cultural production as well as . . . the possibilities for resistance to such containment within those institutional formations" (3). Following Goellnicht's meditations on institutional formations, this paper explores the institutional futures of a field whose arrival needs less and less to be announced.

While personal histories are not necessarily reflective of institutional ones, they can sometimes be instructive for considerations of institutional shifts. Writing this paper has been an opportunity to reflect upon my own embarrassingly thin training. Having undertaken over a decade of postsecondary work in Canadian universities, primarily in Departments of English,

I could not take any courses in Asian Canadian literature. Moreover, the idea of being an "Asian Canadianist" was, until recently, virtually unthinkable. When I wrote my doctoral candidacy exams, Asian Canadian literature was not something in which I could declare a specialization (I was guided toward established fields such as Canadian and postcolonial literatures). And it would never have occurred to me that, at the close of my graduate work, major Canadian universities would be hiring—or have stated intentions of hiring—in fields such as Asian Canadian literature, Asian diasporic literature, and Asian North American literature. Partly because of these institutional shifts, and largely because of the hard work of many activists and scholars, Canadian scholars are now in the curious position of considering the pasts and the futures of a field that, until recently, did not have a defined institutional existence.

I do not recount this personal institutional history in order to celebrate the seeming rise of Asian Canadian literature in Canadian academic institutions. Rather, I wonder what the exercise of cautious optimism might look like. Unlike the institutional location of Asian American literature, our fledgling institutional location means that internal critique must always be balanced with the necessity of nurturing Asian Canadian and Asian North American literature as it establishes a toehold in the academy. Goellnicht's metaphor of Asian Canadian literature as having emerged from a "protracted birth" suggests precisely what I suspect is a collective sense of the fragile newness of the field. While the metaphoric references to the relative youthfulness of Asian Canadian literature as a field are useful and, in many ways, unavoidable for thinking through our current institutional moment, I cannot help feeling a little wary of depending too much on the developmental narrative that they imply. Asian Canadian scholarship needs a sense of its institutional histories in order to get a sense of where it might go next. And yet, even as I too rely on considerations of the field in terms of developmental narratives, I sense that it is also a field which is looking for ways of thinking through these histories that are attentive to the lessons of postcolonialism and the perils of Western historiography.

Perhaps one approach might involve imagining directions for the field that benefit from the work that has been done in fields such as Asian American studies, Asian Australian studies, postcolonial studies, and diasporic studies. Asian Canadianists can draw from related fields, partly because most of the critics who have pioneered so much of the work in this field come to it, by necessity, through side doors and back doors, bringing with them a

commitment not only to this literature but also to a wide range of critical projects. We can draw from these multiple fields of inquiry to make serious interventions not only within the Canadian academy but also internationally. As Goellnicht points out, Asian Canadian literature as a field emerges from a different history than Asian American literature (3). This difference registers as an enabling one when we take up the possibilities of our own distinct intellectual and institutional histories. People who work in Asian Canadian literary criticism come not only from fields that might be considered to be related, such as postcolonial and Canadian literature, but also from Romanticism, eighteenth-century, and comparative literature. Rather than seeing these interests as distinct from the study of Asian Canadian literature, we can exploit these eccentricities of location by building a field that is broadly affiliative. We can use these intellectual interests to put pressure on Asian Canadian literature by pushing this literature toward more comparative contexts.

One of the possibilities that I want to explore in this paper is that of approaching Asian Canadian literature through the rubric of diaspora. I suggest that Asian Canadian literature must retain its affiliation with diasporic concerns and remain open to its ties to postcolonial studies because a rigorous exploration of the politics and culture of indenture and its aftermath needs to be at the centre of Asian Canadian literary studies specifically and of Asian diasporic studies in general. In this paper, I will be referring most specifically to Chinese Canadian communities, but I hope that some of my comments will have relevance for other Asian communities in Canada.

Because diasporic studies is, like Asian Canadian studies, a relatively new field, let me briefly outline how I understand its significance. The recent resurgence of the term "diaspora" in the Western academy has arisen out of a profound perplexity regarding the cultural spaces and products of peoples who have been displaced by oppression and violence. I suggest that, if the term is to retain its potential for powerful critique, it cannot float away from the constitutive sadnesses of dislocation. Furthermore, I propose that the term in contemporary discussion would be productively used as a way of thinking through subjectivities that emerge from the displacements of colonial and imperial oppression. In this sense, I understand diasporic studies as constitutively related to postcolonialism. As Rebecca Walsh notes, "the study of diaspora is frequently inseparable from the study of postcolonialism and imperialism in its various forms" (2). In "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," Khachig Tölölyan admits

some fears about the ways in which diaspora as a concept has become unhinged, in both enabling and disabling ways, from its classical usage. Warning of the dangers of allowing the term to become too expansive and inclusive, he suggests that, "Without some minimum stringency of definition, most of America—or Argentina, or New Zealand, or any modern immigrant-nation—would just as easily be a diaspora" (30). The need for stringency of definition lies in the perils of a collapsing of transnational and diasporic subjects where the use of the diasporic concept beyond its classical sense may result in "the inadvertent complicity between some diasporicists and transnationalists in the attack on the nation-state" (29).

In differentiating between transnationalism and diaspora, I want to highlight the ways in which the state of diasporic migrancy is framed by social and political precariousness. It is not that all migrants exist in a precarious state but that migrancy carries within it the potential for precariousness. This is a precariousness amplified by race, sexuality, gender, and class. What stands out for me in this marking, though, is the way in which the words *go home* carry specific valences for some communities more than others. For some, the injunction to go home carries with it a profoundly different capacity for pain, humiliation, and political disempowerment. Vijay Mishra notes in "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora" that, "As long as there is a fascist fringe always willing to find racial scapegoats for the nation's own shortcomings and to chant 'Go home', the autochthonous pressures towards diasporic racial exclusivism will remain" (426). Mishra describes the sense of "familiar temporariness" that marks what he has called the old Indian diaspora, the diasporic community that is the legacy of indentured labour in the West Indies (426). In this idea of a "familiar temporariness," we can begin to read for the kind of precariousness that lies within racially marked diasporic communities. For example, a fourth- or fifth-generation Chinese Canadian might still be asked to "go home" in a way that a fourth- or fifth-generation white Canadian will never be. In the context of the Chinese diaspora, I therefore focus on a diaspora marked most explicitly by race but inescapably defined by issues of class, sexuality, and gender. I focus on a racialized diaspora because the Chinese diaspora has been defined throughout the social and historical archive by race first. As the history of race riots and race-based legislation such as the head tax and the exclusion act illustrates, the Chinese Canadian community has been attacked primarily on the basis of its Chineseness, even though issues of class, sexuality, and gender—especially evident in the promulgation of the

idea of a degenerate bachelor society that has taken jobs away from upstanding and hard-working white men—are crucially imbricated in the targeting of Chinese immigrants.[1]

In distinguishing the diasporic from the transnational, I am also arguing for a racialized differentiation that turns on class and is profoundly connected to colonial displacement. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur call for distinctions to be made by identifying "the political risks entailed in different forms of movement and migration as well as between transnationalism (which can describe NGOs, multinational corporations, and dissident political organizations, as well as individuals) and diaspora (which is a human phenomenon)" (15). While the distinction between the human and the nonhuman (are NGOs, multinational corporations, and dissident political organizations not human?) is slippery and thus potentially misleading, Braziel and Mannur do point to the importance of thinking through the nexus of the diasporic and the transnational. In their introduction to *The Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*, Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin warn against "an exclusive focus on the diasporic as *transnational*" because they suggest that we also consider the possibilities of diasporas existing within states (23). They refer specifically to the experiences of Natives in North America. Boyarin and Boyarin suggest that we need to keep the concept open to displacements that are compelled by colonialism but that are not necessarily transnational. As Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* makes clear, the issues that attend on thinking through the experiences of privileged, multiple-passport-carrying subjects can be most productively engaged through the rubric of transnationalism. As she notes in "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics among Transnational Chinese," "The term 'transnationality' better describes the variety of cultural interconnections and trans-border movements and networks which have intensified under conditions of late capitalism" (85).

Ong's *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* attempts to address the "other Asians"—those who are not among the "new affluent Asian immigrants" of her previous study of flexible citizenship.[2] However, as the delineation "other Asians" suggests, Ong's discussion in *Buddha Is Hiding* understands the migratory underclass as the other side, or the underside if you will, of transnationalism. For Ong, the underclass Asian migrant constitutes a problem for citizenship and thus illuminates the ways in which "citizenship rights have become partially disembedded from the nation" (286). While her discussion usefully highlights the need for a "transnational

moral economy" that takes into account the failure of the discourse of citizenship to protect those most vulnerable to the abuses of power, what remains less clear are the conditions of dislocation and racialization that connect one generation of Asian immigrants and another as well as those connections across Asian communities differentiated by ethnicity and class. It is not just that pan-Asian politics might still provide a place for thinking about the construction of communities in dislocation but also that we need to think through the historical connections between Asian diasporic communities and the histories of European colonialism and imperialism. Rather than thinking of this underclass as the underside of transnationalism, we might understand these subjects within a rubric that sees them as more than the dark side of a transnational dream.

The history of Chinese diasporic trajectories is intimately linked to the history of colonialism. As Jenny Sharpe notes, "The designation of postcolonial as an umbrella term for diaspora and minority communities is derived in part from an understanding of decolonization as the beginning of an unprecedented migration from the former colonies to advanced industrialist centers" (105). However, as the trajectory of Chinese indentured labour shows, diaspora begins not only with the end of colonialism but also with its instigation. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked the mass exodus of dispossessed communities who were bound by indenture and slavery. I believe that we need to foreground this history of dispossession and dislocation not because it is "history" in the Western historiographic sense but because these are pasts that are constitutive of our present. It would be a mistake to think of the indentured Asian labourer as an unfortunate feature of a forgettable past. The march of history does not proceed so smoothly. We cannot risk losing sight of the ways in which the racisms of the past continue to shape the racisms of our present.

Approaching Asian Canadian literature within the rubric of diasporic studies, as I have briefly outlined it, encourages interventions such as comparative work between multiple sites of Asian migration, comparative work between minority communities, and explorations of the relationship between slavery and indenture as formative features of certain diasporic subjectivities. I should say that these are not interventions that diasporic studies necessarily enables but ones that I see as potentially enabled by a diasporic perspective.

First, attention to the routes of indenture of Asian Canadian immigration facilitates comparative work between the multiple sites of Asian migration. I think not only of communities in Australia or the US but also, for

example, of those that emerged from the sugar plantations in Cuba and the Caribbean, the railway workers in South America, and the miners in South Africa. That is, we could understand early Asian Canadian migration within a complicated and overlapping set of trajectories. In emphasizing the routes of migration, I am not advocating a rejection of the need to engage with the nation-state. I am, however, suggesting that we need to think of Asian Canadian migration as deeply connected to a whole series of movements and migrations. The colonial archive abounds with instances of these connections. For example, part of the decision to import Chinese indentured labour to South Africa in the early-twentieth century was based on consultation with the *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in Canada* submitted to the Canadian Parliament in 1885 as well as the experience of Chinese labour in Australia and the US. Persia Crawford Campbell notes that

> on Feb. 14, 1903, the Witwatersand Labour Association, under the aegis of the Chamber of Mines, asked Mr. Ross Skinner to proceed to California and the Far East to investigate
> 1. the conditions under which indentured Chinese labourers might be employed on the Rand;
> 2. the possibility of obtaining such labour;
> 3. its suitability to supplement the present inadequate Kaffir supply. (171)

The representations of Chineseness that circulate in one country are not limited to those national contexts. Canada consults Australia and the US; South Africa consults all of the former. The representation of the experience of Chinese workers in nineteenth-century Canada in British colonial administrative documents such as the *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in Canada* directly shaped the experiences of Chinese workers who would end up in South Africa working in the gold mines. Moreover, one of the aims of the Royal Commission report was that of situating Chinese immigration in Canada in the context of Chinese immigration in Australia and the US:

> It will also be part of the duties of the Commission to examine the evidence submitted in Australia, California and Washington and to condense and collate it and submit it with its report to Parliament so that the Parliament of Canada may have, in a convenient shape, together with the researches of the Commissioners, all the information which the legislative bodies of the United States and Australia had when they undertook the work of legislating on this question. (Canada viii)

It makes perfect sense that one arm of colonialism would consult with another and that they would work in tandem to produce politically coherent

forms of legislating not only Chinese immigration but also Chineseness itself, as one would have to be able to differentiate those who are Chinese from other forms of Asianness in order to legislate around it.[3] But this is also precisely the reason why we need to think through the connections between Chineseness in Canada and elsewhere.

The shaping of Chineseness in Canada is not distinct from the mechanisms of colonialism and its dislocating forces. Throughout the history of the recent mass migrations of Chinese people, one form of exploitation has been used to justify another. The experience of one migrant population has implications for those of another. We need to think about Chineseness not as an identity formed solely in relation to the Canadian state; we also need to think about the formation of the Canadian state through imperialism and colonialism and the relationships between other colonized spaces. British imperialists did not see Chinese populations in Canada as distinct from those in Australia, South Africa, or Hong Kong; in order to understand this history of racialization, we need to think of it in terms of the construction of Chineseness in Canada and to think of this construction as deeply connected to Chineseness elsewhere. We might also consider the possibilities of resistance across these spaces. Might the routes of indenture have also been trajectories for the circulation of information, tactics for survival, strategies of resistance? As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker demonstrate with detailed clarity in *The Many-Headed Hydra*, the transatlantic routes of slavery were also a means for the passage of information among subaltern populations. These are possibilities we have yet to fully consider in terms of the trans-Pacific passages of indenture.

Second, a diasporic perspective displaces the primacy of the relationship between white and nonwhite groups, shifting the emphasis to the relationships among minority groups. "Asia" and "Canada" are not the only cultural, historical, or geographical entities that constitute Asian Canadian subjectivities. One of the tasks of Asian Canadian and diasporic criticism lies in a serious engagement with the kinds of relationships between minority communities that texts such as SKY Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* explore. In addition to the complicated whorls of a personal history that involves Chinese, Swedish, Scottish, and Irish crossings and mixings, *Diamond Grill* depicts interactions between Japanese, First Nations, Doukhobor, Jewish, and Chinese communities. Similarly, Lee's novel opens with a love story between a Chinese man and a First Nations woman. These are not necessarily relationships that we need to recuperate as

celebratory examples of minority interactions. As Tseen-ling Khoo argues, "the particular colonial oppressions and legacies of Canada's indigenous groups are situations for which Asian-Canadians can express sympathy and some forms of solidarity but cannot claim to share" (177). Khoo goes on to note that she is "not advocating a hierarchy of victimage; rather [she] want[s] to iterate the strategic quality of coalitions and their potential for contingent but powerful effects" (177). Indeed, both Wah's use of the term "half-bred poetics" to describe "the activity and dynamics of the site of the hyphen" ("Half-Bred" 95) and Lee's depiction of First Nations communities suggest that these are deeply complicated and vexed relationships and interactions—a point that Rita Wong explores in detail in her contribution to this special issue. But it is precisely this messy, discomfiting space that we need to explore in our criticism. At this point in cultural criticism, the issue is not about whether a particular representation is good or bad, or accurate or inaccurate. However, I hope that a diasporic perspective on Asian Canadian literature might bring forward more discussion of the kinds of dynamics that unfold in texts that invite precisely these complex discussions on the uneven relationships between minoritized groups.

Recognizing and examining the uneven relationships between minority groups might curtail some of the inevitable binarism that seems to be already implied in the notion of "Asian Canadian" studies. The past two decades of diasporic and minority discourse criticism have already suggested the need to consider the multiplicity of the interactions from which concepts such as Asian Canadian emerge. This work points to thinking about racialization as a set of differential relations that cut across each other. In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Avtar Brah asks, "How . . . are African, Caribbean, South Asian and white Muslims differentially constructed within anti-Muslim racism in present-day Britain? Similarly, how are blacks, Chicanos, Chinese, Japanese or South Koreans in the USA differentiated within its racialised formations? What are the economic, political, cultural and psychic effects of these differential racialisations on the lives of these groups?" (185). In response to these questions, Brah argues, "Of central concern in addressing such questions are the power dynamics which usher in racialised social relations and inscribe racialised modes of subjectivity and identity. [Her] argument . . . is that these racisms are not simply parallel racisms but intersecting modalities of *differential racialisations marking positionality across articulating fields of power*" (185–86). This attention to the positionality of differentially racialized communities recalls

Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd's discussion of minority discourse as a theoretical project that "involves drawing out solidarities in the form of modes of repression and struggle that all minorities experience separately but experience precisely as minorities. . . . 'Becoming minor' is . . . a question of position: a subject-position that in the final analysis can be defined only in 'political' terms—that is, in terms of the effects of economic exploitation, political disenfranchisement, social manipulation, and ideological domination on cultural formation of minority subjects and discourses" (9). JanMohamed and Lloyd call attention to the structural situation of minority communities and the urgency of understanding these positionings as a dialogue between minorities. Brah has noted that minority discourse, unlike the Black Power movement and its reorienting of the connotations of blackness, has not been successful in shifting the meaning of minority; she "remain[s] skeptical that . . . any moves that perpetuate the circulation of the minority/majority dichotomy will not serve to reinforce the hegemonic relations that inscribe this dichotomy" (189). While we must remain attentive to the possibilities of re-entrenching the very binaries that we seek to disrupt, the overall project of understanding minorities in relation to one another rather than simply in opposition to whiteness remains one that we must continue to work toward.

In highlighting the relationships among minority communities, we can problematize the presumption of a trajectory where the Asian is always already foreign. Instead of understanding the "home" of diasporic trajectories as primeval localities that expel people into new places that are becoming increasingly culturally mixed as a result, a diasporic perspective demands an understanding of the *construction* of home and arrival in diasporic trajectories. Not doing so naturalizes the idea that diasporic peoples come from a space of racial homogeneity and arrive at spaces that are becoming increasingly multicultural because of other people "like them" without ever questioning the autochthonous claims of those "who were there first." In the case of the Chinese diaspora, taking for granted the trajectory of "home" and "arrival" naturalizes the idea that China is a uniformly "Chinese" country, that Chinese diasporic communities ultimately come from China (even if there are multigenerational detours through Indonesia, Vietnam, South Africa, and so on), and that white people originate in Canada. In challenging the autochthonous claims of whiteness, this perspective also refuses to naturalize the relationship between the nation-state and ethnicity, between the People's Republic of China and Chineseness.

Third, a diasporic perspective on Asian Canadian literature illuminates the relationship between indenture and slavery, between Asian Canadian communities and black Canadian communities. I suggest that we need to think through the historical and cultural relationships between slavery and indenture. While slavery has commonly been understood as a foundational event of black diasporic culture, the relationship between Asian indentured labour to the Americas and Asian diasporic culture has yet to be fully explored. When slavery was "abolished" in European colonies in the mid-nineteenth century, there was a concerted effort to recruit indentured labour from India and China to take the place of slave labour. As documents as diverse as the Canadian *Report of the Royal Commission* and *The Cuba Commission Report: A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba* show, Asian labourers were specifically targeted for indenture because of their perceived docility or pacific nature. What was known as *la trata amarilla* ("the yellow trade") in Spanish colonies and the "coolie" trade in anglophone colonies supplanted the slave trade.[4]

Furthermore, an analysis of the journey of indentured labourers from Asia to the New World opens up the possibilities for thinking about the connections between black and Asian diasporas, Atlantic and Pacific subjectivities. I have been struck by the realization that many of the ships used to carry slaves across the Atlantic were used to transport indentured labourers across the Pacific. Moreover, all of the ships used to transport indentured labourers copied precisely the architecture of slave ships: "iron gratings over hatchways, walls between crew and coolie quarters, armed guards, [and] cannons trained on hatchways" (Applied History Research Group). The legacy of these architectural forms raises all kinds of questions about the relationship between the Middle Passage and the Pacific passages of indenture. It is not just that Asian indentured labourers were subjected to similar incarceratory forms as slaves from Africa but also that the very differences between these forms are also profoundly suggestive for our considerations of the construction of black and Asian diasporic subjectivities.

Not only were the same ships often used, but, looking at logbooks and shipping routes, we can see that Asian indentured labourers also passed through the now infamous Middle Passage across the Atlantic (see fig. 1).

When I first began this research, I assumed, wrongly, that an examination of nineteenth-century Asian migration would largely be one of looking at trans-Pacific routes. However, this assumption is based on the bias of twentieth-century air travel and the supposition of migration to North America alone. As Cutler's map of common nineteenth-century shipping routes

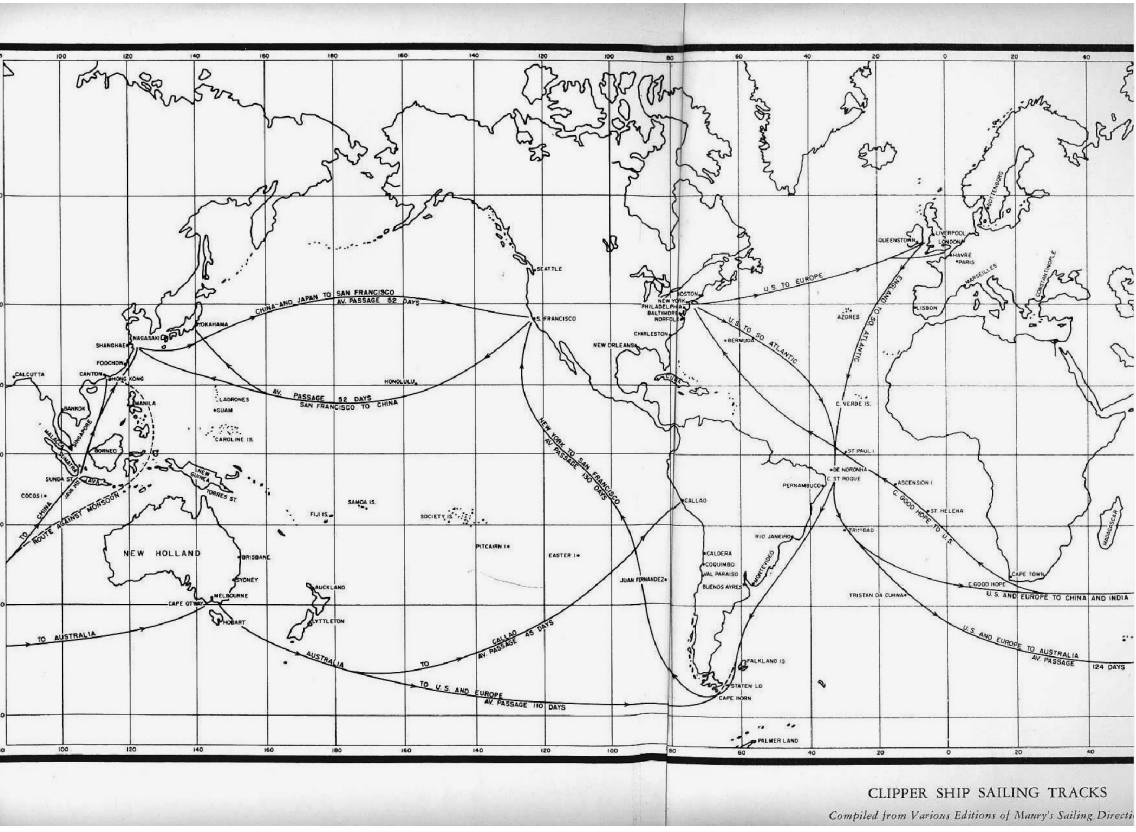


Figure 1: "Clipper Ship Sailing Tracks," in Carl Cutler, *Greyhounds of the Sea* (New York: Halcyon, 1937), flyleaf.

shows, some ships—particularly those headed to ports such as Vancouver, San Francisco, or Callao from Asia—did indeed traverse the Pacific. Yet many other ships left Asia and sailed *west* across the Indian Ocean, round the Cape of Good Hope, and across the *Atlantic*.

If, following the pioneering work of Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*, we take seriously the importance of routes for thinking about diasporic cultures, then understanding the routes of Asian indenture means understanding the black Atlantic as *formative* of Asian diasporic cultures, not only in the sense that black slavery precedes the mass migration of Asian indentured labourers but also, more importantly, in the sense that black Atlantic formations can be understood as *constitutive* of Asian diasporic formations. That is, the

black Atlantic was not solely black, and Asian diasporic movements were not solely transpacific.

Asian American critics such as Gary Okihiro and Lisa Yun have long argued for the importance of thinking about Asian diasporas in relation to black diasporas. In *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, Okihiro argues that "the migration of Asians to America cannot be divorced from the African slave trade, or from the coolie trade that followed in its wake" (47). In his recognition of the connections between coolie and slave histories, Okihiro warns against emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities between these coercive forms of labour migration. Lisa Yun and Ricardo Laremont argue that "The terms 'coolie' or 'indentured labourer' . . . obfuscate the very political and experiential nature of coolies" (101). Comparing the cost of slave and coolie labour in nineteenth-century Cuba, Yun and Laremont demonstrate that coolie labour was significantly cheaper than slave labour and note that the conditions of work for coolies were no different and sometimes even worse than for those of slaves from Africa (107–09). "Because of malnourishment and abusive conditions, over fifty percent of coolies died *before* their eight-year contract ended. The average life span of an African slave on a sugar plantation was twenty years" (Yun and Laremont 113). These statistics are horrifying enough to suggest that it would not be mistaken to understand the indenture of Chinese labourers within the terms of slavery.

My point here is not that slavery and indenture shared similar features or that the horrors of slavery did not end with abolition. There has been a tendency to think of the black and Asian diasporas as distinct partly because of legal differences between these two forms of forced labour[5] but also because these legal differences are also reinforced by the supposition of distinctly separate geographical passages. Understanding Pacific passages as linked to Atlantic passages enables an understanding of the relationship between Asian and black diasporic subjectivities. If the Middle Passage has been a crucible for the emergence of contemporary black identity, Asian Canadian scholars would be amiss in not also looking at the ways in which these routes lie within the histories of some Asian migrant populations. Asian Canadian scholarship needs to untangle the spatial overlap that marks both the displacement of slavery by indenture and the congruence of these experiences.

Investigating the routes of indenture offers an opportunity to think about the passage itself as deeply transformative and to meditate on what these transformations might be for diasporic cultures. The average journey from

Macao to Havana took more than half a year. What happened in that time? What kinds of bonds were formed, and which communities emerged from these experiences? How do they resonate in contemporary culture? In "(B) ordering Naipaul: Indenture History and Diaspora Poetics," Vijay Mishra argues "that any account of the production and reproduction of diaspora culture must begin with the ships of the passage: 'indenture lives in dates and distances,' writes Arnold Itwaru in his poem 'We have Survived' (293)" (196). Taking up Henri Lefebvre's provocative declaration that "No space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace" (164), Mishra suggests that "the ship was a space that outlived its original design" (198). It carries a resonance, the memory of confinement, passage, and transformation, beyond that of the journey itself. Displacements and migrations are not simply about people moving from one place to another. Rather, the processes of displacement carry within them a memory tied to the materiality of ships, of passages, of the months and days spent at sea in abysmal conditions and under constant threat. Diasporas are formed not only by the act of moving from place to another but also by what happens along the way. After all, no one is born a coolie. One *becomes* one through experiencing the spaces of imperial confinement—the ship's hold, the barracks of embarkation, and those of arrival. This becoming is a process of subjection from which slave and indentured subjectivities emerge in the "living memory" of incarceration (Gilroy 198).[6] Within this process of becoming, of subject formation and the attendant resistances to these incarceratory forms of subjectivization, we can decipher the transformations from which diasporic subjectivities might emerge.

Contemplating the relation between what we might think of as "indenture passages" for Asian diasporas and contemporary experiences of displacement, we come to the problem of old and new diasporas. In 1996 issues of *Textual Practice*, Vijay Mishra and Gayatri Spivak, in separate essays, mark out the distinction between old and new diasporas. In "The Diasporic Imaginary," Mishra suggests that "the old Indian diasporas of the sugar plantations" who "make up a single group of dispersed and territorially disaggregated bodies" can be distinguished from the "new" Indian diasporas, which "are part of a global odyssey as they renegotiate new topographies through the travails of travel" (427, 435). Similarly, Spivak asks in "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World," "What were the old diasporas, before the world was thoroughly consolidated as transnational? They were the results of religious oppression and war, of slavery and indenturing, trade and conquest, and intra-European economic migration which,

since the nineteenth century, took the form of migration and immigration to the United States" (245). While this distinction between old and new diasporas has not been significantly taken up in subsequent discussions of diaspora and postcoloniality, I want to return to it because these categories open up a way of understanding the heterogeneity of diasporic communities while still attending to the continuities of specific historical experiences of displacement. Mishra notes that drawing out a distinction between old and new Indian diasporas in his essay is more than "a purely heuristic desire for a neat taxonomy" ("Diasporic Imaginary" 442). He draws "attention to the complex procedures by which diasporas negotiate their perceived moment of trauma and how, in the artistic domain, the trauma works itself out" (442). Mishra's identification of the old Indian diaspora with the traumas of indenture passage points to ways in which the experience of the passage shapes diasporic communities. Implicit within the distinction between old and new diasporas lies the problem of involuntary and voluntary displacement. Extending Spivak's and Mishra's project, I suggest that the "old" diasporas of indenture and slavery are not fully distinct from the "new" ones of jet-fuelled transnational mobility. Rather, these diasporas are contemporaneous and can draw attention to the ways in which the past is constitutive of the present.

While both Mishra and Spivak make the distinction between old and new diasporic subjects, my sense is that we cannot so easily separate them. That is, one is constitutive of and defined against the other. Contemporary Asian Canadian literature grapples with these connections and ruptures of old and new diasporic experiences. Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* juxtaposes the narratives of characters such as Kae Ying Woo and Hermia Chow against old diasporic characters such as Wong Gwei Chang and Lee Mui Lan. Wah's *Diamond Grill* meditates on the connections between his father's experience of becoming Chinese and his own. Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence* explores the connections between Wu Lan, a psychologist living in Vancouver, and Lee Ah Choi and Chow Chat Mui, two prostitutes in nineteenth-century Singapore. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Larissa Lai pushes the edges of the old and the new, staging the connection between Nu Wa in ancient China and Miranda, who lives in a future that is yet to come. These texts attempt to think through the relation between the old and new experiences of migration and displacement as a function of what it means to be in diaspora. They take up what it means to feel connected to one place and be in another while also attending to what it means to be in one moment in history and still feel the presence of another.

It is this question of history that marks for me the urgent relation between Asian Canadian literary criticism and postcolonial historiography. As Stephen Slemon notes in "Post-Colonial Critical Theories," postcolonial theory consistently questions the category of history. Taking up Eduardo Galeano's retelling of the Spanish conquest of South and Central America through the figure of the poet and the "remembering of colonial history, at its most brutal and abject, in a language of smell, touch and taste" (109), Slemon argues that

> The intellectual challenge for post-colonial critical theory is to attempt to come to know the story of colonial and neo-colonial engagements in all their complexity, and to find ways to represent those engagements in a language that can build cross-disciplinary, cross-community, cross-cultural alliances for the historical production of genuine social change. That is how [Slemon reads] Eduardo Galeano's message about the poet of conquest, who seeks out history in the stones of the river, who teaches history in the smell of the wind. (114)

Whether this postcolonial engagement takes place through the subaltern historiography or colonial discourse analysis, it never lets go of the question of the subject of history and the subjective experiences of the past, of history as it resides in the memory of the senses. While there is still much work to be done in examining the relationship between postcoloniality and Asian Canadian literature, we might begin with postcolonialism's commitment to this question of the subject of history. Asian Canadian literary studies cannot take for granted the subject of its engagement and must continue to wrestle with constructions of race and ethnicity as well as the historical contingencies of those constructions. Asian Canadian literature is not simply a multicultural subsection of something bigger called Canadian literature. It is more than just a piece of the Canadian literary puzzle. Rather, it situates Canadian literature within a complex and delicate global network of routes and passages that are at once cultural and historical. Asian Canadian literature reaches outward across the Pacific and beyond as much as it reaches inward toward the heart of the Prairies; it reaches backward through the histories of displacement and forward to futures that we have yet to imagine.

I am aware of the problem of flattening out the multiple histories of Asian indenture. Not only are there significant differences in the histories of Indian and Chinese labouring communities, but there are also important differences between the experiences of Chinese indentured labourers. That is, the experience of working on the Canadian Pacific Railway is not the same as that of hauling guano in Peru, which is not the same as that of working on the sugar plantations in Cuba, and so on. Some labourers travelled on the

credit-ticket system, some as indentured labourers, some as contract labourers. However, my sense is that we need to explore the similarities, the ways in which these histories of displacement create common cultural formations. One of the challenges of diaspora theory is to think through what David Scott, in reference to Kamau Braithwaite, calls "an obscure miracle of connection" (*Refashioning Futures* 106)—how it is that one of the effects of the isolating experience of displacement is that of a powerful sense of connection to communities that are not even necessarily bound by nation, race, or class.

We might also keep in mind that the differentiations between the forms of the exploitation of Chinese labour (credit-ticket, contract, outright indenture, and so on) are distinctions that have been engendered by colonial and imperial bureaucracies. I suggest that, at least in the case of labourers imported from Asia for reasons of economy and ease of exploitation, the divisions between voluntary and involuntary, contract and indenture, are false ones. As postcolonial historians such as Madhavi Kale and Gyan Prakash have noted, the categories of free and unfree labour emerged out of colonialism and imperialism. Prakash's *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India* argues that the discourse of freedom is tied to notions of the individual subject, while Kale notes that the very category of labour and its place in British history "were forged in the crucible of empire" (3–4). Reading the archive of Indian indenture through the lens of race and gender, Kale proposes that

> The articulation of gender, race and nation or colonial status is what made indentured labor so crucial to the crystallization of "free labour" ideology. Indentured labour was peculiarly suited to imperial post-emancipation conditions because it recognized and implicitly capitalized on racial differentiation—indeed racial hierarchy—within the empire by contributing to naturalizing, universalizing a bourgeois-imperial sexual division of labor that was not only predicated on but also reproduced women's banishment to the domestic: to domestic labor, space, identity. (174)

The differentiation of race and its hierarchization, as well as the gendering of labour, made possible a postemancipation system of labour exploitation that can ostensibly hold to the principles of abolition without relinquishing a reliance on unfree labour. It is not that indenture was necessarily slavery under a different name (although those who advocated the end of indenture, such as the commissioners of the *Cuba Commission Report*, certainly declared it to be such) but that indenture, as Kale notes above, "crystallized" notions of freedom that made possible the dichotomization of free and unfree labour.

I began with a sense of the multiple possible futures of Asian Canadian literature, and it seems as though I have ended up in the past. However, in Fred Wah's apt words, "this rusty nail has been here forever in fact the real last spike is yet to be driven" (*Diamond Grill* 165). The "rusty" traumas of displacement and discrimination remain unredressed. The question of the future is also that of the past. As David Scott observes in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, our imaginings of the future shape our relations to the past. He notes that postcolonial studies has anchored much of its imaginings of a postcolonial future in a Romantic vision of anticolonial struggle (in which "Romantic" refers precisely to the heritage of European literary Romanticism). This unacknowledged reliance upon a Romantic narrative of anticolonial struggle and anticolonial revolutionary figures such as Toussaint L'Ouverture leaves postcolonial studies with an unresolved longing for a future already belied by the tragedies of postcolonial governance. Writing about the problem of the future, Scott suggests "that alleged histories of the present (postcolonial or otherwise) tend to elide the problem of 'futures' in historical temporality": "I do not mean by this that they are non- (or anti-) utopian in formulation (though they typically are this too). I mean, rather, that these histories tend *not* to inquire systematically into the ways in which the expectation of—or longing for—particular futures helps to shape the kind of problem the past is constructed as for the present" (31). Scott points to the crucial role of desire in the relation of the past to the future and how our longings for particular futures shape our understandings of the past.

While postcolonial studies, as Scott suggests, longs for anticolonial revolution and revolutionaries rooted in a disavowed Romanticism, Asian Canadian literary studies seems to be uncertain about its own desires. It exists not in longings unfulfilled and unrequitable but in the peculiar ache of longings that have yet to be articulated. As Goellnicht notes, almost wistfully, we do not have an explicit history of revolution or struggle upon which to base the emergence of the field: "Asian Canadians never attained the status of a mass, panethnic social movement but remained localized groups, primarily in Vancouver or Toronto, or focused on the issues of a single ethnic group" (9). Unlike Asian American studies, Asian Canadian literary criticism does not emerge directly from U.S. countercultural political movements such as the civil rights struggle, the anti–Vietnam War protests, or the Third World strikes. However, not knowing the shape of our longings does not necessarily result in an elision of the question of the future. Rather, existing within this

ache of longing for a future that has yet to be articulated enables a different kind of temporal relation. It can be, as I have been suggesting in this essay, a relation that imagines a future out of the precariousness of displacement. If what we long for shapes our understanding of what we think we know, then we must attend to the longings shot through Asian Canadian literature for community, for redress, for the right to embrace the sadnesses of history as much as the pleasures of memory. The work of the present continues to be that of understanding the proleptic power of forgotten and suppressed pasts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Guy Beauregard, Don Goellnicht, Masumi Izumi, Tseen Khoo, David Lloyd, and Henry Yu for the conversations through which this paper has been developed. My gratitude is also due to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which has supported the research on which this work is based.

NOTES

1 There has been a series of race riots targeted against Chinese immigrants in Canadian history, including the 1907 Vancouver riot, which caused enough concern at both local and national levels that Wilfrid Laurier, the prime minister at the time, stepped in to police the situation. For detailed discussions of anti-Chinese riots and anti-Chinese legislation (the two often went hand in hand), see Li; Roy; Ward; and Wickberg et al.

2 Ong observes in the prologue to *Buddha Is Hiding* that, "In *Flexible Citizenship*, I suggest that new affluent Asian immigrants—relocating their families and wealth to North America, while pursuing business interests in Asia—represent a new kind of disembodied citizenship. This is a parallel study of the 'other Asians'—Southeast Asian war refugees—who flowed in at roughly the same time, and it will focus on the practices that embed these newcomers in specific contexts of subject-making" (xiv).

3 For a more extensive discussion of Chineseness and the significance of the head tax legislation in Canada, see Cho.

4 See Hu-DeHart for a discussion of Asian diaspora populations and the history of indenture in Latin America. Also see Helly for *The Cuba Commission Report*.

5 As Hu-DeHart argues, we cannot ignore the legal differences between slavery and indenture no matter what similarities there were in terms of material conditions: "it is important to separate actual physical treatment from legal status. A well-treated slave was still chattel for life by law" (83).

6 In the final chapter of *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Gilroy writes of "the living memory of the changing same" (198). His notion of this "living memory"—which changes and yet remains tied to the continuities between the past and the present—offers an important way of understanding the presence of the history of slavery in memory of contemporary black diasporic subjects.

WORKS CITED

Applied History Research Group, University of Calgary. 2001. U of Calgary. 29 Apr. 2003. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/migrations/five4.html>.
Boyarin, Jonathan, and Daniel Boyarin. *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002.
Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Braziel, Jana Evans, and Anita Mannur. "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies." *Theorizing Diaspora*. Ed. Braziel and Mannur. London: Blackwell, 2003. 1–20.
Campbell, Persia Crawford. *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire*. London: King and Son, 1923.
Canada. *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration in Canada*. Ottawa, 1885.
Cho, Lily. "Rereading Head Tax Racism: Redress, Stereotype, and Antiracist Critical Practice." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 62-84.
Cutler, Carl. *Greyhounds of the Sea*. New York: Halcyon, 1937.
Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 72 (2000): 1-41.
Helly, Denise, ed. *The Cuba Commission Report: A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba*. 1876. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.
Hu-DeHart, Evelyn. "Latin America in Asia-Pacific Perspective." *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*. Ed. Arif Dirlik. 2nd ed. New York: Rowman, 1997. 251-78.
JanMohamed, Abdul, and David Lloyd. "Introduction: Towards a Theory of Minority Discourse." *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. New York: Oxford UP, 1990. 1–16.
Kale, Madhavi. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration in the British Caribbean*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1998.
Khoo, Tseen-ling. *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literature*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003.
Kwa, Lydia. *This Place Called Absence*. Winnipeg: Turnstone, 2002.
Lai, Larissa. *Salt Fish Girl*. Toronto: Allen, 2002.
Lee, SKY. *Disappearing Moon Café*. Vancouver: Douglas, 1990.
Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Blackwell, 1991.
Li, Peter. *The Chinese in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.
Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra*. Boston: Beacon, 2001.
Mishra, Vijay. "(B)ordering Naipaul: Indenture History and Diaspora Poetics." *Diaspora* 5.2 (1996): 189-237.
—. "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora." *Textual Practice* 10.3 (1996): 421-47.
Okihiro, Gary. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1994.
Ong, Aihwa. *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

—. "Cyberpublics and Diaspora Politics among Transnational Chinese." *Interventions* 5.1 (2003): 82-100.
— . *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999.
Prakash, Gyan. *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1990.
Roy, Patricia. *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants 1858–1914*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1989.
Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.
—. *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999.
Sharpe, Jenny. "Is the United States Postcolonial?" *Diaspora* 4.2 (1995): 181-99.
Slemon, Stephen. "Post-Colonial Critical Theories." *Postcolonial Discourses: An Anthology*. Ed. Gregory Castle. London: Blackwell, 2001. 99-118.
Spivak, Gayatri. "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World." *Textual Practice* 10.2 (1996): 245-69.
Tölölyan, Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *Diaspora* 5.1 (1996): 3-36.
Wah, Fred. *Diamond Grill*. Edmonton: NeWest, 1996.
— . "Half-Bred Poetics." *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*. Edmonton: NeWest, 2000. 71-96.
Walsh, Rebecca. "Global Diasporas: Introduction." *Interventions* 5.1 (2003): 1-11.
Ward, W. Peter. *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy toward Orientals in British Columbia*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1978.
Wickberg, Edgar, et al. *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland, 1983.
Yun, Lisa. "Under the Hatches: American Coolie Ships and Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Pacific Passage." *Amerasia Journal* 28.2 (2002): 38-61.
Yun, Lisa, and Ricardo Laremont. "Chinese Coolies and African Slaves in Cuba 1847-74." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4.2 (2001): 99-122.

Henry Yu

Afterword

Does there exist an object to be studied called Asian Canadian writing? Is there, as Gertrude Stein famously remarked about Oakland, a *there* there? The essays in this issue do not assume, as some academic practitioners still do, that the objects they study exist in some simple way before their acts of producing knowledge frame and indeed create them as objects. They are, to use Guy Beauregard's term, concerned about the *terrain* of a field called Asian Canadian studies, and as they explore new ground they are filled with an awareness of it as a built environment rather than some natural landscape. In various ways, each of the authors has carried an acute sense of how they or the writers they study fit uncomfortably into some object called "Asian Canadian writing," or indeed the subjectivity of someone that might be labeled an "Asian Canadian writer." Ultimately, they leave us with the question of whether there is even a subject we might call an "Asian Canadian," or whether we might be better off with a less narrowly construed definition of the histories and experiences of migrants and settlers in Canada who can trace ancestry to Asia.

Is there a *there* to be found, a destination awaiting us? There is something to be said about the possibility that the place of origin is more stable than all the wandering might suggest. After all, in the study of Asian Canadian writing, many of the writers in question—Wayson Choy, Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Jim Wong-Chu—appear again and again as the usual suspects, and the concrete site of Vancouver anchors so much of their lives and their writings. They did not appear *sui generis*, but came formed out of a particular intersection of histories and their memories of these histories. Interpretations of these writers' work, and of the places and people they created, find solid grounding in a specific time and space, or so it seems to a historian like me. The 1970s in Vancouver and across Canada was a particular context for the eruption of creativity that Donald Goellnicht has called the "birthing" of Asian Canadian writing. Shaped by the conversations that newly formed networks of artists and writers and political activists carried on in places

like "Pender Guy" and Powell Street and at UBC, the fictions of a Canadian history that had excluded or erased their voices were confronted by voices straining to be heard. This is a powerful myth of origin, akin to the birthing stories of Asian American literature out of the Kearney Street Workshop in San Francisco and the activism of the fight over the International Hotel and at San Francisco State College and at the University of California at Berkeley. Donald Goellnicht, however, in discussing Roy Kiyooka's and Fred Wah's trajectories as writers who entered the "canon" of Asian Canadian writers later in their careers, traces a more complicated story that explores how recognition and marketing intersect and, at times, collide with the writer's own conceptions of what and why they are producing, showing the shifts that have occurred in Canadian literature between the 1970s and the 1990s.

Perhaps it is the historian in me that narrates change using simple historicist explanations, but it seems clear: The 1990s was a different time, and therefore the writings had changed, giving us Evelyn Lau and Kevin Chong and Larissa Lai and new challenges and possibilities for using identity as an analytical category. Glenn Deer's essay accordingly focuses on the aesthetics and politics of a different generation of artists, a period marked by an expanding market demand for the literature of "visible minorities," and one that redefined the meaning of those earlier writers such as Kiyooka and Wah, whose work found new interpretations and meanings as well as new categorizations. There were writers, activists, publishers, critics, and readers who actively shaped this new terrain. In this respect, one important consequence of having gathered all these essays into a single issue is the rich grounding they provide, a mapping of the shifting terrain that created a new product to be harvested and packaged, the "Asian Canadian" as ethnic writer.

This collection of essays aims to go farther, however, and take us to another place, more unsettled in all senses of the word. It is "contested" terrain, created out of political practices and fought over, not in the way armies battle over turf, but the way architects and designers fight over the very shape of the built environment. It is also an intellectual site that has not presumed Canadian nationalism or settler colonial politics as the rationale for academic production. The aim of scholarship, in other words, must not rely on the politics of national incorporation and inclusion, an addition of streams of Asian migrants into a larger national narrative of Canadian immigrant settlement. If the landscape of Canadian academia shapes Asian Canadian studies, can we avoid all of the rivers flowing to the same shore, the creation of some desired object called Canadian society and culture? Contribution to the

development of Canadian literature, as admirable and enjoyable a goal for scholarship that this might be, is too limiting a terrain for us to navigate.

The question of what purposes the knowledge about "Asian Canadians" should serve underlies all of the essays, based upon the premise that the objective shapes the object as surely as a cup shapes the water. Guy Beauregard and Christopher Lee in particular point to the very battles over definition that determine the political possibilities of categories, and the essays by Roy Miki, Rita Wong, and Lily Cho all, in their own particular ways, question both the pasts and futures of narrowly construed definitions of identity politics. What is to be gained by the practice of creating, studying, and discussing the category of "Asian Canadian" writing? And with much trepidation, what is to be lost or ignored, or worse yet excluded, like the Chinese and Punjabi Sikhs and Japanese each in their own ways so many decades ago? The legacy of exclusion, it might be argued, is central to the problematic of Asian Canadian literature, and with this legacy comes a heightened awareness of other exclusions and the political necessity of alliances and coalitions, so that we do not perpetuate in our actions the very exclusions we repudiate. Rita Wong places the writings of nominal Asian Canadians in dialogue with First Nations history, and Lily Cho uses parallels between the migration of indentured Chinese labour to the Americas and the African slave trade in the Atlantic as heuristic devices to question too singular a focus on "Asians" as unique subjects in history.

Although this is a collection of essays primarily concerned with literature, Lily Cho's and Iyko Day's essays reminds us that it is not only in the field of literature that we see the connections and inextricable ties between projects of racialization that produced—and continue to produce—categories such as "Oriental," "Native," "white," and "black." Day's work on the shifting history of categories in the Canadian and US census reveals that the role of state institutions in defining categories of belonging reflect complex political processes that at times ran parallel in Canada and the US but, at other times, diverged in significant ways. Among many fascinating insights, Day points out that the erasure of race that has marked much of Canadian policy and categorization is not the transcendent accomplishment that many smug Canadians embrace as a point of national pride. Analyzed in conjunction with the successful capture of census enumeration by civil rights groups in the US (groups that recognized the value of counting bodies as a way of demanding resources and changes in public policy), the evasion in Canada of a correlation between the categories created by the census

and categories of discrimination, exclusion, and injustice created by racial practices has resulted in a profound disconnect. One of my bi-national Canadian/American friends used to remark that racism in Canada struck him as perverse in comparison to racism in the United States because "they just lynch you from a lower branch." What she meant by this was never clear, but her assertion captures the distinctions in kind and degree between racial projects here and there, as well as the mythic untruth that a victim of racism in Canada is somehow better off because of some kinder, gentler, and more obscured form of racialization. But when you are hanging from the branch, does it really matter how high it is in the tree? The gulf itself between rhetoric and practice that Day's essay suggests as a characteristic of racial categories in Canada is significant: it is the oft-frustrating disjuncture between what is imagined as a happy race-free society where we are all Canadians to an equal degree, and a society where inequities and injustices are difficult to quantify and remedy because we do not know how to count.

How are we to imagine and classify ethnic and racial groups, let alone count them and critique the literature produced by them? Who defines the "them" and for what purpose? The inadequacies of an "identity politics" that charts individual "ethnic groups" or "visible minorities" are a target of several essays in the issue, with explicit links drawn to the multicultural policy of the federal government of Canada. The "management" of multiculturalism, the not-so-hidden hand at work in the politics of cultural production, is a political and aesthetic strategy that has succeeded in the classic "divide and rule" practices of Canada's imperial past, but also in a more contemporary "divide and consume" manner that is particularly pertinent for understanding the production and consumption of literature. At the heart of the commodification of "ethnic" literature is a darkness born of the marketplace, a shade cast upon the art of "visible minorities" that brings to light the centering of consumption practices on an idealized "white" consumer.

The product can produce the consumer. The exotic, after all, is exotic to someone in particular, and the smorgasbord stylings of the new Canadian literature can produce as its generic consumer a sophisticated cosmopolitan who has risen above racism and is able to appreciate those who are different. White supremacy in relationship to Asian migrants used to mean exclusion and social hierarchies of status and profession. Such political practices served as a glue to weld together a wide range of fractious settlers as European, "white Canadians" (a rather redundant term in practice, since the modification of Canadian by terms such as "Asian" Canadian presumed that

the norm was a white Canadian). The state-sponsored multicultural ideology disseminated in contemporary Canada has seemingly left that world behind, but we continue to encounter strange legacies of a racially stratified past. Exoticism and objectification, a fetish for the quaint writings of the authentically strange—is this the cup from which Asian Canadian writings pour forth? Is there no *there* there in terms of an authentic Asian Canadian writer whose subjectivity produces Asian Canadian writing? Is the authentic subject itself a product of the marketing of multicultural consumption?

One should hope not, even if the suspicions lie close to the surface, as they clearly do in Marie Lo's examination of the reception of Evelyn Lau's writings. The "currency" of visibility, the commodification of authenticity that fetishizes the exotic and packages and re-packages the product for our consumption—if we go down this path as the terrain for understanding Asian Canadian writing we will be lost in the wilderness of endless empty commodities. Christopher Lee suggests that the best we can do, in following Hannah Arendt's notion of action, is perhaps to enact this thing called Asian Canadian and, in our enacting of it, we can build it with political intent and worthy cause. It is, he believes, how the category of "Asian Canadian" has been built, and through seemingly endless births, it has been what has kept it from becoming just a label on a shelf at Chapters that makes it easier for consumers to find and buy the right product.

It is difficult to isolate the product from the market, the book from its readers, the commodity from the consumer. This issue has taken this challenge head on, and what has resulted is of importance for understanding more than just the rise of an interesting category called "Asian Canadian" in literature; the issue also speaks to and engages with the long history of racialization as a process of power and a legitimation of hierarchy in Canadian and North American settler societies. Literature as a form of power, as a way of imagining the world and of distributing that imaginary, is at the center of this issue's problematic.

What should be obvious—that everybody except First Nations peoples came late to this place, and in myriad ways some migrants "got it over" on indigenous peoples and other migrants—should not be a surprise to anyone anymore. But to argue that this conception of a "Canadian" history and society is in itself liberating also comes into serious question. Roy Miki in his essay grounds us not in a hermetically bounded place called Canada but instead opens questions about the fictions that produce Canada in a global context. Spatial metaphors abound, and the framings of local and global dissolve the familiar geographic terrain of the nation.

If we enact and practice and produce in our activity something we agree to call Asian Canadian studies, it must be open to the global connections that have made being Canadian a convenient fiction (even if the privileges of that citizenship and that passport go beyond mere convenience). The local sites that Canadians make their homes are enmeshed with other places around the world, whether in people's imaginations or in the movements of bodies and goods. To ask our questions and center our studies on some narrowly construed place called Canada would beggar what has always been the generative consequence of adding the term "Asian" to the term "Canadian." It is more than saying that some migrants to Canada came from some place called Asia—it is to raise the specter that the categories themselves are fictions we need to understand for the hierarchies and exclusions that can be mobilized through their use, to embrace a history which made "Orientals" a problem and a solution for creating Canadian unity. The discomfort of adding the excluded term of "Asian" to "Canadian" invokes a long history of how, in Canada, excluding some girds some others. But we need also to examine what has been lost in that process and what other possibilities for life were obscured or ignored in those categories. What makes the problematic of "Asian Canadian" important to consider, and I hope also important to practice and to act, is that it is a troubled, contested place with questionable boundaries. We must constantly ask ourselves how the things we say or do serve a purpose, and how we can reach out to make the wider world a more just and equitable place.

We sit at a propitious moment, when intellectual and economic and demographic and political transformations have made the expansion of institutional programs devoted to studying "Asian Canadians" possible. As someone who is involved in trying to build some of these structures, I can say that it is a constant challenge. Not all interests are equal, and not all interests will be equally served. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the essays in this collection, it is a warning and a clarion call: to not forget the contested terrain upon which we live, and to recognize that our work is a continuing struggle that has had a long history. Whom we welcome as neighbors, whom we work with together, and whom we ignore at our peril—all will be affected by or determined by the daily practices we enact. Whether there is such a thing as Asian Canadian writing, whether there is a *there* there to be found, *there* is still a place I recognize, even if it is contested ground, a place where I can see myself thinking and working, where I can see a home, even if it is not the only place I feel at home. I hope this issue is another foundational step, like many foundational steps before, towards building this place.

Epilogue
A Conversation on Unfinished Projects

Christopher Lee: *Canadian Literature* has kindly given us a few pages to reflect on our engagements with and investments in Asian Canadian Studies in light of our essays in this special issue. I am always struck by how intellectual work around Asian Canadian Studies coalesces at certain moments around specific concerns. Recently some of us have been reflecting on how quickly Asian Canadian Studies has been taken up by academic institutions; one sees advertisements for academic positions, for example, that directly refer to Asian Canadian literature, and some of us teach in departments that regularly admit graduate students who declare it as their primary area of research. Does this mean that we can speak of an Asian Canadian intellectual tradition? If so, what kinds of responsibilities do we have—intellectually, politically, pedagogically—if we consciously call ourselves Asian Canadianists?

Guy Beauregard: I agree with Chris that the question of responsibility remains crucial to our future work. If Asian Canadian studies is to be understood as a critical project—and not simply viewed as a bounded object of inquiry—then we need to ask ourselves what this critical project can do. The value of this special issue, as I see it, is how it opens up this question in remarkable ways. Yet I am reminded here of a point Roy Miki made a decade ago in *Broken Entries* (1998): that cultural texts do not arrive in our hands with their meanings ready made. This is certainly the case with this special issue too. For while the individual contributions to this special issue robustly investigate the stakes involved in doing Asian Canadian critical work, the potential significance of these contributions, understood as a whole, will depend on what comes after.

Iyko Day: I think Chris's question of whether we can identify an Asian Canadian intellectual tradition provides an interesting moment to reflect on the "impurity" of that tradition. Like some of the other contributors to this

issue who were trained and have worked in both Canada and the US, the spectre of Asian American studies unavoidably mediates the way I engage with Asian Canadian cultural politics. For me this has meant—as my essay in this collection suggests—distinguishing Canadian racial and ethnic politics from the US context. Today, I still see the need to distinguish Asian Canadian studies, particularly in terms of the distinct legacy of artists and cultural activists that gave rise to its current institutional configuration, while acknowledging the vexed porosity of national borders and the recurrence of anti-Asian settler nationalisms. So in conceptualizing an intellectual tradition, perhaps Larissa Lai's notion of a "corrupted lineage" (2001) best captures the complex and ongoing interplay of nation and transnation in the field.

Don Goellnicht: As someone who started teaching Asian American literature from the peculiar position of central Canada over fifteen years ago, Iyko's comment on the relationship between Asian American studies and Asian Canadian cultural politics resonates profoundly, as does Chris's original question. In my own pedagogy, the shift has been from Asian American through Asian North American and Asian Canadian to Asian Diaspora studies, and not as a simple linear progression: the fraught negotiations and perilous navigations continue. At this significant moment of institutional formation, with a new generation charting its configuration, it's clearly valuable to continue these productive debates, but it's also important to ensure that they don't become debilitating. As we encourage increasing numbers of graduate students into the field, however defined, it's incumbent on us to create secure institutional spaces in which they can work and build careers, just as it's important to ensure that Asian Canadian communities find their cultures fully represented in higher education.

Marie Lo: Like Iyko and some of the other contributors to this volume, I was also trained in the US and Canada. These days, it seems to almost go without saying that Asian American analytic paradigms have been important points of reference in the formation of Asian Canadian studies. While my work on Asian Canadian cultural politics has certainly been routed through Asian American Studies, my work on Asian American cultural politics has simultaneously been shaped by the critical engagements of Asian Canadian scholars. I am an Asian Americanist as much as I am an Asian Canadianist. For me, excavating an Asian Canadian intellectual tradition—however fraught such a project might be—is of necessity twinned with complicating an Asian American one.

Glenn Deer: While many of the essays in this issue capture moments in Asian North American culture that have already become part of history, the problems that appeared urgent in the recent past now persist in different forms. The recovery of previously suppressed voices, anti-racist activism, critiques of multiculturalism, the negotiation of institutional inclusion, identity politics, and the development of productive pedagogies are still significant issues. These are supplemented by the need to cross borders, to move comparatively across national spaces, and to build and maintain communities of Asian North American inquiry, and to extend coalitions between teachers, theorists, writers, and artists in all modes of cultural production. This conversation has already been joined by many writers who are not part of this collection because of the limitations of space, but whose critical work must be accounted for as helping to shape future directions in our research and teaching.

Roy Miki: I would say that the institutional visibility of Asian Canadian literary studies calls for critical negotiations and practices specific to its contingent formations. The temptation to stabilize its institutional presence may occlude the always provisional conditions of its various manifestations. For me, despite the critical work done in its name, "Asian Canadian" remains a limit term that generates, simultaneously and sometimes with cross purposes, a shifting body of social and cultural references and an equally shifting body of textual forms and practices. Coming to appearance in the fraught belly of the Canadian nation-state, it now circulates in multiple arenas of interpretation, subject to both progressive critical research and to the perils of institutional containment and careerism. At this time, the uneven effects of transnational flows are producing the need to develop a research ethics to approach Asian Canadian work as an open-ended critical frame that always (or do I mean all ways?) has the potential to expose and transform dominant relations of power. (Am I being too hopeful? I hope not.)

Rita Wong: One might look to the etymology of the word "Canada," the Huron-Iroquoian word kanata, for a reminder of how the very term "Asian Canadian" relies on First Nations land, language, and history. Moving from colonial pillage to ethical village feels like an intellectual journey that still has a long way to go. As Sunera Thobani writes in her book *Exalted Subjects*, "The transformation of the racialized nature of the national-formation requires a fundamental redefinition of the relationships of all non-indigenous populations to Aboriginal peoples" (250). To phrase it from another

angle, Dorothy Christian, a video artist from the Splatsin, asks, "Can you love the land like I do?" and (in the context of having worked hard to support the Mohawk resistance at Kanehsatake/Oka in 1990), "Who is going to be standing next to me when an army tank is coming at me?" I hope that "Asian Canadian" has both use-value and ethical thinking to offer toward decolonization and what it means to respect the indigenous cultures of this land. The journey starts with the human but doesn't end there. May there still be enough time for us to deeply learn and understand ecological interdependence.

Lily Cho: When I think about Asian Canadian Studies and its place in academic institutions, I am struck by the varied and various paths it has traveled through communities and disciplines. In terms of Asian Canadian literature specifically, I am also struck by the many fields of expertise (postcolonial, Canadian literature, diaspora, transnationalism, eighteenth-century literature, Asian American studies, ethnic studies and so on) from which its practitioners have emerged. Thinking about all this—and looking at the conversation unfolding in this collective epilogue—I am excited about the possibilities for how Asian Canadian can remain a site of openness where the boundaries are not quite worked out. It draws on a diverse set of intellectual traditions and practices. It has been, as Iyko notes via Larissa Lai, capaciously corruptible in terms of its sense of lineage. Its trajectory has been circuitous and open-ended. Not knowing where it will end up has been enormously generative. It's hard to not know and exciting too. I can't wait to see what comes next.

WORKS CITED

Christian, Dorothy. "Remapping Activism." *Active Geographies: Women and Struggles on the Left Coast*. Eds. Jo-Anne Lee and Rita Wong. Special issue of *West Coast Line* 58 (2008): 15-20

Lai, Larissa. "Corrupted Lineage: Narrative in the Gaps of History." *In-Equations: can asia pacific*. Special issue of *West Coast Line* 33 (2001): 40-53.

Miki, Roy. *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing*. Toronto: Mercury, 1998.

Thobani, Sunera. *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2007.

Tim Mook Sang

Mill Houses[1]

I am that bird flying back in spring,
soaring over the model village,
the somewhat-to-scale miniature
of a northern Canadian settlement.
I am that bird
hovering over budding maples,
nipping on northern shrubbery,
travelling the quiet river
as it paths out of the trees
and meanders through the village.

I look down with our birds-eye view of history.

I am flying back,
back to when 100 Mile House
was a single one of these houses
(or even one of the wood-sheds)
and not the town outside Prince George,
back to when I was in elementary school
on a field trip
and my life now was *this* piece of art
hanging in our local gallery.

1. *Mill Houses* was painted by A.J. Casson in 1928

Dale Lee Kwong

Ng Shu Kwong
(1869-1929)

barely sixteen in 1885
Gong-gong leaves Tin Sum village in southern China
to be a foreigner in Canada

arranging passage to cross the Pacific
crowded and shivering for months
enduring drafts in the dark dank underbelly

what went through his mind
deloused, debriefed and quarantined in Victoria
his Chinese name registered backwards

trekking miles across the Monashee Mountains
mining for gold in Cherry Creek
after white miners strip it first

what compelled him to settle in Vernon, B.C.
build a general store with rooms above for his family:
two wives and fifteen children

bartering with Indians and Chinese farmers
stocking everything from pelts to luggage
faithfully sending money overseas

his big treat every few weeks
bulk cracker crumbs and watered down condensed milk
savoured like Peking duck

at sixty his liver fails
Chinese countrymen cannot call
absent by act of exclusion

from his grave, perhaps
grandfather hears those present few
and the mournful tones of the Salvation Army Band

Terry Watada

August Light

when
      the evening
 creeps
into the empire of day,
the light
        turns
 nostalgic.

I see my mother
in her green, egg-shell
patterned smock   buzzing
around
      my dad
who's sitting out-
side   on
a kitchen chair in
a sheet
     to keep himself
clean get-
ting
        his hair cut
flinching at every knick
every
         itch

I hated
her in
  her green smock
because I knew I was next:
the shaver
      and snipping
 scissors
            mosquito-
biting
my neck—the tiny
filings digging
into
      the skin
irritating to a scratch—

in the garden of lush

       Rousseau-
dark
cucumber jungle patch,
        nudetomato
plants and
snake - pear tree insects
circle,
          looking
for an opportunity to feed.

And it is august
I remember
most – with its warm
     kind of light
shaded with shadows and
full
      of home,
sadness,
            and a sense of loss.

Angela Long

Where are you from?

A bungalow on Crestwood Drive, hot tub bubbling behind the garage.
A condo in Seelbach, white stucco covering the walls.
A townhouse in Pheasant Run Estates, 45s spinning in the basement.
An attic in Oberschopfheim, watching the neighbours stomp on grapes.
An apartment above a Gasthaus, smelling goulash simmer every morning at ten.
A clapboard on Florence Street, three Volkswagens rusting by the curb side.
An en-suite bedroom at an English school, crabs from Lake Atitlan crawling up the toilet.
A studio in a winter city, angels smiling down from the cornices.
A custom-built on a desert plateau, stars shooting past every ten seconds.
A one-bedroom on St.Denis, two kittens sleeping in the sink.
A duplex off Bank, china cabinet sparkling with a hockey star's crystal.
A dirt-floored shack in the Lowlands, blue butterflies drinking from the river.
A converted tool shed perched on a limestone shelf, learning to play the tin flute.
A thatch cottage overlooking the sea, rats scratching in the attic after sundown.
A heritage-house bed-sit on a hilltop, lights twinkling on Grouse Mountain.
Another on West Third, a magnolia blooming flowers big as saucers.
A hotel room above a lotus pond, listening to fireworks explode.
A cedar-plank cabin in a temperate rainforest, collecting rainwater in blue barrels.
An apartment beside a medieval castle, brick walls standing since 1492.

Where are you from?

Changming Yuan

Birdkeeping
A Play Poem

scene i

A [in *front of a detached house, trying to repair his fence while talking to himself*]: Fucking hell, why does there have to be winds all the time? Without these wicked winds I would never have to worry about my fence, and the whole universe would have been much more peaceful.
B [*passing by, with a bunch of empty birdcages behind his shoulder*]: A nice day to do some repairing, eh? You know you've got a pretty solid house here.
A: Yeah, but it has cost me a lifetime, though, and I can never pay off my mortgage.
B: You know what I would do? I would hang a bird cage and keep it open. They say it will make you feel happy at least.
A: Really?! Wish to have one then.
B [*giving one of his empty birdcages to A*]: Here happens to be one for you. Happy or not happy, you will keep a bird.
A [*taking over the cage and trying to hang it somewhere*]: How come? But we'll wait and see! [*aside*] Me to keep a fool bird in this cage? No way!

scene ii

A [*receiving a guest in his living room*]: So, how's everything going, pal?
C [*looking at the bird cage*]: When did you begin to have a bird? What's happened to your bird?
A: My bird? oh, I never keep a bird, but just …
C: ?

scene iii

A: [*talking to himself before trying to answer a phone call*]: Me to keep a bird? No way!
D: [*at the other end of the phone*]: I almost forgot to say I am sorry for your late birdie, but didn't you take good care

of it? Perhaps you did not know how to keep a tender songster to begin with? I'll lend you many really helpful books; perhaps I can give you some good tips right now?
A: Oh no! I never keep a bird except…
D: Come on, and cheer up! A bird is just a bird.

scene iv

A [*in front of his house, trying to repair his fence again while talking to himself*]: Dogfart, why does
there have to be wicked winds so often? Without them I would never have to worry about my fence, and the whole universe could have been much more peaceful.
E [*trying to sell a new product to A*]: This time I remember bringing a beautiful bird as a little present to you. Here you go [putting a pink parrot into the cage].
A: Thanks very much, but…
E: Don't mention it. This bird belongs just as much to your cage as your cage to this bird.

scene v

A [standing in the middle of his living room and yelling loudly at the parrot in the cage]: Me be a bird in cage? Oh no, me keep a bird in cage? N--
[the parrot mimicking]: mi-bi-bir-din-kei; mi-ki-pir-din-kei; mi-bi-bir-din-kei; mi-ki-pir-din-kei…

Celluloid Reelities

Elaine Chang, ed.
Reel Asian: Asian Canada on Screen. Coach House $29.95

Reviewed by Victor Liang

In the wake of the "culture wars" of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival was founded in 1997 by producer Anita Lee and journalist Andrew Sun as an event to showcase work from Asia and the Asian diaspora. But more importantly, Canada, with one of the largest Asian populations outside of Asia, lacked an Asian film festival: the Toronto project came from a desire to create a sense of community and the emergence of a *nouveau* Asian diasporic filmmaking that, according to Lee, "treated identity politics with a youthful [and exciting] irreverence." Having survived just over a decade, the festival is now a five-day event and arguably the premier forum for discussions around East and West identity politics through films and videos by East and Southeast Asian artists from Canada and the rest of the world.

In conjunction with the festival, *Reel Asian: Asian Canada on Screen* has been edited by University of Guelph professor Elaine Chang. This anthology spans the independent Asian Canadian cinematic landscape and foregrounds the various issues that face Asian Canadian artists and filmmakers, including identity and representation as explored through family, food, gender, geography, sexuality, and race. In her introduction, Chang enters the ongoing dialogue about the tensions between "Asian" and "Canadian," or, as more commonly referred to, the hyphenated space. For Chang, the paradox of hyphenation ("Asian American" versus "Asian-American") is "less [about] the choice to hyphenate or not to hyphenate than the relationship between the signifiers 'Asian' and 'American' that these markings both and/or either reveal and/or conceal . . . . The fluctuations of intractability and elasticity in the very language of identification evoke impasse as well as possibility."

Chang's beginning offers a compelling warm-up to the many different essays and interviews throughout *Reel Asian*, as hyphenation is a constant presence and question. The hyphen manifests itself in various themes: in an excerpted conversation between filmmaker Cheuk Kwan and University of Western Ontario English scholar Lily Cho, Chinese fusion food serves as metaphor for immigrant assimilation; writers and actors David Eng and Leon Aureus discuss the problems facing Asian artists in the film industry, especially the highly Eurocentric onscreen (mis)representations of Asians; and video artists Wayne Yung and Nguyen Tan Hoang explore identity through their different approaches to "a resistant, queer Asian art production."

The strength of *Reel Asian* is that it conveys cultural and political insights without being heavy-handed, keeping the content both interesting and enjoyable—after all, let

us not forget that this is also a book about a particular form of entertainment. What we get then, to borrow a few words from filmmaker Helen Lee, is a work that traces a kind of subjective cinema that "let[s] subjects speak from a naturally empowered position, not as objects of sociological or anthropological interest."

Reel Asian is a comprehensive—but by no means exhaustive, as Chang points out herself—anthology of contemporary Asian Canadian cinema. The creativity of its contributors is apparent in the way old Asian-Canadian/Asian Canadian arguments are revisited in a refreshing and illuminating manner, and hence the book functions dually as an informative supplement to its namesake festival, as well as a valuable stand-alone work.

Autobiographical Acts

Rocío G. Davis
Begin Here: Reading Asian North American Autobiographies of Childhood. U of Hawai'i P
US $42.00

Reviewed by Tara Lee

Within "the play of the autobiographical act," Rocío G. Davis traces the various ways that Asian American and Asian Canadian writers have resisted national narratives through their depiction of childhood. Davis, an associate professor of American and postcolonial literatures at the University of Navarra, draws upon cultural, race, and autobiography theory in order to consider the layers of meaning constructed through the rewriting of the past. This tracing of key texts offers a thoughtful, albeit far from groundbreaking, look at how Asian American and Asian Canadian autobiography has shifted before and "after [Maxine Hong] Kingston" and her seminal *The Woman Warrior*.

The volume is divided into seven chapters that each consider a different facet of the "*writerly*" process of interrogating various national, temporal, and cultural locations. The work of autobiography critics like Richard N. Coe grounds Davis before she examines how the genre has developed within Asian American and Canadian writing. The central argument rests on the concept that autobiography, especially its dialogue with childhood, is an agency-producing act that challenges stable ideas of the subject and national affiliation. It is not only a personal process of coming to voice, but also a dynamic forging of a collective cultural memory.

After the initial framing chapter, chapter 2 adopts a chronological approach by beginning with late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century works before moving onto more recent examples. Davis highlights early writing, such as Yan Phou Lee's *When I Was a Boy in China*, and their cultural-ambassador role before moving to texts like Ved Mehta's *Face to Face: An Autobiography* that were published after "Asian American" become a recognizable identity formation. These "critical interventions" and Davis' readings of them then segue to a more focused study in Chapter Three of war as a narrative structure. Close readings of works such as Rae Yang's *Spider Eaters: A Memoir* and Da Chen's *Colors of the Mountain* foreground the personal trauma of the writers while still paying heed to their larger political and historical projects.

The next chapter adds more complexity to the autobiographical act with biracial authors such as Heinz Insu Fenkl and Michael David Kwan, whose *métissage* contributes "undecidability and indeterminancy." The unstable quality of the genre becomes further apparent in Chapter Five that looks at the appropriation and rewriting of tropes of North Americanization in writing by Jade Snow Wong, Elaine Mar, and Wayson Choy. The tropes signal both the assimilative contexts in which these works were

produced, but also the ability for writers to make them anew. The following chapter delves into even more unconventional territory through texts such as Evelyn Lau's *Runaway* and artist Lynda Barry's comic *One Hundred Demons,* whose content and form deviate from more "traditional" autobiographies. Their blurring of genre leads to the final chapter that addresses questions of readership through works like Shichan Takashima's *A Child in Prison Camp* that target a younger audience.

While Davis' project is certainly ambitious, the breadth of her undertaking is both its strength and its weakness. Davis gathers together a disparate collection of texts and successfully outlines the movement from nascent cultural-ambassadorial work to more experimental identity expressions. The careful attention to both the disconnections and connections between the works makes for an informative look at the boundaries and possibilities of past and current autobiography. However, the desire to limn a community of works also results in a superficiality that more extended treatment of certain texts would prevent. Especially with the emphasis on process, it would be more illustrative to have certain examples unfold gradually and have them showcase their "*writerly* acts" in detail.

An obvious omission is a more rigorous questioning and justifying of the crucial terms and genre assumptions within the study. Terms like "memoir" and "life writing" could also be applied to the works in question. Most importantly, "biotext" or "biomythography" could move Davis outside of the confines of usual classifications and open up her readings to new critical and creative avenues. It might also break the volume from its relatively linear structure.

Finally, the treatment of location is also worth noting. With a volume that contains "Asian North American" in its title, the specificities of Asian Canadian and Asian American contexts need to be fleshed out. After all, the placing of the two categories together is still fraught. And because so much of Davis' argument hinges on imposed socialization into a dominant national framework, it's important to recognize the different management strategies of the Canadian and American nation-states.

Nonetheless, despite these oversights, a positive aspect of Davis' work is her attention to the transnational elements within her chosen works. Ultimately, the crossing and straddling of borders offer an alternative model of identity that may help to move these autobiographies and their critical lenses beyond the usual constrictive national blinders.

What Poetry Does

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco
Municipal Mind: Manifestos for the Creative City. Mansfield $16.95

Rita Wong
Forage. Nightwood $16.95

Rob Winger
Muybridge's Horse. Nightwood $16.95

Reviewed by Aaron Giovannone

How can contemporary poetry engage with political, social and historical issues? The three books reviewed here answer this question differently. In *Muybridge's Horse*, Rob Winger mixes lyric and narrative to trouble the real and imagined history of the famous nineteenth-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge. In *Forage*, Rita Wong's acute political conscience fuels relentless poetic experimentation. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, on the other hand, puts verse aside for a foray into the political arena in *Municipal Mind: Manifestos for the Creative City*.

In his new book, Pier Giorgio Di Cicco reaches out to a different community of readers than he normally does as a poet. Momentarily eschewing stanzas for the manifesto, a form that mixes creative and

expository writing, the poet laureate of Toronto has taken on the voice of a guru in urban studies. His book, in fact, is blurbed by a dozen or so academics, authors, and administrators in that field.

At its best, *Municipal Mind* displays Di Cicco's focused rhetorical power. He turns an elegant phrase critiquing government's tendency to restrict creativity: "Every public virtue must leave private room to wonder," and when problematizing the legislated cultural event: "Showcase is the silhouette of creative soul." Overall, however, *Municipal Mind* doesn't exploit metaphor, imagery, or the rhythmic phrasing available in poetic writing. As a result, we tend to read these pieces for their expository content.

Throughout these manifestos, Di Cicco elaborates his thesis that "[e]very citizen should self-identify as an artist, with the same moral commitment to ideals, before we can have any credible allegiance to our environment". As Di Cicco's phrasing already suggests, this artist-citizen is the self-determining monad of mystical humanism, a sovereign entity ideally behaving according to an ethic of "welcome and response" to its fellow citizens. The result of this philosophy, however, is that citizens are only implicated in their society when they choose to be. In the book's final chapters, a discourse on "mercy and compassion" uses religion and spirituality to establish an innate connection between these disparate citizens, a move that finally ballasts the book's argument with theistic universalism.

By contrast, Rita Wong's *Forage* relies on an array of poetic resources to make a political statement. This book is a dynamic mixture of styles—ranging from the lyric to the list to the prose poem—addressing a litany of public and personal injustices. Wong jumps from topic to topic, from aesthetic to aesthetic, targeting by turns genetic engineering, Native American place names, Chinese remedies, laundry toxins, body toxins, discarded computer toxins, oil, smog, weaponry, endangered species, and much more. This diverse collection coheres because of the author's voice, which is emboldened by a sense of sheer affront and the need to find "ground to push against, red earth, / bloody earth, stolen earth."

Wong's success in *Forage* lies largely in her close attention to the material composition of objects, linguistic and otherwise. In a poem titled "fluorine," for example, Wong's chemical analysis of everyday items activates latent relationships of cause and effect, and therefore ethical responsibility:

> arsenic in calculators mercury in felt
> hats, mad as poisoned hatter
> pyrophoric undercurrent in mundane
> acts assume poison unless otherwise
> informed crowded alloys detect no
> health damage until generations later I
> brush my teeth with nuclear intensity
> the cavities I avoid destined for others

In other poems, Wong revels in the material of language through intense punning. In "canola queasy," for example, the 'stock market' becomes the "stuck market" then the "stacked market"; in "domestic operations," the 'war on terror' becomes "the wart on error" then "the war-torn era." Wong alters the phonic and graphic material of words and phrases to undermine their usual signification and the ideologies informing them.

Unlike the first two books reviewed here, Rob Winger's *Muybridge's Horse*, winner of a CBC Literary Award, is not explicitly political. It is, rather, a poetic retelling of the life and work of the famous photographer whose innovative technique allowed for the capture of multiple frames in rapid succession. This development revealed, for the first time, the intricacies of bodies in motion.

Muybridge's Horse straddles the line between narrative and lyric, using historical personages and their imagined subjectivities as a muse. In the first of three sections, Winger poeticizes with vivid and arresting results: "the second in walking when both

feet are airborne / the time between target and gunshot / water in your throat / the space of decline when a masseuse's thumb slips from a knotted muscle." Occasionally Winger's metaphors describing characters in photographic vocabulary seem too deliberate, but overall, this history told through poetic fragments becomes an intriguing literary analogue of Muybridge's photographic technique.

The book's second section consists mostly of ekphrastic narrative pieces, in which photos taken by Muybridge during a Guatemalan sojourn are re-imagined in picturesque prose. In the third section, however, Winger often refuses to imaginatively invest himself in Muybridge's photos, which have become increasingly pornographic as Muybridge himself has gone into a decline. Instead, Winger reproduces only the captions of these photos: "Carrying a vase and placing it on a table. Females. (NUDE)." This movement away from narrative towards a "found" aesthetic endows the work with a sense of documentary objectivity not as strongly present in the rest of the book.

CanLit Inter-nationally

Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki, eds.
Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature. Wilfrid Laurier UP $36.95

Marta Dvorák and W.H. New, eds.
Tropes and Territories: Short Fiction, Postcolonial Readings, Canadian Writings in Context. McGill-Queen's UP $80.00

Reviewed by Debra Dudek

Two recent essay collections provide exciting and challenging contributions to debates about the responsibilities of academics working in the humanities generally and within the field of Canadian literature in particular. Both collections are the published result of conferences that took place in 2005: *Trans.Can.Lit* emerges out of the "TransCanada: Literature, Institutions, Citizenship" conference that took place in Vancouver; and *Tropes and Territories* is based on the conference of the same name that ran at the University of Paris III (Sorbonne Nouvelle). I bring attention to these details in order to situate these collections of essays at a particular time (one conference was in April, the other in June) but at different places. That both collections engage with Canadian literature primarily (although *Tropes and Territories* substitutes "writings" for "literature" in its subtitle) foregrounds the notion that conversations about this arguably nationally inflected body of texts occur beyond the borders of the Canadian nation-state.

This assertion may seem obvious, but as Smaro Kamboureli writes in her "Preface" to *Trans.Can.Lit*, "This elsewhereness inscribed in CanLit intimates that Canada is an unimaginable community, that is, a community constituted in excess of the knowledge of itself, always transitioning." This transition is identified in the collection as the result of a number of features including pressures on academics in the humanities to work on collaborative and

interdisciplinary projects, to produce outcomes that have an immediate and obvious impact, to apply for grants constructed along a science model, and, as Kamboureli summarizes, to adopt "the rhetoric of knowledge production, corporatization, and global citizenship." Furthermore, while *Trans.Can.Lit* does not engage overtly with how postcolonial studies and its dissenters and offshoots—including Indigenous, diasporic, and critical race studies—inform the study of CanLit, a quick look at the contents pages reveals an impressive list of some of the foremost Canadian critics working in these fields including Diana Brydon, Rinaldo Walcott, Lee Maracle, Stephen Slemon, Lily Cho, Ashok Mathur, Julia Emberley, Len Findlay, and the two editors, Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki.

Relationships between ethics and literary studies surface in this collection as do reworked notions of citizenship. Kamboureli, Brydon, Cho, and Lianne Moyes reference Donna Palmateer Pennee's essay on "literary citizenship." Cho proposes "diasporic citizenship" as a productive dissonance for "thinking through the differential histories of dislocation in Canadian literature." Moyes suggests that a "prosthetics of citizenship," in which a "foreign" part enables "a subject (or a nation, text, or border) to function," is at work in Erin Mouré's *O Cidadán*. And Len Findlay's essay, which concludes the collection, offers three versions of citizenship: bourgeois, artisanal, and Aboriginal. Findlay suggests that a "collaboration of artisans and Aboriginals" may "challenge the aspirations and actualities of the bourgeois state" and advocates for such "new forms of solidarity."

"Literature" and "Institutions" are the other two terms that sit beside "Citizenship" in the subtitle of the TransCanada conference, and together these three terms link and organize each of the essays. Tellingly, only one of the essays—Lianne Moyes' paper on Mouré's *O Cidadán*—engages in a close reading of a particular text. In each of the other twelve essays, the contributors analyze the study of literature—either broadly as literature or specifically as CanLit—and argue for a variety of transformations to this study and/or within larger institutional frameworks in which such study occurs. Lee Maracle states, "From a Salish perspective, study ought to move us beyond relentless reproduction of our cultural bias and remove the filters blinding our ability to see beyond this bias." Movement or transformation takes specific form for Stephen Slemon, who argues that academics must become postcolonial administrators, and for Richard Cavell, who argues for academics to become public intellectuals. Julia Emberley also points to public culture as "probably the most important site of contestation."

One of the strengths of organizing this collection around the intersection of literature, institutions, and citizenship is that the essays become a multivoiced call for revolution to critics and teachers working in a field under attack. Many of the essays point to a need to identify contradictions within the study of CanLit. This resistance to being neat and tidy and civil leads to various strategies including Brydon's motion to "unravel" consolidations, Walcott's "call to be unruly," and Daniel Coleman's shift "out of sedative politics" and into "wry civility." *Trans.Can.Lit* reminded me, as an academic who teaches and researches CanLit in Australia, not only of the specificities of debates occurring within Canada but also of how many of the concerns in Canada transfer with frightening ease to an Australian context. The "trans" in CanLit moves beyond the porous borders of Canada, reminding academics working in literary studies about the power of what we do and of the responsibility attached to this power.

A cost of this strength of *Trans.Can.Lit*, however, may be the disappearance of texts themselves, which is a general

concern articulated by Laura Moss in her essay that opens *Tropes and Territories*, and which may be read, as the editors state in their introduction, as a conversation with Diana Brydon, who is the only writer featured in both collections. It may also be read as a conversation or interaction with Stephen Slemon, whose position paper at the "TransCanada" conference is quoted at the beginning of Moss' essay. In his conference paper and his essay in *Trans.Can.Lit*, Slemon suggests that critical reading or "literary critical practice" may work for "progressive social transformation." While Moss aligns herself with Slemon's "commitment to social transformation," her essay expresses concern with how "social transformation [at the "TransCanada" conference] was consistently predicated on the political positioning expected of postcolonial authors" and not texts.

Moss extends this concern from the specificity of the "TransCananda" conference to a general discussion about the study of Canadian literature, and especially discussions by Canadian academics trained as postcolonialists, whose reading practices lean towards the biographical and/or sociological. Moss claims that this "fractal" reading practice, in which "the part *is* the whole," leads to four misreadings: first, the text becomes documentary rather than fiction; second, formal experimentation moves away from poetics and toward a reflection of cultural movements outside the text; third, a character's emotions become the emotions of a community; and fourth, an emphasis on sociology "leads to the loss of a sense of play, a sense of humour, a sense of art, and a sense of the ordinary." I outline Moss's essay in some detail here because it may be read as a hinge essay against which the other pieces in *Tropes and Territories* may be tested and read and because if one reads across these two collections—which I highly recommend—then Moss's essay moves back into *Trans.Can.Lit*.

The essays in this collection are individually strong, while also providing an overall snapshot of a variety of textual practices, which are informed primarily by postcolonial criticism, but also as this criticism intersects with feminism, poststructuralism, and ecocriticism, for example. As the editors state in their comprehensive introduction, the essays in this collection cover various intersections between aesthetics and politics, and as a whole the book "insists on both the real world issues of postcolonial territories and on the force of the textual language that addresses, conveys, and critiques them." While it is impossible to provide a comprehensive review of even half of the works in this hefty volume of twenty-three essays, I can say that they cover an impressive range of topics and methodologies and would be a valuable resource for anybody teaching and/or doing research on postcolonial literature and/or on the genre of the short story.

The essays themselves range from broad mappings to close readings, from claims about the author in the text to claims about the reader in the text. Essays that engage in broad mappings include Chelva Kanaganayakam's piece on South Asian short fiction, Lydia Wevers' comparative essay on Maori and Pakeha contemporary short fiction from Aotearoa New Zealand, Bruce Bennett's paper on place in contemporary Australian stories, and Warren Cariou's essay on oral memory in Métis short stories. The collection provides close readings of short fiction by writers including Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Thomas King, R.K. Narayan, Alistair MacLeod, Emily Carr, Mavis Gallant, Alecia McKenzie, Patricia Grace, Janet Frame, David Malouf, Alice Munro, Mark Anthony Jarman, and Witi Ihimaera.

In closing, I recommend a "transed" reading of these collections. When the despair about being overrun by the corporatization of the humanities seems too overwhelming

and when strategies of unruliness are elusive, then cross into the readings of stories in *Tropes and Territories*. When the stories seem too far removed from the everyday practices of academic life, then traverse the strategies proposed in *Trans.Can.Lit*. Either way, the coast is clear.

Scrawled with Histories

Kyo Maclear
The Letter Opener. HarperCollins Canada $17.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

In *The Touch of the Past* (2005), Roger Simon draws our attention to "the substance of our practices of remembrance, practices that constitute which traces of the past are possible for us to encounter, how these traces are inscribed and reproduced for presentation, and with what interest, epistemological frame, and structure of reflexivity we might engage these inscriptions." For Simon, engaging with "traces of the past" remains vitally important as a means of opening up "questions of and for history as a force of inhabitation, as the way we live with images and stories that intertwine with our sense of limits and possibilities, hopes and fears, identities and distinctions." Yet what would constitute an adequate form of engagement with the past as it touches our lives in sometimes unexpected ways?

This concern lies at the heart of Kyo Maclear's remarkable novel *The Letter Opener*, a text shortlisted for the 2007 Amazon/*Books in Canada* First Novel Award. Maclear's novel tells the story of how the life of one character—the first-person narrator Naiko—becomes unsettled and transformed after she meets Andrei, a Romanian refugee who has arrived in Canada and has found work, alongside Naiko, at the Undeliverable Mail Office, a cavernous facility in the suburbs of Toronto. Here, Naiko sorts through undelivered objects, "[storing] routine in [her] muscles and bones like a precious fuel, finding gratification in the simple reunion of people and their possessions." Naiko brings attentiveness and care to this routine, paying close attention to "subtle distinctions" in the objects she sorts: "A nick, a scratch, a tear, a blot, a blemish, a loose or tight part, a missing widget. Every object carries its own genetic code."

Naiko's work at the UMO requires her not simply to sort through such objects but also to reconstruct stories and—crucially—to imagine. In this way, she attempts to piece together Andrei's story, in Romania and beyond, following his disappearance in Toronto. As we follow her attempts to do so, we can begin to understand, as Maclear observes in a generative short essay appended to the edition of the novel under review, how "some stories cannot be consumed and forgotten. Some letters cannot be resealed. They make demands on us." The novel represents how these demands steadily affect Naiko's interactions with her partner, family members, and colleagues. Some of these interactions are impressively rendered: sharply drawn characters working at the UMO pop in and out of the narrative, as do the distinct characters living in Sakura, a seniors' home for Japanese Canadians. But while Sakura functions as a site in which questions of memory gain additional urgency in Naiko's life—this is where Naiko contends most directly with the effects of Alzheimer's on her mother's life—some readers may nevertheless question the novel's representation of the Canadian health-care system's apparent capacity, at that time, to immediately provide pleasant facilities and ethnically sensitive care for Alzheimer's patients.

The larger questions raised by Maclear's novel, however, cannot be reduced to the interactions of its characters or the probability of certain aspects of its narrative.

The novel instead directs our attention to the stakes involved in receiving and recirculating stories that "make demands on us" too. To be sure, receiving and recirculating stories remains a project without guarantees; as Naiko observes, "[o]ne cannot predict what portions of the past will be carried into the future." Yet even with these uncertainties, Maclear underlines the importance of this project: not only to account for stories that fall within our line of vision but also to ask questions about the stories that do not. As Maclear notes in her critical study *Beclouded Visions* (1999), "[h]ow, and to what ends, we choose to connect with events and people that exist outside the bounds of our immediate experience is a matter of continuing concern." With clarity and generosity and warmth, *The Letter Opener* invites us to revisit this concern: to imagine, along with Naiko, the lives of others and the complex ways such lives are "overlaid with labels, scrawled with histories"—and to learn to ask how their stories could matter to us now.

Une Chine pas si douce

Félicia Mihali
Sweet, Sweet China. XYZ $28.

Compte rendu par Eloise A. Brière

Récit semi-autobiographique, le roman *Sweet, Sweet China (2007)* de Felicia Mihali, relate le séjour d'une Montréalaise d'origine roumaine, envoyée en Chine pour enseigner le français à ceux qui cherchent à émigrer au Québec. Son titre anglais évoque l'entre-deux linguistique dans lequel vit Augusta pendant son séjour tout en ironisant sur son rapport avec la Chine, qui, la plupart du temps, est loin d'être doux. Le récit comprend plusieurs registres temporels et narratifs alternant entre l'imaginaire et la reproduction du réel. Sur le plan visuel, le livre ressemble à un album souvenir, comprenant une cinquantaine de photos, collages, reproductions de cartes postales, lettres manuscrites et autres documents appartenant effectivement a l'auteure qui désigne son livre « manuel de sauvetage » pendant son « naufrage sur l'île de Chine. » Renforçant le sentiment du réel, les notes en bas de page, offrent des précisions sur la culture et la langue chinoise.

Larguée dans l'immense capitale, pratiquement sans prise sur la langue et la civilisation millénaire qui l'entourent, son enseignement et ses étudiants constituent le principal point d'ancrage d'Augusta. Autrement, nomade urbaine, elle part à la découverte de Beijing, notant dans son journal ce qui la déboussole: langue impossible à maîtriser, comportements imprévisibles, pollution, froid, faim, saleté, isolement.

Une des originalités de ce roman fait que la narration est partagée entre Augusta et trois déesses tutélaires chinoises qui veillent sur celle qu'elles appellent « notre protagoniste. » Narratrice principale parmi celles-ci, Sakiné est la déesse traditionnelle du regard; c'est elle qui raconte les expériences vécues par Augusta. Rarement d'accord avec elle, les deux autres, Desirée, déesse du goût, et Flora, déesse de l'odorat, apportent également leur point de vue au récit, corrigeant, parfois effaçant les notations de Sakiné ou d'Augusta. Ainsi le texte comporte de multiples points de vue: celui d'Augusta, ceux de Sakine, Désirée, et Flora.

Un cinquième volet s'ajoute aux précédents, celui-ci intertextuel, comme le précise une note renvoyant le lecteur au roman classique *Rêve dans le pavillon rouge* de CaoXue Qin. Ce fil narratif raconte la vie d'une jeune femme, Mei, la dernière épouse d'un général de la Chine antique. Chaque épisode du conte télévisé remplit les vides de l'exil d'Augusta, la rapprochant du jour de son départ de Chine; Mei, fuyant son destin, lui offre en même temps une sorte de miroir de ses propres pérégrinations.

Sweet, Sweet China est le quatrième roman de Félicia Mihali, dont le nom ne figure pas encore parmi les écrivains affichés sur le site officiel des écrivains du Québec, *l'Île*. L'auteure fait cependant partie du contingent d'écrivains venus de divers horizons qui transforment la littérature depuis la fin du XXe siècle. Ce roman, cosmopolite et habile, riche en contrastes transculturels, offre un regard inhabituel à la fois sur la Chine, le Québec et la vie de l'immigré; il se mêle aux nouvelles voix qui transforment le discours litteraire au Québec.

(in)Visible Subjects

Sachiko Murakami
The Invisibility Exhibit. Talonbooks $15.95

Katia Grubisic
What if red ran out. Goose Lane $17.95

Andrea MacPherson
Away. Signature Editions $14.95

Reviewed by Erin Wunker

Something is amiss in Sachiko Murakami's debut collection; or rather someone is missing. Murakami deftly manipulates the fine distinction between these pronouns. Who do you see when you look at a woman on the street? A person, or a thing? Do you see her at all? Or do you only see her when she is gone?

The Invisibility Exhibit walks the reader through the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside paying close attention to the people the Olympic planners would rather you didn't see. Whether stalking ghosts or examining the minutiae left behind, the poet unflinchingly looks into the void left by the scores of women who have gone missing from Vancouver's Skid Row. The implicit and urgent question here is what damage do we perpetuate when we *thing* someone.

"Exhibit A (Boxes)" uses the imperative to direct the reader's gaze: "Leave the box beneath the tree. Leave parents to their cruelty. / For dinner, try pasta, try fury, try feeding after fray. / Try a split lip." She continues, "Try Exhibit A. / Open the box: lump of coal, wormy dirt, slap of adult palm to knee, / you and your big disappointment." The rhetoric of courtroom evidence is woven with the language of the quotidian around a disturbing lacuna. Exhibit A does not have *a* subject: it has many, or none, depending on what the reader commits to seeing. But, as the poet concedes, not even mighty Charon can "bring to rest / images of the dead" for whether or not we can spare any change, these dead "never lived" ("Negotiating with the Ferryman").

One of Murakami's most effective tropes is her subtle use of repeated images that are threaded through the collection. There is the bag of Okanagan peaches, appearing first in "Portrait of Mother as Missing Woman" ("haven't spoken since that day / in the hotel with a bagful of Okanagan peaches / I didn't want, wanted her to have"), then in "Poem to Stop the Recurring Dream," ("No one knows / what's worth archiving. Peach rot slicked pebbles ripped pictures can't stop"), and again in "Exhibit D (Peaches)" ("Now she is too thin from her smaller and smaller suppers /…. / a bag of useless imaginary peaches"). There is also the recurring correlation between women and meat, where the faceless man makes the uncomfortable connection between dinner and the news but "swears it has nothing to do with him" ("Meat"). These recurring images work to sketch the connection between the reader and the missing: who deserves to be seen? Don't mistake Murakami here: this is not a question for Vancouver alone; this is a question to you, to Canada, and to the world, whose eyes will be on Vancouver soon enough. But ultimately the demand Murakami makes in her brilliant debut is, fittingly, left invisible: will you continue to look when it is inconvenient? When the spotlights are off

and the media have packed up, will you remember these women? "Now that the lab is nearly empty. / What gentleness we muster now, to lift DNA / from a microscopic edge, to protect / the whole of the woman contained there" ("We've Seen Littler of Her in Life and Less of Her in Death").

Katia Grubisic's debut collection is an affirmation that some of the most interesting young poets in Canada are writing in Montreal. *What if red ran out* is not posed as a question, but rather is a testament to the impossible, painful, and surprising beauty of the delicate, the rare, and the everyday. Not to mention the irreverent. "Baffled King Collage" asks "what if the things we fear are / Leonard Cohen covers, or / coats made of chagrin" and then, tongue in cheek, wonders "what if it ends up / you and me and another / hallelujah / not much godly / about it." Whether she is cutting and pasting Canadian cultural icons, or calmly meditating on the mercurial and the mundane ("I will put all my clothes in boxes / …. / Like others / who have successfully lost their minds, I will exist / on raspberries"), Grubisic's voice is self-assured and original. From "Last Tango in Outremont," which reconstructs the dance of death and desire as an ebb and flow between familiar strangers, to "The Rough Guide to Home," which parodies the ubiquitous, hip tourist guidebook, Grubisic's red—whatever it may be—shows little sign of running out.

Away, Andrea MacPherson's most recent book of poetry follows the poet on her travels from Ireland to Scotland, France to Greece. While none of the poems experiments particularly with the travel genre, each section captures a snapshot moment. What you'll find here is steady, dependable reflections on what it means to journey. The opening poem, "St. Stephen's Green *Dublin in May*" is exemplary of the collection: "Standing under a great green tree / thankful for this reprieve from concrete and stone / (a reminder of the west coast of Canada / the only scent missing is the sea). /…. / Behind me the Green is lit with sunlight / and the pond is calm as Sunday sleep / as if this city has never known sorrow, / never felt it close and taught as marrow."

L'amour d'un père

Alain Olivier
Voyage au Việt Nam avec un voyou. XYZ 24,00 $

Fulvio Caccia
La Frontière tatouée. Triptyque 19,00 $

Compte rendu par Anne Marie Miraglia

Deux textes parus en 2008 s'attardent sur un moment particulier dans la vie de leurs protagonistes pour explorer la relation intime, souvent complexe, entre un père et son fils.

Dans *Voyage au Việt Nam*, son troisième livre, Alain Olivier relate son voyage de cent jours « au pays des rizières, de la palanche et du dragon » avec Anna et Daniel, leur fils de onze ans. Ce récit de voyage, constitué de plus de cent lettres à sa mère, « comporte aussi son lot de mensonges » permettant à Olivier d'évoquer en contrepoint et en filigrane sa relation passée avec un père « inventé pour les besoins de la cause ». Ce père, « vu de dos » par un enfant timide qui le suivait en trébuchant, fait ressortir par contraste l'affection que se témoignent Alain Olivier et son propre fils. Au lieu de lui indiquer la voie à suivre, Olivier laisse son fils marcher devant. Daniel lui sert de guide et lui apprend à « se laisser éblouir » comme un enfant. « Kids have no borders », constate un Vietnamien. Et le narrateur d'ajouter : « [les enfants] s'entendent à merveille sans parler la même langue. »

Daniel fait confiance à la vie, porte un regard insatiable sur le monde et facilite pour ses parents la découverte de l'inconnu et la communication avec les Vietnamiens qui les accueillent avec un sourire chaleureux. Et si Olivier décrit les villes, les villages et les beautés naturelles du Việt

Nam, son récit est celui d'« un homme qui garde les yeux fermés » sur des aspects désagréables (misère, saleté, prostitution, etc.) afin d'insister sur la grande générosité et la profonde humanité des Vietnamiens.

Voyage au Viêt Nam, c'est aussi le récit d'un homme qui se cherche, qui découvre ses limites tout en se rappelant les voyages antérieurs (en Côte d'Ivoire, en Afrique de l'Ouest, en Haïti, en Italie et en Équateur) qui l'ont façonné.

Dans *La Frontière tatouée*, le poète et romancier Fulvio Caccia présente les relations père-fils sous un tout autre registre et dans un tout autre genre. Ce quatrième roman se lit comme un polar avec sa cohorte de cadavres, de personnages énigmatiques et son suspense. Le roman se distingue par sa forme complexe, ludique et poétique, par ses réflexions sur les sacrifices de l'artiste et par sa mise en relief des rapports entre parents et adolescents. Focalisé principalement sur Richard Killroy, père de David Killroy, âgé de dix-sept ans, le texte montre, dépeint, fait ressortir la difficulté du père à protéger son fils dans un monde où les parents sont « à côté de la plaque », n'ont plus d'autorité sur leurs enfants menacés par la violence, la drogue, et la confusion entre le réel et le virtuel. Le père peintre et le fils tagueur mènent en parallèle chacun sa propre enquête sur le meurtre de Joe, le meilleur ami de David, membre comme lui d'un groupe de tagueurs qui signent leurs graphes du paraphe HMJ accompagné d'un dé. Le graphe est « un marqueur de territoire » sur les murs d'une banlieue rappelant les véhicules incendiés et les émeutes parisiennes. Mais l'ajout d'un point de trop sur la sixième face du dé est le premier indice conduisant à une bande de tagueurs rivale, aux assassins de Joe et à la disparition de David qui cherche la septième face du dé, « le septième ciel » dans un jeu devenu réalité, où le père se substitue au fils et affronte une rude épreuve qui peut-être les délivrera d'un danger imminent.

Contributors

Articles

Guy **Beauregard** teaches at National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan, where he is directing the Empire and Overseas Literature project. His essays have appeared in *Amerasia Journal*, *Essays on Canadian Writing*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and *Culture, Identity, Commodity* (Hong Kong UP; McGill-Queen's UP, 2005).

Lily **Cho** is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Western Ontario. Her recent publications include: "The Turn to Diaspora," *Topia* 17 (2007); "Dislocations and Diaspora: Reading Evelyn Lau's *Choose Me*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 32.1 (2007); "Diasporic Citizenship: Contradictions and Possibilities for Canadian Literature," *Trans.Can.Lit* (2007); and "Future Perfect Loss: Richard Fung's *Sea in the Blood,* " *Screen* 49.4 (2008).

Iyko **Day** is Assistant Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College. She is completing a manuscript that examines Asian North American multimedia engagements with transnational icons of white settler nationalism in Canada and the US.

Glenn **Deer**, an Associate Editor for *Canadian Literature*, teaches Asian North American studies, Canadian literature, and cultural studies in the Department of English at the University of British Columbia. He has recently published essays in *English Studies in Canada*, *Amerasia Journal*, *Sites of Ethnicity* (Winter Verlag 2004), and *Claiming Space* (Wilfrid Laurier UP 2006).

Donald **Goellnicht** teaches Asian North American literature and culture, and critical race studies in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, where he is also an Associate Dean of Graduate Studies. His recent publications include *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, co-edited with Eleanor Ty.

Christopher **Lee** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of British Columbia. He has published articles in *Canadian Literature* and *Amerasia Journal* and is currently completing a book on literary aesthetics and the politics of post-identity.

Marie **Lo** is an Associate Professor of English at Portland State University. She is completing her manuscript, "Recognition's Field of Vision: The Visible Subject of Asian North America," which traces the cross-fertilization of US and Canadian racial discourses in Asian North American cultural production.

Roy **Miki** is a writer, poet, and editor who lives in Vancouver. His two most recent publications are *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Raincoast 2004), a work that explores the Japanese Canadian redress movement through a creative blend of personal reflection, documentary history, and critical examination, and *There* (New Star Books 2006), a book of poems. He received the Order of Canada in 2006.

Rita **Wong** is the author of *forage* (2007) and *monkeypuzzle* (1998). She teaches at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

Henry **Yu** teaches at the Department of History at The University of British Columbia. He is the Director of the Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies (INSTRCC), the first stage of a long term commitment at UBC to the study of trans-Pacific migrations and the long history of interactions between Asian and European migrants and First Nations peoples in Pacific Canada.

Poems

Dale Lee **Kwong** lives in Calgary, AB. Angela **Long** lives in Massat, BC. Tim Mook **Sang** lives in Ottawa, ON. Terry **Watada** teaches at Seneca College, and lives in Toronto, ON. Changming **Yuan** lives in Vancouver, BC.

Reviews

Guy **Beauregard** teaches at National Tsing Hua University in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Eloise **Briére** teaches at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Debra **Dudek** teaches at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Aaron **Giovannone** teaches at Brock University. Tara **Lee** teaches at the University of British Columbia. Victor **Liang** lives in Richmond. Anne Marie **Miraglia** teaches at the University of Waterloo. Erin **Wunker** lives in Calgary.

Have you visited www.canlit.ca lately?

canlit.ca/interviews

Our **Interviews** section has transcripts, audio, and video interviews with Fred Wah, Richard Van Camp, Addena Sumter-Freitag, George Woodcock, and Heather O'Neill.

canlit.ca/poets

CanLit Poets is a freely available, ongoing, online archive geared towards motivating the next generation of Canadian poets. The poems in this archive have all been published in the pages of ***Canadian Literature***, and the response questions have been answered by the poets themselves.

canlit.ca/scholars

CanLit Scholars is a freely accessible database of Canadian scholars. Entering your information will make it easier for journals, colleagues, universities, and associations looking for reviewers, vettors, and collaborators in the field to find you and learn about your expertise.

canlit.ca/publishers

CanLit Publishers is a dynamic list of Canadian publishers that offers access to update your own listing, see a list of your books that have been published in ***Canadian Literature***, and advertising statistics.

canlit.ca/store

At the **CanLit Store**, you can use your credit card or Interac to instantly purchase back issues and subscriptions to ***Canadian Literature***.

Canadian Literature acknowledges the support of the Canada Magazine Fund

INitiative for
Student
Teaching and
Research in
Chinese
Canadian studies

Discovering Pacific Canada

What is "Pacific Canada"? Pacific Canada is a perspective on Canada's history, present, and future that recognizes the crucial importance of our long standing links to the Pacific region. As a corrective, it recovers histories that have been ignored or erased, and offers a new vision of Canada's present and future.

Learning Chinese Canada

The first stage, exploring the central role of Chinese Canadians in our collective history, inaugurates a long term commitment at UBC to explore Pacific Canada and to engage the extensive Asian Canadian communities of Vancouver and British Columbia.

We Are Not Just Studying History, We Are Making History

Integral to UBC's *Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian studies* (INSTRCC) is "student-based learning"—an approach where students are not passively receiving what is already known but actively creating new knowledge. Working on projects that they help create, our students take active roles in their own education and in community-based research. The most committed and engaged students are given working fellowships to continue their research and to help teach new sets of students the skills they have learned. These talented Student Fellows take a leading role in the direction of teaching and research activities, and are vital pioneers in the building of this important field of study. They create, preserve, and distribute new knowledge, from recording oral interviews and family histories to film-making and website production.

Learn more at: *http://www.instrcc.ubc.ca*

For more information on how to support this initiative through developing research partnerships with students or through financial contributions, please contact: INSTRCC@interchange.ubc.ca

New from Ronsdale Press

I Have My Mother's Eyes

A Holocaust Memoir Across Generations

Barbara Ruth Bluman

A moving story of the author's mother's escape from Nazi-occupied Poland to Lithuania, across Russia, then on to Japan, and finally to Canada. Bluman interpolates accounts of her own struggle for survival — her battle with cancer.

ISBN: 978-1-55380-070-5 220 pp 20 b&w photos $21.95

River of Gold

Susan Dobbie

In this fascinating sequel to the best-selling novel *When Eagles Call*, Kimo, a Hawaiian Hudson's Bay Company worker — along with his friend Moku, a black man and a native woman whom he rescues from slavery — joins the Cariboo gold rush of the 1860s in an attempt to find his place in the new land.

ISBN: 978-1-55380-071-2 220 pp $19.95

From Green to Gold: New & Selected Poems

Harold Enrico

Acclaimed by Theodore Roethke, Enrico is that rare poet who combines the deepest traditions of our history, our spirituality, with the colourful imagery of the Pacific Northwest.

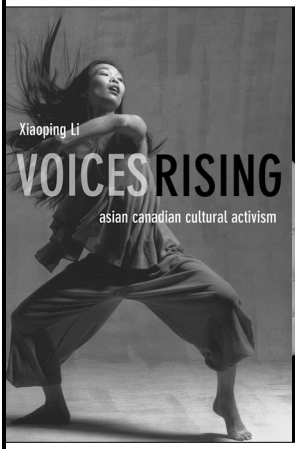
ISBN: 978-1-55380-067-5 154 pp $15.95

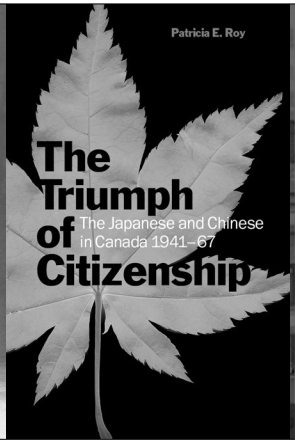
RONSDALE

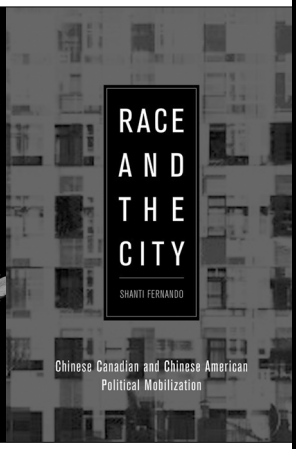
Visit our website at: www.ronsdalepress.com
Distributed by LitDistCo

Asian. Canadian.

UBCPress







Voices Rising
Asian Canadian Cultural Activism

XIAOPING LI

2007, 320 pages
978-0-7748-1221-4
$85.00 hardcover
978-0-7748-1222-1
$29.95 paperback

The Triumph of Citizenship
The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67

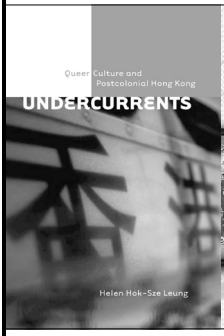
PATRICIA E. ROY

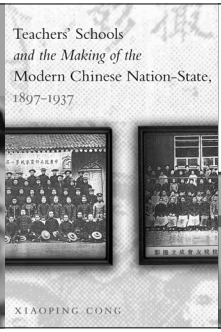
2007, 400 pages
978-0-7748-1380-8
$85.00 hardcover
978-0-7748-1381-5
$32.95 paperback

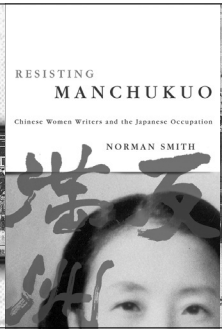
Race and the City
Chinese Canadian and Chinese American Political Mobilization

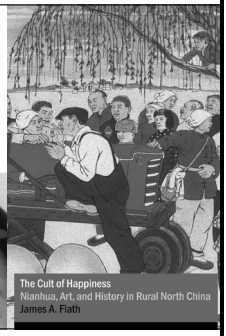
SHANTI FERNANDO

2006, 192 pages
978-0-7748-1345-7
$85.00 Hardcover
978-07748-1346-4
$29.95 Paperback



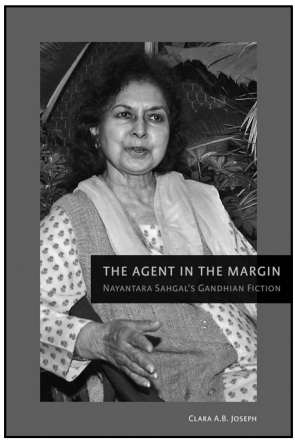






UBC Press is the publishing imprint of the University of British Columbia. We are Canada's leading social sciences publisher and its fastest-growing scholarly press.

order online
www.ubcpress.ca



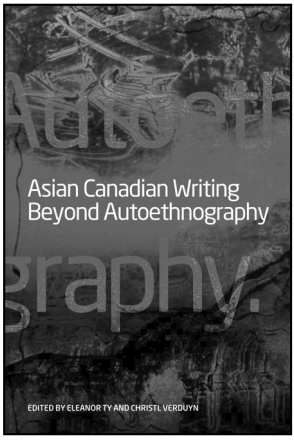
The Agent in the Margin

Nayantara Sahgal's Gandhian Fiction

Clara A.B. Joseph

$85.00 Cloth • 978-1-55458-043-9

In this comprehensive study of the literary works of Nayantara Sahgal, Joseph introduces the political and philosophical thought of Gandhi to literary analysis and applies an Althusserian reading to show how characters marginalized by gender, class, race, and language in Sahgal's work assume agency and thereby challenge poststructuralist theories of cultural and ideological determinism.

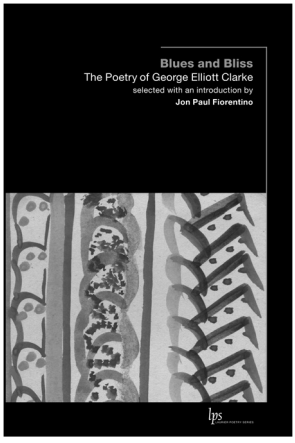


Asian Canadian Writing beyond Autoethnography

Eleanor Ty and Christl Verduyn, editors

$38.95 Paper • 978-1-55458-023-1

The essays in this collection explore ways in which Asian Canadian authors and artists have gone beyond what Françoise Lionnet calls autoethnography, or ethno-graphic autobiography. They demonstrate the ways in which Asian Canadian representations of race and ethnicity, particularly in works of the last decade, have changed and become more playful, untraditional, aesthetically and ideologically transgressive, and exciting.



Blues and Bliss

The Poetry of George Elliott Clarke

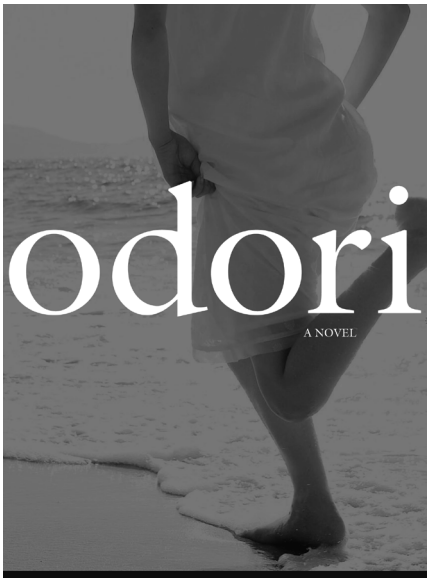
Selected with an introduction by
Jon Paul Fiorentino

$14.95 Paper • 978-1-55458-060-6 • Laurier Poetry series

Fiorentino offers readers an impressive cross-section of Clarke's voices—blues singer, preacher, cultural critic, exile, Africadian, high modernist, spoken word artist, Canadian poet. In the afterword, Clarke eschews theory, presenting himself primarily as a songwriter.

Wilfrid Laurier University Press

Order from your favourite bookstore or call 1-800-565-9523 • Visit www.wlupress.wlu.ca for more information



WINNER OF THE CANADA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS
2008 CANADA-JAPAN LITERARY AWARD

"With ***Odori***, Darcy Tamayose offers the first novelistic telling of the Okinawan diaspora in Canada. ***Odori*** traces a thread from the flourishing present of Okinawan communities in Alberta back through the terror of the Second World War's Battle of Okinawa and the golden age of 16th-century Ryūkyū (Okinawa) to the stories of the islands' origin. In the tradition of the Japanese-Canadian prairie gothic articulated by Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto, Tamayose interweaves Okinawan myth, storytelling and dance (*odori*/*udui*) with events of the present day, magically joining in spirit a piece of Southern Alberta with these islands of the East China Sea."

— Award Jury

cormorantbooks.com