

Complicated Entanglements
Henry Tsang and Cultural Race Politics, 1988-1995

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the development of cultural race politics in Canada between 1988 and 1995, with a particular focus on the artistic and curatorial production of Henry Tsang. Progressively narrowing in focus, it explores this development from the perspective of the nation, community and individual. Situating the rise of cultural race politics within the context of Canadian multiculturalism and various discourses of national identity, this thesis explores two exhibitions curated by Tsang in Vancouver, British Columbia, *Self Not Whole* (1991) and *Racy Sexy* (1993). In combination, these exhibitions are demonstrative of the critical curatorial strategies employed under the rubric of cultural race politics to challenge the systemic exclusions faced by culturally diverse artists. Furthermore, a close examination of two works of art by Tsang, *Vancouver West – Detached* (1994) and *Orange County* (2003), illustrates the legacy of cultural race politics within the contemporary context of transnationalism. Together, the artistic and curatorial practice of Henry Tsang reveals the social construction of race in Canada. In doing so, it moves beyond rigid binary discourses of ‘us’ and ‘them’ towards increasingly complex and unfixed modes of conceiving identity.

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INTRODUCTION

'What we all long for'

What floats in the air on a subway train... is chance. People stand or sit with the thin magnetic film of their life wrapped around them. They think they're safe, but they know they're not. Any minute you can crash into someone else's life, and if you're lucky, it's good, it like walking on light.

In this city there are Bulgarian mechanics, there are Eritrean accountants, Colombian cafe owners, Latvian book publishers, Welsh roofers, Afghani dancers, Iranian mathematicians, Tamil cooks in Thai restaurants... Lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated – women and men all trying to handle their own chain of events, trying to keep the story straight in their own heads... In this city, like everywhere, people work, they eat, they drink, they have sex, but it's hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension.¹

Dionne Brand's novel *What we all long for* is a captivating account of life in Toronto in the early twenty-first century as Tuyen, an aspiring artist, navigates the city streets through the lens of her camera (Fig.1). Brand's erudite, yet down-to-earth, narrative envelopes readers in the folds of the 'thin magnetic film' surrounding Tuyen's life. We are witness to the unfolding mystery of the disappearance of her older brother, who was separated from his family in the chaos leading up to their perilous trans-Pacific journey from Vietnam to Canada in an illegal vessel. Trying to find her own life in Toronto, outside the trauma that casts a constant shadow over her family, Tuyen creates an installation in her derelict apartment to reflect her position and experiences in the city. She calls it the *lubaio*, an ancient Chinese signpost. In an effort to populate the *lubaio*, Tuyen collected pieces of the city through her everyday observations. At every turn, she would "find frames filled in with the life of the city. She would find discarded looks... On any given day... on any crossroads, you can find the city's heterogeneity, like some physical light. And Tuyen found herself always in the middle of observing it."² *What we all long for* engenders a sense of ambiguity as Tuyen negotiates her own "doubled, tripled

¹ Dionne Brand, *What we all long for* (Toronto: Random House, 2005), 4-5.

² Brand, 142.

and conjugated" identity within that of her family and the city that wraps around her, always aware of misapprehension. In this way, Brand creates a portrait of desire that transcends the increasingly permeable boundaries constructed around race, gender and sexuality. Read as a snapshot, or a historical index, of a given time and place in the life of a stranger, these complex intersections and desires woven through *What we all long for* set the stage for the various questions posed by this thesis.

This thesis explores the history of cultural race politics in Canada between 1988 and 1995. Cultural race politics is a term that was coined by Monika Kin Gagnon to reflect the response by culturally diverse artists and writers in Canada to the various systemic exclusions built around racial discourses that permeated arts institutions. 1988 marks the ratification of the official Multiculturalism Act and 1995 represents the general timeframe in which cultural race politics began to lose momentum and evolved to reflect the ever-increasing influence of globalization in drawing attention away from the nation towards the international arena. Progressively narrowing in focus, this thesis is organized in three sections. Chapter one explores how cultural race politics developed out of the context of Canadian colonialism and multiculturalism. Propelled by the momentum of earlier liberation movements in the United States, this chapter will examine the oppositional and anti-racist response of culturally diverse artists and curators to Canada's colonial history of violence and exclusion, as well as to the continued entrenchment of ethnic ghettoization through discourses of official multiculturalism. Chapter two examines how two curatorial projects by Vancouver-based artist Henry Tsang are situated within the discursive paradigm of cultural race politics in general, with a particular focus on the various marginalizations and social constructions of Chinese-Canadian identity Vancouver. These are *Self Not Whole* of 1991 and *Racy Sexy* of 1993, the former adopting an inward focus to interrogate the construction of Chinese-Canadian identity from within the community itself, and the latter interlacing questions of racial and

sexual identity in order to transgress seemingly fixed community boundaries. Shifting from the community to the individual, Chapter three investigates two artworks by Tsang, *Vancouver (West) – Detached* (1994) and *Orange County* (2003). These works express increasingly local and personal negotiations with race, class, mobility and desire. Furthermore, *Vancouver (West)* offers a case study of the successes and failures of a work of art emerging out of the period of cultural race politics, while *Orange County* illustrates the impact of globalization and transnational travel, communication and technology on representations of race, class, mobility and desire in the twenty-first century. Thus, the intention of this thesis is to provide an increasingly focused analysis of the position of cultural race politics within the nation, Chinese-Canadian community and the self, with special attention paid to the curatorial and artistic production of Henry Tsang.

Returning to the metaphor of desire provided in the title of Brand's novel, 'what we all long for,' it is possible to track the varied forms it takes throughout these debates. During the period leading up to the Second World War, English Canada sought to assert an identity founded in Britishness. However, following WWII, the intensification of immigration, complex political and economic relationships with both the United Kingdom and the United States and questions of unity raised by Quebec created a national identity crisis in Canada, one which led to a 'longing' for an identity founded in consensus. Here, 'what we *all* long for' implies a unified voice. The 'we' in cultural race politics, on the other hand, conveys a greater sense of disunity, one set in opposition to 'you,' in the marginalizing 'us' and 'them' binaries of discourses of centre and periphery. In this instance, 'what we all long for' communicates a personal and impassioned yearning for social visibility and equality, that which disrupts the homogenizing discourses of national identity and multiculturalism. Within the artistic and curatorial production of Henry Tsang, the emphasis lies in 'longing' – the yearning not only for

visibility, but also for social security, mobility and belonging. Some of his work, particularly the 1993 exhibition *Racy Sexy*, is metaphorically linked to 'what we all *long for*,' using inter-cultural sexual desire as a way of transgressing conventional notions of community boundaries. Ultimately, this brief exercise demonstrates the inability to provide a clear definition of 'what we all long for' in Canada. As expressed by Brand, lives in Canada are "doubled, tripled, conjugated," with only the 'certainty of misapprehension.'³ Thus, through an examination of cultural race politics, its successes and drawbacks, with a particular focus on artistic and curatorial projects by Henry Tsang, this thesis aims to foreground layering over stasis, ephemerality over fixity, transgression over containment, and the rhizomatic over the arboreal.

'the struggle of man against power is a struggle of memory against forgetting'⁴

Writing about the history of cultural race politics in Canada between 1988 and 1995 is an exercise in writing against the grain of conventional historical narratives outlining the development of this country's nationhood. The history of nations has traditionally been viewed in the modernist terms of progress and singularity, as the chronological unravelling of events from an accepted point of origin to the common experience of the present. Such a conception of nationhood adopts a deeply rooted approach to identity, one that largely obscures the colonial power relationships narrating the nation. Bhabha demonstrates that the nation is in fact the result of narrative processes that seek to naturalize colonial power relationships between colonizer and colonized.⁵ According to Bhabha, the "linear equivalence of event and idea" that this type of historicism proposes, "most commonly signifies a people, a nation, or a national

³ Brand, 5.

⁴ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 4.

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation" in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 204.

culture as an empirical sociological category or a holistic cultural entity.”⁶ Such historicism aligns with Benedict Anderson’s notion of the nation as an imagined community, where, he suggests, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail... the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”⁷ However, against the modernity of the national ideal, Bhabha situates ‘the people,’ particularly minorities and those on the margins, as ‘splitting’ the national subject by, as he argues, “representing the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the ‘social’ as a homogenous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population.”⁸ He goes on to suggest that the writing of linear histories, unmarked by the ‘splitting’ of national subjects on the margins, turns the nation “from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’ within modern cultures.”⁹ In this way, linear histories that, perhaps unwittingly, construct singular and static narrative structures of time and place reflect the imbalanced power relationships between colonizer and colonized, centre and periphery.¹⁰

Cultural race politics in the arts was an important moment in Canadian history for interrogating the status quo and challenging normalized national mythologies that highlight the linear while silencing what Anderson defines as “the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail.” In the arts, these inequities resulted in the systemic exclusion of artists of colour and First Nations from equal access to the means of artistic

⁶ Bhabha, 201.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 7.

⁸ Bhabha, 209.

⁹ Bhabha, 211.

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial theories of hybridity have received extensive criticism. Expressing the articulation of a ‘third space’ between two binary poles, Bhabha’s hybridity functions to re-entrench the position of binary opposites. This results in a failure to reveal the social construction of the binary opposites that underscore contemporary racism. While the model provided by Bhabha is a useful tool for thinking through social relations, the dualism upon which it is constructed is less complex than the three-dimensional and rhizomatic models offered by Erin Manning and Arjun Appadurai.

production, funding, exhibition and critical response. To write, or narrate, this time in Canadian history is to engage in what Monika Kin Gagnon and Scott Toguri-McFarlane call “a politics of cultural memory.”¹¹ Speaking of the writing of ‘Canada’ as a national project, Gagnon and Toguri-McFarlane adamantly contend that the official history defining Canada is not the same as the many cultural memories that simultaneously constitute its meaning. They write,

‘Canada’ belongs to a history and memory of different cultures coming together as one – a multicultural project that at its origins was marked by colonial violence. Precisely because the cultural memory and originary violence of ‘Canada’ is one of many different cultures as one, ‘Canada’ will never ever reflect, or be able to represent cultural differences. In the strictest sense, one has to forget cultural difference in order to think about ‘Canada.’¹²

In this way, Gagnon and Toguri-McFarlane express the injustices contained within the writing of history, those which fail to account for original colonial violence and the perpetuation of systemic inequities. The events and exhibitions organized under the label of cultural race politics beginning in the late 1980s sought to make visible and reconstitute these silenced cultural memories. They also worked to achieve equal access to funding, representation and critical attention within regional and federal cultural institutions. Appealing to diverse audiences and communities, cultural race politics also sought, at the most fundamental of levels, to initiate dialogue around the terms race and colour in order to reveal the social construction of difference, particularly as it manifested itself in official discourses of multiculturalism.

The attention paid to the contributions of cultural race politics within Canadian art history, however, is itself often cursory and simplistic. As a result, it is often overshadowed by chronologically and regionally parallel histories, such as that of

¹¹ Gagnon, Monika Kin and Scott Toguri McFarlane, “The Capacity of Cultural Difference,” *Minister’s Forum on Diversity and Culture*, http://www.pch.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bq/05_e.cfm (accessed 14 March 2006).

¹² Gagnon and McFarlane, www.pch.gc.ca.

Vancouver photoconceptualism. Sharon Fernandez, in conversation with Monika Kin Gagnon in the latter's interview-based reappraisal of cultural race politics, speaks of this perfunctory interest in cultural race politics as a form of "cultural amnesia."¹³ This amnesia reflects what Fernandez sees as a reversal of the positive outcomes of cultural race politics. She contends that, with regard to racial equity, it is as though "the debates of the 1980s and 1990s are frozen in time and irrelevant to today's complex world."¹⁴ Noting that many of the arts organizations that adopted changes in the name of racial equity in the 1990s have reverted back to "homogeneity" in 2002, Fernandez also observes that contemporary artists of colour are not as quick to engage in race-based politics despite this reversal.¹⁵ Fernandez attributes this "severing from historical memory" in part to the lack of commitment by cultural institutions and university art history departments to include the history of cultural race politics within the narratives they construct. The question of who controls public discourse cannot be reduced to a singular, finite answer. Public discourse is defined by how information is granted to the public and whether or not this creates a demand for further information.

Within the arts, information is granted to the public through curatorial writing, critical response to artists and exhibitions, and academic literature. The inclusions and exclusions in these texts therefore define public discourse. The impact of exclusions in defining how art is received is expressed by Marina Roy in the 2007 anthology *Vancouver Art and Economies*.¹⁶ She writes, "Language defines how art is received. It can be instrumental in constructing a seemingly cohesive art scene or movement through its intentional inclusions and exclusions. It can also open art up to new avenues

¹³ Sharon Fernandez, "Into the Institution," in *13 Conversations About Art and Cultural Race Politics*, eds. Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 74.

¹⁴ Fernandez, 74.

¹⁵ Fernandez, 74.

¹⁶ Marina Roy, "Adventures in Reading Landscape," in *Vancouver Art & Economies*, ed. Melanie O'Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007).

of meaning, perpetuating new ways of thinking, new theories and practices.”¹⁷ Despite this insight, it is interesting to note that *Vancouver Art and Economies* devotes only a single chapter to culturally diverse artists and the successes and drawbacks of cultural race politics. While several chapters engage in an exploration of cultural politics in general, the contributions of Vancouver-based artists of colour are not included. Instead, the majority of essays in the anthology focus on the production of artists linked with the Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism – including Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Rodney Graham and Ken Lum.¹⁸ *Vancouver Art and Economies* is but one example of a general tendency to omit artists, exhibitions and curators dedicated to the discourse of cultural race politics from cultural memory, both in the past and the present.

That these two parallel histories be written so separately is particularly confounding in the case of Ken Lum, whose interest in dealing with racialized identities as they are manifested within the Canadian context is evident in *Mounties and Indians* (1989). Lum’s large-scale photoconceptual work resembles a commercial signboard divided in two halves. The first is a documentary-style photograph of four First Nations people dressed in the everyday business and casual attire of the late 1980s standing with two Mounties in full regalia on either side. Beneath this image is a text-based graphic that reads “Mounties & Indians,” providing labels for an otherwise anonymous scene. In doing so, Lum plays on the myth of Canadian nationhood that rests, according to Eva Mackey, on the originary diversity of the First Nations and the tolerance of

¹⁷ Roy, 90.

¹⁸ Photoconceptualism is a term that has come to characterize artistic production in Vancouver from the late 1970s to the 1990s. Often called the Vancouver School, the work of this male-dominated group has also come to govern Canada’s image in the international art market.¹⁸ Sharla Sava contends that the Vancouver School of Photoconceptualism developed within a counter-tradition or cultural politic that aimed to address the postmodern crisis of representation which arose around the Queer and feminist movements of the 1970s. Considering the simultaneous unfolding of cultural race politics and its common indebtedness to these earlier liberation movements, it is perplexing that it is not referred to in these timelines of Vancouver art.

benevolent Mounties.¹⁹ However, placed within a contemporary urban environment, Lum negates the colonial imperative of *terra nullius* that provided a legal basis for appropriating Aboriginal land.²⁰ In fact, as Lum's image attests, the First Nations individuals depicted blend into the urban environment more readily than the Mounties, outmoded symbols of western expansion and a universal Canadian identity. That Lum employs a cinematic and directorial mode of photography strongly associated with the Vancouver School, while simultaneously engaging with the racialization of identity underpinning cultural race politics, seems evidence enough that these concurrent histories not only ran parallel but also intermingled, influencing one another through the common commitment to the vocabulary of contemporary art. The discursive interchange evident here between the premises of cultural race politics and the visual language of Photoconceptualism confirms the need to reclaim historical space for the critical contributions by artists of colour in Vancouver, working under the rubric of deliberately racialized identities. Rather than promoting a singular vision of Vancouver-based art in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a 'holistic cultural entity', it would be more historically accurate to portray the various splittings and movements that together constituted an extremely productive period in the city. To do this would be to engage in a political cultural memory that works towards rectifying ongoing exclusions and silences. As suggested by Sharon Fernandez, such an effort "might unify a plurality of communicative, cross-pollinating views, as well as other intersecting experiences that create a 'worldly' Canadian commonality."²¹

¹⁹ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 34.

²⁰ This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2.

²¹ Fernandez, 76.

Literature Review

As the previous section demonstrated, the volume of work directly documenting, analyzing and critiquing cultural race politics in Canada is minimal. The majority of the information available derives from exhibition catalogues, personal archives, newspaper and journal articles, and a handful of texts compiled by academics and curators associated with the movement. However, these silences are evocative and an analysis of texts exploring Canadian national identity and the history of multiculturalism in this country reveals the context out of which cultural race politics emerged.

Canadian national identity in the 1970s was consumed by crisis – that of growing fissures between Anglo and Franco Canadians. In *Canada's Third Option* (1978) by S.D. Berkowitz and Robert Logan, over twenty-five essays were compiled to explore the threats to unity in Canada from political, social and economic perspectives.²² Through the text, the French-English divide is highlighted as the fundamental identity crisis in Canada, one between this country's two 'founding nations.' George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* of 1965 defends Canadian 'identity' against homogenization at the hands of economic forces guided by the American market economy and calls for a return to British political and social values.²³ Here, a core set of values borne out of Britishness are inscribed as fundamental to Canadian identity. Likewise, Ramsay Cook's *The Maple Leaf Forever* (1971) suggests that Canadian identity is complicated by the French-English divide, Canada's relationship with Great Britain and the fear of being subsumed by American culture.²⁴ These values are reiterated in William Gairdner's 1990 publication *The Trouble with Canada: A Citizen Speaks Out*.²⁵ A national best seller, *The Trouble*

²² S.D. Berkowitz and Robert Logan, *Canada's Third Option* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd., 1978).

²³ George Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), 17.

²⁴ Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), 201.

²⁵ William Gairdner, *The Trouble with Canada: A Citizen Speaks Out* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990).

with Canada outlines the “signs of illness” that could make Canada “very, very sick.” Among the illnesses plaguing Canada, Gairdner charges that socialism has created economic stagnation through excessive welfare, that radical feminism has destroyed traditional society and that multiculturalism and bilingualism have precipitated the “silent destruction of English Canada.”²⁶ These publications effectively construct a core national identity out of conservative British ideals, which Margaret Cannon argues underscores the proliferation of racism in Canada in *The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada*.²⁷ Despite decades of debating Canadian national identity and the role of multiculturalism in locating that identity, Andrew Cohen, author of *The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are*, argues that the process of nation-building is one that remains incomplete. He questions, “Who are we? Where do we belong?”²⁸ Although this book does not focus specifically on questions of multiculturalism, its search for a unifying national identity demonstrates the perpetuation of discourses of belonging built on the normalization of a mainstream ‘Canadian’ identity. The question remains, in opposition to what does this ‘mainstream’ identify itself?

Multiculturalism, arguably emerging out of Pierre Trudeau’s desire to silence Quebec nationalism and homogenize internal difference, has been the centre of debate in Canada since it became federal policy in 1971. Harold Troper and Lee Palmer’s *Issues in Cultural Diversity* of 1976 acknowledges that Canada is a society in which “many racial, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups coexist,” and offers seven case studies of the numerous impediments to equal opportunity and tolerance that riddle Canada as “a nation of minorities.”²⁹ Adopting the alternative focus of “the nations

²⁶ Gairdner, 1.

²⁷ Margaret Cannon, *The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada* (Toronto: Random House, 1995).

²⁸ Andrew Cohen, *The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007), 7.

²⁹ Harold Troper and Lee Palmer, *Issues in Cultural Diversity* (Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1976), vii.

within,” Jean Leonard Elliot’s *Two Nations, Many Cultures: Ethnic Groups in Canada* of 1979 arranges ethnic groups according to language and region, exploring their strategies for ‘working out their identities and accommodations to the larger society.’³⁰ Since the publication of these books, critiques of multiculturalism have emerged from both the political right and left. Edited by Stella Hyrniuk, *Twenty Years of Multiculturalism: Successes and Failures* of 1992 assesses Canadian multiculturalism in a holistic manner, bringing together essays from the various participants of a 1991 conference by the same name held at St. John’s College, the University of Manitoba.³¹ Offering a more subjective opinion, Neil Bissoondath’s 1994 publication *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* argues that multiculturalism, “in eradicating the centre, in evoking the uncertainty as to what and who is a Canadian... has diminished all sense of Canadian values, i.e., of what is a Canadian.”³² He suggests that by homogenizing difference, multiculturalism creates ethnic ghettos unable to integrate into a unified Canadian society. Adopting an alternative perspective, Himani Bannerji’s *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (2000) critiques multicultural policy and exposes Canadian racisms from a Marxist-feminist perspective, arguing that Canada “both needs and creates ‘others’ while subverting demands for anti-racism and political equity.”³³ Will Kymlicka’s 1995 political text *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* posits that debates over multiculturalism that view it as entrenching ghettoization or impeding integration are over-generalizations because they ignore differences amongst types of minority groups, such as “national minorities,”

³⁰ Jean Leonard Elliot, *Two Nations, Many Cultures: Ethnic Groups in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1979), xi-xii.

³¹ Stella Hyrniuk, *Twenty Years of Multiculturalism: Successes and Failures* (Winnipeg: St. John’s College Press, 1992).

³² Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994), 65.

³³ Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2000), 97.

like First Nations and Quebec, and “polyethnic immigrant populations.”³⁴ He goes on to argue that while national minorities should have “opportunity to maintain themselves as a distinct culture,” ethnic minorities do not require such collective rights and that the conditions for integration should instead be accorded through well-enforced individual rights.³⁵ These authors situate the multiculturalism debate within broader discourses of the nation and nationalism, a field delineated by several key texts. These include Ernest Gellner’s *Nationalism* (1997);³⁶ Homi K. Bhabha’s edited text *Nation and Narration* (1990);³⁷ and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991).³⁸

Many Canadian and international works explore multiculturalism in the social sciences and arts. Those that have been instrumental in reconstructing the history of Canadian multiculturalism from a variety of critical angles include, Veronica Strong-Boag et al’s compilation of essays focusing on race and gender, *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender and the Construction of Canada*;³⁹ Richard Day’s *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*, which provides a historical analysis of the development of multiculturalism and racism in Canada;⁴⁰ Eva Mackey’s examination of cultural politics and the limits of Canadian discourses of tolerance in *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*;⁴¹ Sneja Gunew’s text *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*, which employs postcolonial and transnational theories to briefly compare Canadian multiculturalism with

³⁴ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10.

³⁵ Kymlicka, 113-4.

³⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1997).

³⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

³⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 1991).

³⁹ Veronica Strong-Boag et al., *Painting the Maple: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Construction of Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

⁴⁰ Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

that of Australia;⁴² Charmaine Nelson and Camille Nelson's edited compilation of essays on the intersections of race, racism and nationalism in Canada, *Racism, Eh? A Critical Interdisciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada*;⁴³ Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home and Identity in Canada*, which provides an in-depth analysis of the rhetoric of home and belonging as it is differently constructed through discourses of colonialism, multiculturalism and transnationalism; and, most recently, Robert Putnam's "*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century*," which is a study outlining the perceived long-term detrimental impact of diversity and heightened immigration on social solidarity and social networks from a political science perspective.⁴⁴ Combined, this literature gives form to the various complexities surrounding questions of multiculturalism in Canada today.

Concurrently with this literature, numerous others have engaged directly with multiculturalism and race politics from an arts and cultural perspective. Both published in 1994, Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi's *Culture Difference and the Arts* explores the politics of difference in Australia and the role of the arts in a multicultural society, while Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* works to decentre the naturalized Eurocentrisms that construct difference and underpin racisms, particularly as they are conveyed through the mainstream media.⁴⁵ Several key texts were published in the mid to late 1990s that both documented and provided critical response to cultural race politics as it developed in Canada. These were preceded by and often cite the seminal text *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, edited by Russell Ferguson et al., which compiled over two dozen essays on

⁴² Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁴³ Charmaine Nelson and Camille Nelson, *Racism, eh? A Critical Interdisciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada* (Concord: Captus Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Robert Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30/2 (2007).

⁴⁵ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

marginalization in the arts in the United States. Providing numerous perspectives on what constitutes the process of marginalization, *Out There* challenges the construction of a “mythical norm” constituted as “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure,” around which “everyone else must be arranged.”⁴⁶ It was also instrumental in the writing of Canadian cultural activists in the 1990s, such as Monika Kin Gagnon who was a central figure in documenting and responding to the events revolving around cultural race politics. *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* is a compilation of essays, letters and articles written by Gagnon between 1990 and 1997 on the exhibitions and events organized primarily by artists, writers and cultural activists working in Vancouver.⁴⁷ Gagnon took the opportunity in *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics*, a book published two years later in conjunction with Richard Fung, to reflect on cultural race politics in the 1980s and 1990s in conversation with artists and curators active at the time.⁴⁸ Rather than being a compilation of primary documents, *13 Conversations* adopted a dialogic formula in order to articulate the multitude of strategies and debates surrounding cultural race politics. While these publications were produced in the years following the decline of cultural race politics, numerous texts and journals were instrumental in establishing a corpus of individuals committed to constituting the field and defining its (always shifting) parameters. These include Marlene Nourbese Philip’s *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992* that exposed the silenced racisms permeating Canadian institutions and society from the perspective of the literary community;⁴⁹ the 1993-4

⁴⁶ Russell Ferguson et al., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990).

⁴⁷ Monika Kin Gagnon, *Other Conundrums: Race, Culture, and Canadian Art* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000).

⁴⁸ Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fun, *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002)

⁴⁹ Marlene Nourbese Philip, *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984-1992* (Stratford: The Mercury Press, 1992).

edition of *Parallelogramme* devoted to Anti-Racism in the Arts;⁵⁰ Roy Miki and Fred Wah's special edition of *West Coast Line*, which brought together fiction, essays and artworks by culturally diverse artists and writers;⁵¹ Smaro Kambourelli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, which created a corpus of fictional and autobiographical works by Canadian writers of colour and First Nations;⁵² and the 'Sitelines Issue' of *West Coast Line*, which contained numerous key texts by such cultural activists as Ashok Mathur and Jeff Derkson.⁵³

Finally, integral to continuing the debates circulating around cultural race politics at the most fundamental level were the exhibitions that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Numerous catalogues were produced in conjunction with these exhibitions. These serve as documentation of the artworks produced during this period, while also contextualizing their position within the broader critical dialogue. Among these exhibitions, many of which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapters One and Two, are included, *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (1990);⁵⁴ *Self Not Whole* (1991);⁵⁵ *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives* (1992);⁵⁶ *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*;⁵⁷ *Racy Sexy* (1993);⁵⁸ and *Dual Cultures* (1993).⁵⁹ Later exhibitions that either reflect on the legacy of cultural race politics in Canada or work to enunciate the location of cultural politics within the contemporary context of

⁵⁰ *Parallelogramme* 19/3 (1993-4).

⁵¹ Roy Miki and Fred Wah, "Colour. An Issue," *West Coast Line* 13/14 (Spring-Fall 1994).

⁵² Smaro Kambourelli, *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵³ Roy Miki, "The Sitelines Issue," *West Coast Line* 31/3 (Winter 1997-8).

⁵⁴ Paul Wong, *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (Vancouver: On Edge, 1990).

⁵⁵ Henry Tsang and Lorraine Chan, *Self Not Whole: Cultural Identity and Chinese-Canadian Artists in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 1991).

⁵⁶ Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992).

⁵⁷ Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations Art at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).

⁵⁸ Scott McFarlane, *Racy Sexy* (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 1995).

⁵⁹ Kamloops Art Gallery, *Dual Cultures* (Kamloops: Art Gallery, 1993).

transnationalism in the twenty-first century include, *Crossings* (1998);⁶⁰ *Home and Away* (2003);⁶¹ *The Life and Death of I.D.* (2006), and;⁶² *Limits of Tolerance: Re-framing Multicultural State Policy* (2007).⁶³ Together, these texts, catalogues and journals provide the historical foundation, documentation and critical analysis of cultural race politics in Canada, both directly and indirectly. This thesis enters in dialogue with the exhibitions and critical texts that precede it, recognizing the need for the development of a more extensive body of literature studying cultural race politics in order to better understand its success, failures and contributions to equity in the arts in Canada.

⁶⁰ Diana Nemiroff, *Crossings* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1998).

⁶¹ Bruce Grenville, *Home and Away* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003).

⁶² Sally Frater, *The Life and Death of I.D.* (Hamilton: The McMaster Museum, 2006).

⁶³ Liz Park, *Limits of Tolerance: Re-framing Multicultural State Policy* (Vancouver: Centre A, 2007).

CHAPTER 1: THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE

This chapter explores the development of cultural race politics within the context of Canadian multiculturalism and discourses of nationhood. In doing so, it provides the historical framework for this thesis. As a policy charged with promoting equity between all individuals, multiculturalism in Canada is fraught with irreconcilable contradictions that unwittingly construct ethnic ghettos on the margins of a self-defined mainstream 'Canadian' identity. Although in conversation with Canada's long history of colonialism, multicultural policy in Canada developed alongside broad global political changes. Leading up to the late 1980s, these developments created the momentum necessary to catalyze the events and exhibitions associated with cultural race politics, a movement responding to the systemic exclusion of culturally diverse artists and cultural organizers from access to the means of artistic production as a result of ethnic ghettoization.

The Limits of Tolerance: Official Multiculturalism and its Discontents

Multiculturalism has been a defining characteristic of official Canadian national identity since being introduced as state policy by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau on October 9, 1971.⁶⁴ According to Richard Day, witness to constantly changing demographics, particularly with the influx of European immigration associated with the Second World War and the subsequent shifts towards Third World immigration to counterbalance Canada's inability to produce sufficient population growth through birth rates,⁶⁵ "multiculturalism as state policy was presented as *an overcoming of the history of*

⁶⁴ Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 146; Jeff Derkson, "Unrecognizable Texts: From Multicultural to Antisystemic Writing," *West Coast Line: The Sitelines Issue* 31/3 (Winter 1997-8), 59.

⁶⁵ Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of Nation* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 4.

Canadian diversity.”⁶⁶ Within the context of Canadian multiculturalism, it is imperative that one begins by interrogating the terms diversity and overcoming. Who is implied under the umbrella term *diversity*? Is it *all* Canadians, regardless of birthplace, race, language or culture? What does it mean to *overcome* diversity? There are no easy answers to any of these questions and the history of diversity in Canada is a long one. This history is one that has been fraught with both overt and silent racisms and contradictions. Yet it is one that has come to define the Canadian experience both at home and abroad as a national imaginary unifying Canadians across time, space and cultural difference.

In her literary anthology *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*, Smaro Kambourelli advances the notion that Canadian identity today has been moulded by its colonial history.⁶⁷ Kambourelli contends that Canada is characterized by a continuous search for identity, one that is often defined in collective and unifying terms, “despite, or perhaps because of, the legacy of colonialism and the overpowering evidence that Canada has always been a place of diversity – racial, ethnic, and linguistic.”⁶⁸ As the territory that is now called Canada came to be settled, Kambourelli argues that the colonial encounter with cultural difference was, in fact, a “non-encounter” because British and French settlers believed the land to be empty.⁶⁹ Although early on the settler economy depended on the labour and expertise of Aboriginal peoples,⁷⁰ the land upon which they settled was interpreted as empty because it did not have what Europeans considered to be signs of inhabitation such as agriculture, government and

⁶⁶ Day, 189.

⁶⁷ Smaro Kambourelli, “Introduction” in *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.

⁶⁸ Kambourelli, 7.

⁶⁹ Kambourelli, 7.

⁷⁰ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1999), 25.

religion.⁷¹ Where the contractual sale of land did occur between First Nations and British settlers in the 1860s, the latter employed a tactic of “creative ignorance” whereby it was assumed that the First Nations involved fully understood the implications of such a transaction without receiving an appropriate explanation.⁷² Where such legal avenues were not taken during the settlement process and where intolerable differences emerged between settlers and First Nations, the physical elimination of First Nations communities was often pursued.⁷³ Scrutinizing this legacy, Kambourelli argues,

Canadian history, until relatively recently, perpetuated this image of Canada as a land that was ‘discovered,’ not a land that was colonized... The myth that Canada was ‘discovered’ was intended to hide the fact that what we now call Canada has always belonged to other peoples, peoples with their own distinct languages and cultures.⁷⁴

The colonial perspective that Canada was an empty territory that was progressively discovered continued into the period between Confederation and the First World War with the wilderness paintings of the Group of Seven. According to Eva Mackey, “It was the work of these artists which contributed most to the development of a national identification with a distinctive sense of place.”⁷⁵ However, the sense of place extolled was one of *terra nullius*, uninhabited northern landscapes. The works of art that emerged out of this period have singularly naturalized the inseparable connection between uninhabited wilderness and nation in the construction of a unifying Canadian identity.

⁷¹ Day, 78.

⁷² Day, 95.

⁷³ Day, 84; It is not within the scope of this thesis to address the history of colonial violence against First Nations peoples in greater depth. For additional information on the implications of this violence in the short and long-term, and for contemporary artistic production by First Nations artists responding to this history, refer to the following texts: 1) Olivia Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002), and; 2) Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999)

⁷⁴ Kambourelli, 7.

⁷⁵ Mackey, 40; In her study of the role of Canada's northern wilderness in the formation of settler national identity, Mackey examines Tom Thomson's *The West Wind* (1917) and Lawren Harris' *Beaver Swamp, Algoma* (1920). The landscapes are characterized by ‘the rugged and rocky terrain’ of the pre-Cambrian shield,’ signified in the painting of lone and wind-blown pine trees (Mackey, 40-3).

As Canada grew after Confederation, this discourse of Canadian identity created, according to Mackey, “difference from the USA and other southern places and races” and, “at a later stage of national self-consciousness and differentiation, symbolically differentiate[d] Canada from both the USA and Britain by mobilising a symbolism of unpeopled and rugged wilderness.”⁷⁶ Despite this long history of the legal, physical and symbolic emptying of the Canadian landscape of Aboriginal peoples, Canadian diversity is often celebrated by government departments such as Canadian Heritage as originating from Aboriginal diversity. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the Canadian Heritage website in 2006,

Diversity has been a fundamental characteristic of Canada since its beginnings. At the time of European settlement there were more than 56 Aboriginal nations speaking more than 30 languages... At a time when it was accepted practice to establish sovereignty through war and cultural domination, there were enough Canadians who believed in the virtues of accommodation and mutual respect to ensure that, *with some exceptions*, Canada would develop peaceably and the foundations of its diversity would be preserved.⁷⁷

Although it appears that this statement finds the seeds of and justification for Canadian diversity within the nation’s first inhabitants, it subsumes the history of First Nations into a constructed national mythology of diversity. Furthermore, Canadian Heritage locates Aboriginal peoples as the first ‘Canadians,’ and glosses over Canada’s colonial history of physical and symbolic violence. This interpretation of Canada’s origins ignores the impact of colonialism in the formation of Canadian identity.

⁷⁶ Mackey, 42.

⁷⁷ Canadian Heritage, “What is Multiculturalism?” Government of Canada, http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/what-multi_e.cfm (Accessed 22 February 2006). Information regarding Canadian multicultural policy was garnered from the Canadian Heritage website because it is the primary tool employed by the Canadian Federal Government for mediating public access to the official *Multiculturalism Act*. Employing language free of legal jargon, it is the most accessible medium for interacting with the tenets of the *Act*. For further information on the *Multiculturalism Act* itself, please refer to: Canadian Heritage, “Multiculturalism,” Government of Canada, http://canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/policy/act_e.cfm (Accessed 18 September 2007).

Kambourelli posits that attempts to define Canada as unified, despite the existence and identities of Aboriginal peoples, have self-perpetuated and evolved over time to address the increasing influx of immigration from non-western European nations.⁷⁸ This influx began with the promulgation of the Immigration Act of 1869 and the *Dominion Lands Act* of 1872, which worked together to fulfill the population needs of Canadian westward expansion.⁷⁹ These Acts targeted immigrants primarily of British and Western European descent; however, the need for increasing numbers of immigrants with agricultural experience led to the eventual opening to immigration from the rest of Europe. Day, exploring the continual evolution of the structure of diversity in Canada, marks the emergence at this point of a clearly hierarchal arrangement of immigrant identities, saying, “While the Department of the Interior tried to present these policy changes as improvements, the people of Canada were quick to notice that although the new Immigrants might be ‘European,’ they were clearly not ‘Canadian.’”⁸⁰ Thus, while Aboriginal peoples were initially positioned as the binary opposite ‘other’ to the Canadian ‘self,’ this position was soon supplanted by the immigrant ‘other’ and Aboriginal identity was even further marginalized.⁸¹ In his book *Our Task in Canada* (1912), R.G. MacBeth wrote of Canada’s transforming population,

Canada is today the Mecca of the world’s emigration, and those who are coming are by no means immigrants like... the early settlers in the Province of Ontario, or the Maritime Provinces or the Red River country, who took no rest till they had erected churches and schools and colleges... For the most part those who have been coming in recent years are of inferior races and lower civilizations.⁸²

⁷⁸ Kambourelli, 9.

⁷⁹ Day, 122; The 1869 *Immigration Act* opened Canada up to immigration from four nationality categories: “English, Scottish, Irish and Foreigners” while the *Dominion Lands Act* saw the unfarmed parts of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories divided into agricultural blocks and offered to selected immigrants for free.

⁸⁰ Day, 124.

⁸¹ Day, 123.

⁸² Roderick MacBeth, *Our Task in Canada* (Toronto: Westminster Co., 1912), 20-1.

The effect of such 'self' and 'other' discourses in Canada led to the establishment of what Day has called a hierarchal arrangement of immigrant identities, where the 'self' came to be unproblematically naturalized as western European despite the original inhabitation of Canada by First Nations, and the 'other' came to be conspicuously racialized. The historical process of racialization will be explored in greater depth in chapter two, with a particular focus on Chinese-Canadian immigration over the past 150 years. While it was still considered possible to assimilate immigrants from across Europe into the Canadian way of life and value system, immigrants from further afield, such as Asia, were seen as incapable of assimilation due to an assumed lack of 'civilization.'⁸³ With immigrant labour drawn from Asia in the late 1900s for the construction of the Canadian National Railways, the hierarchical organization of immigrant identities evolved once again and Asians were constructed as absolute 'other' to the Canadian 'self.'⁸⁴

With such an evidently racist conceptualization and structuring of immigrant identities, it is no wonder that Canada has struggled with the creation of a unified national identity. Kambourelli highlights this struggle, saying, "The unified image of Canadian identity has always exhibited fissures and shown itself to be fragile, full of anxiety to maintain, and redefine, its tenuous hold on power... Canada is a state in continual process, in a constant state of re-vision."⁸⁵ By the 1920s, the mosaic metaphor arose in Canada as a mode of moving beyond the notion of assimilation towards one of unity arising out of diversity. In her 1926 publication, *Our Canadian Mosaic*, Kate Foster writes,

In many minds the term 'assimilation' is confused with amalgamation. Does the former necessarily imply inter-marriage – the fusion of races? Is not assimilation rather the incorporating into our national life of all peoples within our borders for their common well being? Is it not the working together side

⁸³ Day, 134.

⁸⁴ Day, 132; Chinese Canadian National Council, "The Redress Campaign," Chinese Canadian National Council, <http://www.ccnc.ca/redress/history.html> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

⁸⁵ Kambourelli, 9.

by side for the common advancement, each race contributing something of value and so slowly but surely evolving a new people enriched by the diversity of its origin?⁸⁶

Despite her promotion of a united effort for the improvement of life for the 'common well being,' Foster's conception of the mosaic remains mired in the 'us' and 'them' discourse of a Eurocentric immigration policy.⁸⁷ Contradiction emerges as immigrants are seen to be entrenched in the "diversity" of their "origin," while being incorporated into "our national life." How can unity emerge out of such a discursive tradition of opposition? Despite a concerted effort to think through diversity, the process of racialization is perpetuated. Yet, it is interesting to note that shortly following this switch from a rhetoric of assimilation to one of integration that ideas of race also came to be replaced with notions of culture and ethnicity.⁸⁸ Within this purview, difference was based on cultural and ethnic affiliation, rather than on race alone.

The focus on cultural difference and an effort to negotiate Canadian identity through these new terms led to the formation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963 under Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. The Commission's mandate was, as outlined by Kambourelli, to "make recommendations designed to ensure the bilingual and basically bicultural character of the federal administration,' and to find ways of 'promoting bilingualism, better cultural relations and a more wide-spread appreciation of the basically bicultural character of our country and of the subsequent contribution made by the other cultures.'"⁸⁹ Addressing the question of why the focus of the Commission was on *biculturalism*, Day writes,

Before [Canada] thought about connecting itself to what it saw as a multiplicity of cultures and ethnic groups within its territories, the Canadian state first tried to solidify its articulation with the Two Founding Races. In theory, Canada had been a two-nation state since 1774, when the French of

⁸⁶ Kate Foster, *Our Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: YWCA, 1926), 135.

⁸⁷ Day, 153.

⁸⁸ Day, 172.

⁸⁹ Kambourelli, 10.

Quebec were granted the right to maintain certain aspects of their social, legal, and religious particularity. While this was undoubtedly a *gift* from the British, the deal struck at the time of Confederation implied that the two peoples were coming together as equals...⁹⁰

The publishing of the Report on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1969 served as a stepping stone between early notions of cultural integration as expressed in the mosaic metaphor and the creation of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework as federal policy under Trudeau in 1971 and the ratification of the official Multiculturalism Act in 1988 under Brian Mulroney. The B&B Report has alternatively been interpreted as one which strove to reconcile the historical inequities between French and English Canada and one which functioned to differentiate Canada from the United States.⁹¹ Whatever its intentions, the Report explicitly reveals the construction of Canadian 'core' culture as located solely within Canada's two founding nations. The exclusion of the First Nations and early immigrants not from Europe places these groups on the margins of Canadian identity, 'other' to and historically silenced by the 'core.' Furthermore, the focus on a "basically bicultural" identity, which marginalizes the "subsequent contribution made by the *other* cultures," not to mention Aboriginal cultures, effectively overshadowed Canada's colonial history and the racisms that established the hierarchical organization of immigrant identities.

Jeff Derkson suggests that Canadian multicultural policy arose out of this framework of bilingualism and biculturalism in two stages: the demographic stage and the symbolic stage.⁹² The former encompasses the period between the Second World War and the 1960s when "ethnic groups" emerged strongly as a "third force" in Canadian politics due to their increasing demographic presence. The latter led to an increased federal funding for the "celebration of ethnic cultures" and the "preservation of cultural

⁹⁰ Day, 180.

⁹¹ Mackey, 63.

⁹² Derkson, 60.

heritage” with the formation of official multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. Considering the recognition of the growing political force of immigrants in Canada, Derkson contends that official multiculturalism perpetuates the tradition of trying to construct a unified Canadian national identity out of diversity,

Within the national bilingual and bicultural framework, the Multiculturalism Act was designed to maintain the cultural heritage of all groups within a pluralist population, and the rights of members of ‘minority’ groups to equality with members of the two ‘charter’ groups. Out of this, official multiculturalism seeks a ‘unity in diversity’ stand that allows ‘ethnics’ to celebrate their cultures while still remaining full participants within Canadian culture... Within the discourse of multiculturalism, the acceptance of ‘our’ cultural pluralism is the key to national cultural and social unity.⁹³

Situating multiculturalism within a bilingual framework once again reifies the hierarchical arrangement of immigrant identities, privileging those whose mother tongues are either French or English. The contradiction of “unity in diversity,” thereby, remains unresolved.

At the moment of its ratification in 1988, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* also provided the opportunity for Canadians to rally around another unifying mythology – that of the ‘tolerant’ Canadian. Shifting away from the earlier desire to assimilate immigrants into an abstract Canadian value system, Canadian multiculturalism constructed a more formal set of values centred precisely on the location of immigrants in society. This marks a dramatic discursive move away from the early twentieth century desire for “acceptable bodies” (i.e. immigrants from western Europe), towards one of greater equality and openness. Nevertheless, a vein of the discursive tradition of binary oppositions remains embedded within this new perspective. Consider the following statement issued by Canadian Heritage website, which answers the question, “What is Multiculturalism”?

Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open

⁹³ Derkson, 60.

to, and accepting of, diverse cultures. The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence.⁹⁴

This statement begs the question, whose values do these represent, and who is asked to adopt them? Who has the power to tolerate, and who must be tolerated? Such language quickly establishes hierarchical power differentials not unlike that outlined by Richard Day to describe the early positioning of immigrant identities.

Eva Mackey supports the notion that Canada has long been struggling with its identity. She believes, "Since Canada, because of its particular history, could not and cannot fit the identity model of European nationhood, it, like other settler colonies, has had to look for alternative models of nationhood and national identity, and has had to do so 'across competing forms of ethnicity and against a history of occupation and dispossession of the original inhabitants.'"⁹⁵ Within this so-called identity crisis, Mackey believes that multiculturalism has developed as a sort of 'national bandage to bind over the divisions' of difference in order to construct a vision of a "unique past" and a "united future."⁹⁶ However, according to Jeff Derkson, the multicultural "bandage" is just that, a short-term cosmetic solution to the deeper problem of the legacy of Canada's fraught history of diversity and its attendant racisms. He contends that the Act's focus on preserving cultural heritage effectively depoliticizes multiculturalism, "reducing ethnic and racialized cultures to folklore... while never actually alleviating the real inequities within Canadian society."⁹⁷ Difference becomes an integral component of Canadian identity, yet this difference is consumed by the national imaginary only to manifest itself in superficial celebrations of cultural difference. Derkson writes,

⁹⁴ Canadian Heritage, http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/what-multi_e.cfm (Accessed 22 February 2006).

⁹⁵ Mackey, 13.

⁹⁶ Mackey, 68.

⁹⁷ Derkson, 61.

Criticisms of multiculturalism argue that it has remained merely symbolic... This criticism of multiculturalism charges that it cannot forcefully address racism precisely because, as a policy and a law, multiculturalism fails to recognize race and ethnicity as socially constructed and, rather, deals with them as natural.⁹⁸

Sadira Rodrigues expands on Derkson's notion of the social construction of difference. Arguing that the Act posits racial and ethnic 'otherness' as defining characteristics of Canadian society in order to ensure "equity and access for all in the economic, social, cultural, and political life in Canada,"⁹⁹ she writes,

Multiculturalism represents the ideas, documents, and procedures developed and implemented through governmental politics and programs that construct certain meanings based on racial and ethnic difference, and work toward addressing discrimination on the grounds of the very difference it demarcates: on the one hand, the desire to eradicate racial discrimination; on the other, the necessity to reassert *difference*, as guarded by the Act's policies.¹⁰⁰

The tension surrounding difference in multicultural discourses, as articulated by Rodrigues, is born out of the fact that multiculturalism necessarily formalizes the ethnic ghettoization it is meant to challenge. This relates to what post-colonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha identifies as the concomitant "encouragement" and "containment" of cultural diversity.¹⁰¹ Within these two purviews, official multiculturalism is seen as defining the very terms of difference, as well as reducing this difference to the cultural sphere. Difference is thereby assigned based on race and ethnicity in opposition to an unproblematic mainstream white culture, without analyzing the actual social construction of race and ethnicity.

This naturalizing of race and ethnicity has often been posited in conjunction with descriptions of Canada as a tolerant nation. Here, a barrier is simultaneously constructed

⁹⁸ Derkson, 61.

⁹⁹ Sadira Rodrigues, "Dealing (with) Cultural Diversity: Vancouver Art, Race and Economies," in *Vancouver Art and Economies*, ed. Melanie O'Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 167.

¹⁰⁰ Rodrigues, 167.

¹⁰¹ Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," interview by Johanthan Rutherford, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. John Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1990), 208.

between those with the power to tolerate and those who benefit from this tolerance. Thus, it immediately establishes a power differential between normalized, white and unproblematic Canadians and a homogenous group of so-called problematic, visible and multicultural 'others.' This naturalized category of Canadian identity is reflected in, according to Day, the Flood metaphor often applied to those periods of heavy immigration of non-western and northern Europeans into Canada. He suggests that, "Significantly, the Flood metaphor is not used to describe the earlier arrival of British and French immigrants, thus silently balancing these naturally problematic Others with naturally unproblematic Selves."¹⁰² Richard Dyer, in his recent book *White*, has explored the impact of naturalizing only non-white people as raced and ethnic. He argues, "to say that one is interested in race has come to mean that one is interested in any racial imagery other than that of white people."¹⁰³ The implications of this absence of whiteness from discussions of race, Dyer recognizes, has reaffirmed whiteness as unmarked. He writes, "As long as race is something only applied to non-white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people."¹⁰⁴ Thus, within this framework of 'self' and 'other,' and unproblematized whiteness, the 'other' is allowed to preserve signs of difference, while the 'self' learns to tolerate these signs. 'Selves,' naturally, do not need to be tolerated. They are not even noticed.

Tolerance, however, has its limits. As Mackey observes, "white national belonging [is] based on the ability to control social space and, ultimately, to decide whether to be tolerant or intolerant: that is, to have the power to decide the *limits of*

¹⁰² Day, 19.

¹⁰³ Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Dyer, 1.

*tolerance.*¹⁰⁵ Olu Oguibe aggressively distinguishes between tolerable and intolerable difference, saying,

A culture that dwells on difference also distinguishes between forms and categories of difference because it operates on an economy of difference. It demarcates between what one might call tolerable difference and intolerable difference... For such a culture, difference is tolerable when it... serves that eternally crucial purpose of propping and sustaining the society's illusions of superiority and greatness.¹⁰⁶

Thus, in Oguibe's perspective, difference is only tolerable when it does not challenge the core of the 'self'-group's identity and remains a complicit and silent 'other' within the project of self-identification. Within the Canadian context, Himani Bannerji reinforces this perspective, arguing,

Official multiculturalism represents its polity in cultural terms, setting apart the so-called immigrants of colour from francophones and the aboriginal peoples. This organization brings into clearer focus the primary national imaginary of 'Canada,' to echo Benedict Anderson. It rests on posing 'Canadian culture' against 'multicultures.' An element of whiteness quietly enters into cultural definitions, marking the difference between a core cultural group and other groups who are represented as cultural fragments.¹⁰⁷

In Canada, it may be argued that it is the policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework itself which functions to delimit acceptable forms of difference; that is, those cultural groups who "participate in and contribute to Canadian society and Canadian unity" are those which are tolerated.¹⁰⁸

Like Derkson, Bannerji believes that multiculturalism's emergence as a mechanism for managing difference failed, in part, because of its lack of systemic anti-racism initiatives which would expose the racialization involved in Canadian socio-political formation. Evidence of this failure exists in literature produced by such "concerned citizens" as William Gairdner, whose bestselling book *The Trouble with*

¹⁰⁵ Mackey, xix.

¹⁰⁶ Olu Oguibe, "Double Dutch," in *The Culture Game* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 35.

¹⁰⁷ Bannerji, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Mackey, 66.

Canada: A Citizen Speaks Out worked its way to the number one position in the *Globe and Mail's* bestsellers' list in August 1990. Here, Gairdner offers a critique of multiculturalism from a conservative assimilationist perspective, unlike Bannerji's class-based analysis of racialization in Canada. Critiquing the tendency of multiculturalism to celebrate cultural difference and provide equal rights to all individuals regardless of cultural background, Gairdner states,

Surely, everyone wants a happy family, whether one's own, or that of the nation. But there's a contradiction at the heart of any egalitarian multiculturalism policy. For the essence of the family, whether nuclear or national, is *natural* similarity. Similarity in appearances, values, beliefs, goals, religion, language, food, or whatever. In other words, *the essence of affiliation is the presence of natural common denominators.*¹⁰⁹

Gairdner's critique of Canadian immigration and multiculturalism policies asserts that increasing cultural diversity dilutes the 'essence of affiliation' that bonds individuals with common values and culture within the nation. Compounded by the centre and periphery racialization that emerges out of discourses of tolerance and multiculturalism, such a criticism makes it evident that, at the time of the emergence of the 1988 Multiculturalism Act, the limits of tolerance were becoming visible. As a policy that failed to address systemic racism on an everyday basis in favour of a celebration of diversity at the most superficial of levels, in the late 1980s, it was only a matter of time before the abrasiveness of systemic exclusion at the margins began to crack the national veneer of an unproblematic multiculturalism.

Internationally, the late 1980s and early 1990s were characterized by immense social, political and economic upheaval, as well as marking the tail-end of identity-politics movements in the United States. Combined with the increasing visibility of fissures in Canadian multicultural policy and the limitations of its discourses of nationhood, this period provided the momentum and catalysts necessary for culturally diverse members

¹⁰⁹ William Gairdner, *The Trouble with Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990), 392.

of Canada's arts and literary community to challenge the status quo and reveal the systemic racisms underpinning not only the national imaginary but, as will be demonstrated, the functioning of arts institutions across the country. Looking beyond Canada, the international political sphere witnessed and was forced to respond to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. Within less than a decade, the world map shifted dramatically, with new borders being drawn and nation-states expanding and contracting, appearing and disappearing. Marked by the increased movement of people and information across borders, these events, occurring simultaneously with the United States-led Gulf War, the Ethiopian famine and the intensification of global media communication, signalled a critical change in how nation-states defined themselves in relation to other countries within the international sphere.

According to Ien Ang, this normalization of cross-border flows has led to the relative dematerialization of the nation-state, as defined by Gairdner. She writes, "In the latter part of the twentieth century, nation-states have become spaces of global flows, in which the confluence of cultural difference and diversity has become increasingly routinized. At the same time, the process of globalization has also routinized the... interconnections... which erode and transcend the separateness of nation-states."¹¹⁰ Preceding the onset of globalization and the dematerialization of the nation, the United States experienced the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, which were fuelled by the decolonization of countries throughout Africa and Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. Cornel West writes, "These decolonized sensibilities fanned and fuelled... the student anti-war, feminist, gay, brown, gay and lesbian movements. In this period we witnessed the shattering of male WASP cultural homogeneity and the collapse of the short-lived

¹¹⁰ Ien Ang, "Introduction," in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5.

liberal consensus.”¹¹¹ Thus, this period was not only marked by challenges to the integrity of the nation and the early stages of the global flow of people, information and technology, but also by the collapse in the United States of unproblematized white, middle-class, and heterosexual male dominance. Combined, these elements created the opportunity and momentum in Canada necessary for individuals to challenge the nation’s ongoing history of both official exclusion and latent racism. Between 1988 and 1995, in the arts and literary community across Canada, this took the form of cultural race politics.

The Limits of Cultural Difference: Cultural Race Politics 1988-1995

The instatement of multiculturalism as federal policy in 1971 and its ratification into an official Act in 1988 can be interpreted as a commitment on the part of the Canadian government to mend the nation’s history of racial inequality and to recognize the diverse composition of its population. However, as the previous section demonstrated, many argue that the rhetoric advanced by the Act failed to reveal the social construction of race in Canada, an acknowledgement which could have implicated all Canadians into a truly multicultural Canada. The failure to address this social reality meant that the Multiculturalism Act ultimately constructed the difference that it was designed to address, amplifying social exclusion and ethnic ghettoization. Within this vein, Rodrigues contends that multiculturalism “is a concept that defines racial and ethnic *otherness* in the Canadian population in order to ensure equity and access for all in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of Canada.”¹¹² This raises the question of how and in comparison to what *otherness* is defined. Rodrigues also suggests that the mythology erected around the Multiculturalism Act was out of sync with the Canadian

¹¹¹ Cornel West, “The New Cultural Politics of Difference” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 25.

¹¹² Rodrigues, 169.

experience in the late 1980s. Rather than reflecting Canada as “precariously global, fractured by cultural and linguistic battles,” the *Act* perpetuated a sense of national singularity that “celebrated cultural pluralism, while masking tracks of inequity that continued to prevail.”¹¹³ That multiculturalism, in both its official and discursive functions, is broadly recognized as ‘masking’ historical and ongoing inequities translated into concerns within some segments of the artistic community of the late 1980s and early 1990s who sought to take apart what they saw as Canada’s multicultural masquerade in order to reveal its inability to address systemic racisms.

Before entering into a discussion on the response of culturally diverse and First Nations artists, curators and social organizers to continued discrimination within the arts, it is important to recognize some of the positive changes felt by the arts community following the promulgation of the Multiculturalism Act. To say that it had no constructive function is to do the Act injustice. Rodrigues argues that many significant changes in arts policy and funding came into being in conjunction with the Act because of the explicit correlation it draws between nationhood and arts, culture and heritage activities.¹¹⁴ One institution to take the first, albeit somewhat faltering, steps towards applying the recommendations of the Act was the Canada Council for the Arts. In 1989, identifying cultural diversity as a major issue to be addressed in 1990, the Council hired artist and administrator Chris Creighton-Kelly as a consultant in developing equity strategies for the organization.¹¹⁵ In his position, Creighton-Kelly formed a Racial Equality Committee and an advisory committee intended specifically to address the concerns of First Nations artists.¹¹⁶ Presenting the “Report on Racial Equality in the Arts at the Canada Council” to

¹¹³ Rodrigues, 167.

¹¹⁴ Rodrigues, 168.

¹¹⁵ Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung, “Into the Institution” in *13 Conversations About Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 63; Rodrigues, 168.

¹¹⁶ Cameron Bailey, “Fright the Power: Arts Councils and the Spectre of Racial Equality,” *FUSE* 15/6 (1992), 23.

the Council's Board of Directors in April 1991, Creighton-Kelly firmly stated that, "because multiculturalism uses the rhetoric of inclusion it cannot properly address the politics of exclusion."¹¹⁷ The report goes on to say, "Multiculturalism acknowledges difference but it makes equivalences from these differences... The fundamental issues of power... go unacknowledged."¹¹⁸ Creating the space for the articulation of such alternative assessments of the Act within the Canada Council demonstrates a nascent commitment to opening up a dialogue for meaningful change by a federal cultural organization.

Writing in FUSE magazine the year the Report was published, film-maker Cameron Bailey wrote an article responding to Creighton-Kelly's Report on Racial Equality. In this way, Bailey provides a third and alternative perspective within the debates circulating around institutional reform and racial equality, that of a practising film-maker of colour dependent on federal funding. Bailey reflected on the report, which was published in January 1992 in conjunction with a series of responses by the Canada Council Board of Directors on each of the committee's recommendations. Here, Bailey articulates the need for meaningful change within Canadian cultural and funding institutions,

...critics have pointed out that the staffing, jury selection and everyday communications of arts councils excluded all but a privileged minority, and that the definitions of excellence, professionalism and art itself which underpinned their operation were biased in favour of European high art traditions. In other words, arts councils were relentlessly white, ignoring both the complexity of the communities they served, and the dangerous internal rot indicated by systemic racism. In a country where a working artist is almost by definition a government-funded artist, this situation amounted to state-sanctioned cultural apartheid.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Chris Creighton-Kelly, *Report on Racial Equality in the Arts at the Canada Council* (Ottawa: Canada Council, 1991), 4.

¹¹⁸ Bailey, 23.

¹¹⁹ Bailey, 22.

The normalization of white privilege within the everyday operations of the Canada Council led Bailey to support the recommendations of the committee and contest the Board's published responses. He charges the Board with perpetuating the Council's legacy of systemic racism by failing to endorse Recommendation 5 advanced by the committee. This recommendation states, "Whereas systemic racism is a result of the everyday functioning of all Canadian institutions, we recommend an organizational review of the Canada Council be conducted to locate all other areas of bias."¹²⁰ For this failure, Bailey condemns the Council, "By refusing to admit the existence of systemic racism, the Council refutes the reason for the committee, its recommendations, the whole enterprise."¹²¹ The criticisms raised by Bailey are an important reminder that stated commitments to racial equality may be met by some financial and organizational change, but, without addressing the systemic exclusions that underscore institutional policy, real change cannot occur.

In response to the committee's recommendations, the Canada Council did commit, however, to several changes. In 1992 it hired its first Equity Coordinator and created the Equity Office to provide increased access to funding for artists and organizations representing all racial and cultural backgrounds. According to Rodrigues, "the policy sought to resolve historical inequities experienced by artists from racial communities, specifically those of Asian, African, Latin American and Arabic heritage."¹²² The attendant structural changes resulted in over \$25 million dollars being dispensed between 1991 and 2007 to culturally diverse artists, curators, writers and organizations. For Richard Fung, a member of Creighton-Kelly's advisory committee, official multiculturalism, despite the necessary critiques he considers having been levied against it, facilitated these changes by providing "a lever and a context for raising the question of

¹²⁰ Bailey, 25.

¹²¹ Bailey, 25.

¹²² Rodrigues, 168.

systemic racism in the arts. It put race and ethnicity on a public/political agenda in a way that could be challenged from a more radical standpoint.”¹²³ However, he remains cognisant of the limitations of such structural changes, which seem to acknowledge racial and cultural difference with “no reference to power and history.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, Fung argues that, among state cultural institutions, only arts councils appear to have addressed race-based exclusions and inequities, with other national agencies such as Canadian Heritage and Telefilm Canada lagging behind. Other arts councils and artist-run centres that began opening up to non-white artists and writers in addressing the issue of racial equality included the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, A Space, FUSE and Fireweed.¹²⁵ Thus, while advances in policy and funding linked with the Act are noteworthy, the continued inability of some government institutions to recognize and extricate the thread of inequity woven into their own institutional structures created limits to broader and more meaningful change. This brief examination demonstrates some of the complex contradictions that permeate this issue, as positive funding changes are inextricably interlaced with the ‘othering’ language of the Act.

Cultural race politics arose in Canada’s largest cities in the late 1980s because of these contradictions and the continued inability of arts institutions to fully address the important questions of how systemic power imbalances facilitated the persistence of racial inequity and silent exclusions. They arose out of the myriad frustrations bound to Canada’s history of colonialism and continued discrepancies in access to the means of production between the nation’s silently constructed core and visible minorities placed on the periphery. 1988 to 1995 was an extremely vibrant period marked by a passionate commitment to action at both the level of the community and the institution, and by the organization of “large group shows staged under the rubric of deliberately racialized

¹²³ Gagnon and Fung, “Into the Institution,” 66.

¹²⁴ Gagnon and Fung, “Into the Institution,” 66.

¹²⁵ Gagnon and Fung, “Into the Institution,” 64.

identities.”¹²⁶ This took on the form of coalitions, collectives and caucuses which, according to Monika Kin Gagnon, “[staged] numerous events including conferences, festivals, screenings, readings, workshops and art exhibitions, as well as the publication of catalogues, chapbooks and special issues of magazines and journals.”¹²⁷ She goes on to characterize these processes as involving questions of “visibility and legitimation, and what can be referred to as ‘a politics of knowledge.’” At their very foundation, these cultural movements and activities bring into question (and problematize) who defines, determines and controls cultural value.”¹²⁸ As such, cultural race politics worked at numerous levels. It challenged practical questions of access while simultaneously advocating a politics of knowledge that aimed to reveal the social construction of race, with its implications for social, economic and political exclusion.

Cultural race politics, bringing the issue of race to a public forum in Canada, was in intimate dialogue with earlier liberation movements such as those associated with post-WWII decolonization, and the American Black Liberation and American Indian Movements of the 1950s and 1960s.¹²⁹ According to Griselda Pollock, the legacy of these political critiques was to create a new “impetus to the study of ideological practices and cultural forms as being both privileged sites of *ideological* oppression and the place from which to mount *cultural* resistance.”¹³⁰ These movements created the foundation for critical understandings of the systemic exclusions constructed through normalized discourses of cultural difference, while also providing an early model for cultural resistance. However, Monika Kin Gagnon and Scott Toguri-McFarlane argue that, unlike these earlier movements, the identity politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s were less

¹²⁶ Rodrigues, 175.

¹²⁷ Monika Kin Gagnon, “Other Solitudes,” in *13 Conversations About Art and Cultural Race Politics*, eds. Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung (Montreal: Artextes Editions, 2002), 12.

¹²⁸ Gagnon, “Other Solitudes,” 12.

¹²⁹ Gagnon, “Other Solitudes,” 12.

¹³⁰ Griselda Pollock, “The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories” in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

interested in delineating specific community borders. They suggest that, "Instead of operating within a civil multicultural paradigm in which each community struggles and competes to have a proper sense of their identity recognized by the state, the politics of cultural difference began to operate by making evident the haunting cultural differences that riddle pluralist fantasies of a coherent public sphere."¹³¹ Rather than calling for the recognition of individual community rights, cultural race politics called for an end to the ethnic ghettoization that categorized, contained and managed 'difference.' While remaining an oppositional form of resistance, this period appears to contain within its many folds and manifestations the beginnings of the deconstruction, and concomitant rearticulation of, cultural difference and race.

Exposing similar notions of latent racism in Canada and expressing the anger it triggered in the artistic community in the late 1980s, writer Dionne Brand comments,

Notions of access, representation, inclusion, exclusion, equity, etc. are all other ways of saying 'race' in this country. So it's made it comfortable to talk covertly about race in this country without saying that we live in a deeply racialized and racist culture which represses the life possibilities of people of colour.¹³²

Writing in 1994 Australia, Sneja Gunew attributes this lack of entitlement to the propensity of multicultural discourses to inform the definition so-called ethnic communities in absolute terms. She suggests,

The linking of multiculturalism and ethnicity presupposes a kind of ethnic absolutism where the community is both synonymous with a particular cultural formation and maintains its closed boundaries in terms of language and cultural traditions. The community is thus bracketed as a homogenised entity and frozen outside history and contemporary interactive relations. Such notions of community also precipitate the anxiety-provoking shadow of the ghetto which always lurks just behind invocations of ethnic. Under the guise of a supposedly tolerant recognition of difference the deployment of the term

¹³¹ Monika Kin Gagnon and Scott Toguri-McFarlane, "The Capacity of Cultural Difference," Minister's Forum on Diversity and Culture, http://www.pch.gc.ca/special/dcforum/info-bg/05_e.cfm (Accessed 14 March 2006).

¹³² Dionne Brand in Monika Kin Gagnon, "Building Blocks" in *Other Conundrums* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 52-3.

ethnicity often heralds attempts to consign ethnic groups to the margins into a type of enforced separatism which will not 'contaminate' the mainstream.¹³³

These statements reflect the sentiments of culturally diverse writers, artists and academics working in the early 1990s. The expression Brand gives to otherwise silent racisms works to insert the experiences and practices of culturally diverse artists, writers and curators into "contemporary interactive relations." They demonstrate that cultural homogenization and historical marginalization are the products of socially constructed power relationships. In the above statement, Gunew powerfully asserts the casual acceptance of difference, which was assumed to exist unproblematically outside of the mainstream in a stagnant ethnic ghetto. Together, these words challenge the normalization of racisms that were the perpetuations of historical inequities masked in a rhetoric of tolerance and symbolic cultural celebration. Where such normalizations kept racialized communities "frozen outside history," these writers articulate that the histories of all communities run parallel to one another, colliding, intersecting and merging. They begin to carve out spaces for alternative histories to be written and new questions to be explored through the processes and events initiated by cultural race politics in Canada.

Lillian Allen, a dub poet and activist affiliated in the early 1990s with the Association of National Non-Profit Artist-run Centres (ANNPAC), demonstrates the shortcomings of the Multiculturalism Act in a manner which also reveals the intensely personal and emotional commitment of culturally diverse artists active during this period. In an article in a special winter issue of *Parallelogramme* in 1993, Allen outlines the various strategies that could have been employed in order to begin addressing issues of cultural equity.¹³⁴ Among others, these include making organizations and institutions

¹³³ Sneja Gunew, "Arts for a Multicultural Australia," in *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, eds. Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin Pty Ltd, 1994), 5.

¹³⁴ This special issue of *Parallelogramme* (19/3 1993) was published as a response to ANNPAC's 1993 Annual General Meeting in Calgary. At the 1992 AGM in Moncton, several culturally diverse artists formed an advisory council called the Minquon Panchayat, which was empowered for a

relevant to broader communities by the inclusion and participation of culturally diverse people and the recognition of and redress for the various exclusions that riddle Canadian history. While pointing towards a personal investment and involvement in these measures, in the same article Allen outlines the barriers that impeded the achievement of such goals, barriers akin to those articulated by Creighton-Kelly and Bailey,

Unfortunately, there is very little support or leadership shown from the funding bodies in encouraging these changes. The very way that arts and cultural funding is designed and administered plays a key role in perpetrating and maintaining cultural inequality. So, those of us who engage in this process usually find ourselves hedged somewhere between meaningful change and the deep blue sea of the status quo, and its myriad configuration. The 'multiculturalism' of the last decade is one such strategy of the status quo. The rhetoric of multiculturalism made it appear as if a lot of changes, support and progress were happening when in fact relatively small sums of money supported multiculturalism. The established art-funding practice became more entrenched and the Euro-dominated decision-making administration remained intact.¹³⁵

This statement illustrates that, despite the quick response of an organization such as the Canada Council to the recommendations made by the Multiculturalism Act, the scope of change had not yet trickled down to the level of practising artists in a significant way. She also challenges the very nature of changes made, contending that increased financial support could not offset the unproblematized and intrinsically "Euro-dominated decision-making" apparatuses that remained intact.

A vein of frustration quickly reveals itself in Allen's writing as she both bears witness to and exposes the continual layering of obstacles on top of possibilities for

two-year period to examine and offer a vision for the transformation of ANNPAC along more racially equitable lines. At the Calgary AGM in 1993, support for the Minquon Panchayat ended abruptly after a series of 'events, attitudes and confusions' arose. Responses to the AGM from across Canada were published in this issue of *Parallogramme*, the introduction of which reads: "Because many organizations in Canada are attempting to address systemic racism and exclusion, we are opening the pages of *Parallogramme* to critiques, analyses and results arising from ANNPAC's AGM in the hope that sharing information will contribute to successful anti-racism initiatives in the artist-run network." (*Parallogramme*, 14) Contributors include Cheryl L'Hirondelle, Monika Kin Gagnon and Lillian Allen. These events at the Calgary AGM resulted in the dissolution of ANNPAC within the following year.

¹³⁵ Lillian Allen, "Transforming the Cultural Fortress: Setting the Agenda for Anti-Racism Work in Culture," *Parallogramme* 19/3 (1993-4), 52.

effective change towards an opening of institutions and organizations to include and be relevant for a multitude of communities. There are the recurring sentiments of anger and frustration that appear to have emerged as fundamental catalysts to the events that unfolded at the time, with inequitable access to opportunity and representation in cultural institutions surfacing as the primary source for such feelings. These issues revolved around the visibility (or invisibility) of artists of colour within regional and national arts organizations such as ANNPAC, as well as the failure of art exhibitions to address the experiences, concerns and interests of artists and curators of colour. This is compounded by the concomitant, yet incongruous, tendency to define Canadian nationhood through tolerance and pluralism, and is further aggravated by the aforementioned inconsistencies and contradictions contained within the *Multiculturalism Act* that seeks to manage difference. Expressing this frustration, Allen writes,

Those of us who do this work are about to keel over from the censorship of tact, constantly negotiating the infested waters of white guilt, liberalism, power addiction, fear, ignorance, arrogance, sabotage, stupidity and sometimes walls of plain hatred – walls and walls and sheets and walls of it.¹³⁶

Roy Miki, arguing that the existence of these frustrations catalyzed cultural race politics, argues, “A lot of [this anger] had to do with this sense of being unentitled. Not only about access, but a sense of legitimacy, of not ever being equal enough to enter into the social system as a fully endowed agent.”¹³⁷ Miki speaks to the barriers often confronted by artists, writers and curators of colour and First Nations in the early 1990s in achieving equal access to the means of production and to fair recognition within their representing bodies.

Gagnon argues that the 1990 group exhibition organized by video artist Paul Wong, *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*, was one of the first shows to engage in cultural race

¹³⁶ Allen, 52.

¹³⁷ Roy Miki, interview by author, 16 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

politics.¹³⁸ The exhibition was circulated by On Edge Productions and opened at Oboro Gallery Montréal. It traveled to six Canadian cities and included the work of twenty-five emerging and established artists working in photography, film and video.¹³⁹ In keeping with Gagnon's notion of the politics of knowledge, the aim of the exhibition was to provide alternative, more accurate views of Asian artists, and, by consequence, to demystify the exoticizing tendency in contemporary Canadian art at the time.¹⁴⁰

According to the website of the Vancouver artist-run centre Artspeak, "Much of the work in *Yellow Peril* grapples with the notion of truth. Whose voices are not being heard? This provocative exhibition confronts assumptions."¹⁴¹ Accompanied by a 72-page catalogue on top of the traveling show, *Yellow Peril* created a lasting legacy interrogating the marginalization of Asian-Canadian art through both artistic production and critical analysis.

Unlike Gagnon, art historian Alice Ming Wai Jim believes that the landmark 1989 exhibition organized by the Diasporic African Women's Art Collective (DAWA), *Black Wimmin: When and Where we Enter*, was the first to be deliberately racialized and anti-racist. The exhibition traveled extensively throughout Canada, providing a dynamic venue for the work of black women artists from Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, Edmonton and Montreal. As documented by Jim, *Black Wimmin* "not only marked the entry of Black women artists into the Canadian art scene in the late eighties but also paved the way for

¹³⁸ Monika Kin Gagnon, "Introduction," in *Other Conundrums* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 25.

¹³⁹ The artists featured in this exhibition were Taki Bluesinger, Melanie Boyle, Anthony Chan, Benjamin Chou, Richad Fung, Jay Hirabayashi, Roy Kiyooka, Nobuo Kubota, L'Amitie Chinoise de Montréal, Laiwan, Daisy Lee, Helen Lee, Brenda Joy Lem, Lui/Samwald, Chi Chung Mak, Nhan Nguyen, Marlin Oliveros, Midi Onodera, Chick Rice, Rubly Truly, Henry Tsang, Tamio Wakayama, Jim Wong-Chu, Jin-me Yoon and Saryn Yuen.

¹⁴⁰ Artspeak, "Yellow Peril: Reconsidered," Artspeak, http://artspeak.ca/exhibitions/event_detail.html?event_id=139 (Accessed 11 January 2007).

¹⁴¹ Artspeak, http://artspeak.ca/exhibitions/event_detail.html?event_id=139 (Accessed 11 January 2007).

more art by people of African descent to be exhibited.”¹⁴² As one of the first exhibitions in Canada to address anti-racism in the arts, *Black Wimmin* was groundbreaking in not only being singularly devoted to presenting the work of Black women artists, but also in being the first exhibition of its kind to be coordinated solely by Black women curators.¹⁴³

Recognizing the constitutive capacity of art and its peripheral productions, these early exhibitions and events cumulatively explore the production of cultural identities within Canadian culture and history.¹⁴⁴ As delineated by Gagnon, these artists and curators engaged in “hybrid textual practices and conceptual approaches as a means to effecting representational, and political, innovation.”¹⁴⁵ This hybridity developed out of a real engagement with questions of race, culture and identity through the visual language of contemporary art practice. This involved, therefore, the subtle interrogation, merging and/or juxtaposing of stereotyped notions of ethnic ghettoization, home, belonging and community, and the use of contemporary critical art practices. As such, the duality of a racialized identity embedded within the white-dominated discourses of contemporary Canadian art production functioned to sever race-based expectations regarding artistic production and to open new spaces for the articulation of a variety of perspectives within a common visual language.

Yellow Peril and *Black Wimmin* both focused their curatorial framework on specific race-based communities. The 1991 exhibition curated by Henry Tsang and Lorraine Chan at the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver, *Self Not Whole*, employed a similar strategy of inward-focused community interrogation and will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Two. Roy Miki, in interview, expressed the power behind engaging with the term race during this time period through such exhibitions,

¹⁴² Alice Ming Wai Jim, “An Analysis and Documentatin of the 1989 Exhibition ‘Black Wimmin: When and Where we Enter,’” *RACAR: Canadian Art Review* XXIII/1-2 (1996), 71.

¹⁴³ Jim, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Gagnon, “Introduction,” 25.

¹⁴⁵ Gagnon, “Introduction,” 25.

The term of colour was used very much as a discursive rallying point. It was a way of getting outside of, beyond ethnic enclosures, ethnic-specific identities and to open up the broader questions of racialization... at this time period there was this discursive 'visible-ization,' coming to visibility, in a social sense – a cultural lighting up – because of all this anti-racism work it was possible in certain moments for this work to light up.¹⁴⁶

Miki thereby argues that engaging specifically with race brings questions of racism and exclusion to the surface. However, he stresses a movement beyond the ethnic enclosures explored by *Yellow Peril*, *Black Wimmin*, and *Self Not Whole*. Although these early exhibitions provided necessary scrutiny of cultural stereotypes and ethnic ghettoization by simultaneously adopting and racializing the vocabulary of contemporary art, such introspective analyses could not address the broader structural inequities with cross-cultural implications. Furthermore, appearing to engage with a form of strategic essentialism, such an approach can be viewed as, in fact, reifying ethnic ghettoization.¹⁴⁷ Thus, although they worked towards the "coming to visibility" articulated by Miki, "a cultural lighting up" that would situate racialized works within the broader narratives of contemporary artistic production rather than being relegated to the marginal and ahistorical, their narrow racial focus can be seen as having limited their potential for broader critique and cultural impact.

Espousing an increasingly decentred focus, the 1989 Film and Video Festival and Symposium in Vancouver, *In Visible Colours*, brought together the work of seventy-five women of colour from Canada and abroad. Organized by Zainub Verjee and the National Film Board's Lorraine Chan, *In Visible Colour* interlaced race politics with issues of gender and sexuality as its premise, screening more than one hundred works by women from twenty-eight countries over five days. As suggested by Gagnon, the power of the

¹⁴⁶ Roy Miki, interview by author, 16 December 2006.

¹⁴⁷ For further information on the post-colonial writing of Gayatri Spivak, please refer to: Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (London: Routledge, 1996).

festival rested in the fact that its organizers could not easily generalize the experience of gendered and racialized bodies. She writes,

While the realization of this festival depended precisely on foregrounding the shared experiences of oppression, sexism, and racism lived by a global range of women, what the event and the screened works finally made apparent is how these realities are determined by specific social, economic, political and cultural conditions.¹⁴⁸

The festival, by stepping beyond the confines of a single cultural community and thematic structure, was able to articulate the complexity of racialized existence as it is differently influenced by intersecting factors such as class, politics, gender and sexuality. It successfully complicated the tendency to homogenize the racialized individual and experience within the Canadian national narrative as well as its formations abroad.

While many of the international works included explored the myriad ways in which women of colour are defined, the wealth of Canadian works represented, according to Gagnon, “a cultural plurality” and worked to “redress the absences of sexual and racial difference within dominant, official histories.”¹⁴⁹ Many of the works strove to recover, reconstruct and commemorate histories threatened by historical silencing and neglect. Dionne Brand and Claire Prieto’s *Older, Stronger, Wiser* (1989) employed interviews and testimonials from members of Canada’s Black communities to recuperate largely unknown histories (Fig. 3). Miki Onodera’s *The Displaced View* (1988) explored the actual reconstruction of history through processes of oral telling and remembering, working together with several generations of Japanese-Canadian women in her family (Fig. 4).¹⁵⁰ In voicing these histories as they are implicated within and give evidence to the real pluralism riddling the Canadian narrative, these film makers create situations in which, as articulated by Bhabha, “the natural(ized), unifying discourse of ‘nation,’ [or] ‘peoples,’ ... those embedded myths of culture’s particularity, cannot be easily

¹⁴⁸ Gagnon, “Building Blocks,” 58.

¹⁴⁹ Gagnon, “Building Blocks,” 56.

¹⁵⁰ Gagnon, “Building Blocks,” 57.

referenced.”¹⁵¹ Bringing together a broad spectrum of women film makers, thinkers and community leaders, *In Visible Colours* fostered a multiplicity of convergences across communities and national boundaries, while also denying the possibility of homogenization and facile stereotyping. However, they are united in their efforts, according to Gagnon, to create “temporary collective spaces that sought to strengthen [their] participants” and “to identify the needs of [their] communities in a multilayered way.”¹⁵² *In Visible Colours* thereby diverged from *Yellow Peril*, *Black Wimmin*, and *Self Not Whole* in its broader focus and its nurturing of discussions and alliances across socially constructed, economic and geographical barriers.

While these earlier events and exhibitions took place outside of government funded art galleries and museums, in 1992 two events occurred within national institutions. Each proffered alternative histories for the location of First Nations within mainstream mythologies of Canadian nationhood. Aboriginal artists from across Canada were represented at the Canadian Museum of Civilization’s *Indigena*, curated by Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin. Coinciding with the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in North America and the 125th anniversary of the Canadian nation, *Indigena* challenged the common misconception that Columbus ‘discovered’ the Americas. Rather, *Indigena*’s curators stated that 1492 marked the advent of colonization in North America, being the “beginning of a 500-year legacy of religious, cultural, social, economic and political intolerance that is still at every level of modern society.”¹⁵³ In the same year, the National Gallery of Canada, presented *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada*, curated by Diana Nemiroff,

¹⁵¹ Homi Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 247.

¹⁵² Gagnon, “Building Blocks,” 71.

¹⁵³ Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin, *Indigena* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992), 12.

Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault.¹⁵⁴ In the foreword to the extensive catalogue accompanying the exhibition, gallery director Shirley Thomson writes,

[*Land, Spirit, Power*] is intended, in part, as a response and a contribution to the important discussions taking place today around the questions of cultural identity, from the specific perspective of First Nations artists. These discussions... have taken the form of a critical and theoretical discourse that contests and attempts to broaden the traditionally accepted parameters of art, while giving expression to cultural difference.¹⁵⁵

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to address these exhibitions further, together with the previously mentioned events that took place largely in Vancouver, they illustrate the fact that concerns of identity politics permeated across Canada and addressed the multiplicity of issues experienced by artists of colour and First Nations. As suggested by Gagnon, "By creating a critical mass at an intersection with established cultural organizations, these events, in different ways, made the significant first step of facilitating increased access to the tools of cultural production, exhibition, and distribution."¹⁵⁶ Situated in the first half of the period of cultural race politics defined here as 1988 to 1995, these events shone light on questions of race, community and identity and critiqued normalized notions of belonging in Canadian cultural institutions.

Conclusion

Organized by and for culturally diverse and First Nations artists and writers, these events challenged the white domination of cultural organizations, and were characterized by a relative degree of oppositionality and antagonism against mainstream art institutions.¹⁵⁷ This antipathy functioned to set organizers and audiences in opposition to mainstream institutions, which manifested itself often in the exclusion of white organizers

¹⁵⁴ Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *Land, Spirit, Power: First Nations at the National Gallery of Canada* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992).

¹⁵⁵ Thomson, Shirley, "Foreword," in *Land, Spirit, Power*, eds. Diana Nemiroff, Robert Houle and Charlotte Townsend-Gault (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1992), 7.

¹⁵⁶ Gagnon, "Building Blocks," 70.

¹⁵⁷ Rodrigues, 175.

and artists from participation in many of the events and exhibitions associated with cultural race politics. Although these events sought fair and equitable access within cultural organizations, Sadira Rodrigues contends that, while oppositionality created momentum, it also generated complications,

[These interventionist projects] shared an equally complicated function: they claimed ownership on the right and responsibility to discuss issues of race and equity. In identifying as being part of a distinct community, these artists were able to ask questions, make accusations, and expose inequities that emerged from their embodied experiences. These notions of self-identification and self-representation, while enabling a sense of empowerment, also meant that in staking ownership for the parameters of debate, one of the consequences was to spare the larger artistic community from the need or desire to take up these concerns as well.¹⁵⁸

As Rodrigues outlines, these interventionist projects became entrenched in complex contradictions. On the one hand, employing race-based communities created safe spaces for community members to reveal social injustice. On the other, laying claim to sole ownership over issues of race and equity both alienated and created disinterest among the broader public. In her contributions to subaltern studies, Gayatri Spivak is a proponent of what she labels strategic essentialism, where the “*strategic* use of positivist essentialism achieves a scrupulously visible political interest.”¹⁵⁹ She defines such a “positive project” as one “which assumes that, if properly prosecuted, it will lead to a firm ground, to something that can be disclosed.”¹⁶⁰ In this way, Spivak contends that the strategic identification of internally defined and essentialized characteristics of community serves to unify individuals for a political goal. In this way, it is possible to characterize the work of those active in cultural race politics through a manner of strategic essentialism that functions to create politically unified groups of individuals defined by race and/or opposition to systemic inequities in access to the means of artistic

¹⁵⁸ Rodrigues, 176.

¹⁵⁹ Gayatri Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (London: Routledge, 1996), 214.

¹⁶⁰ Spivak, 211.

production. However, strategic essentialism is also discredited for in fact reaffirming the hegemonic practice of ethnic ghettoization and marginalization that it seeks to dismantle, through this very process of creating “ethnic enclosures.” Like the contradictions rife throughout multicultural discourses, cultural race politics itself was mired in a similar paradox.

As a nascent political movement in Canada, however, it can be argued that the oppositional tactics of cultural race politics were necessary. This is perhaps best demonstrated through a brief comparison with the history of feminism. Like many of the projects associated with cultural race politics, whereby organizers had personal investments in the institutional change they sought, first-wave feminism is renowned for stating that the “personal is political.”¹⁶¹ This is exemplified in Judy Chicago’s *Womanhouse* of 1970 at the Fresno State College, which was one of the first instances where feminist consciousness was articulated. The first wave, which sought to emphasize the “condition and experience of being female” was sometimes deemed essentialist because it conceived of woman as “a fixed category determined through societal and cultural institutions.”¹⁶² This essentializing categorization failed to recognize the internal differences contained within the broader experience of women, including class, sexuality, race and nationality. Audre Lorde writes of these exclusions, “Ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power.”¹⁶³ Second wave feminism, however, views “woman as an unfixed category” that is “constantly in

¹⁶¹ Pollock, 5.

¹⁶² Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, “The Feminist Critique of Art History,” *Art Bulletin* LXIX/3 (September 1987), 346.

¹⁶³ Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and the MIT Press, 1990), 283.

process.”¹⁶⁴ Thus, while the former sees ‘woman’ as a fixed category in opposition to that of male, the latter examines woman “through her representations and ideological constructions within a male system.”¹⁶⁵ Despite the critiques levied against first wave feminism, it is important to recognize its contributions in laying the groundwork necessary to recuperate the lost histories of women, in providing a female-centred analysis of the position of women in history, and in revealing male dominance in defining social structures in general and the art historical canon in particular.¹⁶⁶ In this way, the oppositional strategy of first wave feminists was necessary for the movement to gain visibility, as well as to pave the way for the increasingly nuanced critiques of the second wave.

When asked in interview whether bringing artists and communities together under the terms ‘colour’ and ‘race’ reifies hegemonic structures of marginalization, Roy Miki reaffirmed the need for oppositionality in the early stages of cultural race politics,

That was a liberal critique present at the time... saying how can you use this term [‘colour?’] ‘Aren’t you buying into that?’ I mean, we weren’t stupid. *That’s why* we used this term “colour...” What I was interested in was that terminology was volatile and that we could recontain ourselves by the language we used. People were conscious of that. Critics can look back and say that people were only oppositional and had no subtlety of critique, which is really true to a degree, but there was a heightened politics of visibility. What a term like colour did was make the social spaces around it reverberate, it created noise. Even if people came back and attacked you, there was at least a social visibility; at least people were coming out of the closet.¹⁶⁷

In this way, we see the connection between cultural race politics and first-wave feminism in highlighting the necessity to increase the visibility of marginalized groups of people. They are also paralleled in the personal investment and passion that drove organizers and artists in each period. However, cultural race politics also demonstrates numerous

¹⁶⁴ Gouma-Peterson, 346.

¹⁶⁵ Gouma-Peterson, 346.

¹⁶⁶ Gouma-Peterson, 351.

¹⁶⁷ Roy Miki, interview by the author.

characteristics of second-wave feminism in its increasingly nuanced approach to identity construction. Although coalitions were created and exhibitions were organized around the term colour, as outlined by Miki, events such as *In Visible Colours* and *Racy Sexy* exhibited a dedication to communicating internal diversity. This was achieved through the layers of analyses of race with class, gender, sexuality and, in some cases, nationality. The following chapter will explore two exhibitions curated by Henry Tsang – 1991's *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy* of 1993. Together, these exhibitions would mark the transition within cultural race politics away from strategic essentialism towards a form which resembles the critiques of second-wave feminism.

CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL CURATORIAL STRATEGIES

Chapter one provided the context for the emergence and development of cultural race politics within the paradigm of multiculturalism in Canada. In order to respond to the limitations placed on various cultural communities as they were constructed by multicultural discourses, the events that took place under the umbrella of cultural race politics were continually evolving. Cultural organizers and artists foregrounded process and continuous interrogations over a single formulaic strategy to respond to the critiques levied against them from within the movement and without. In this way, the events connected to cultural race politics are in intimate dialogue with one another, each challenging the ideas that came before it, posing new questions and offering innovative, if temporary, solutions.

In order to illustrate this dialogue and the numerous strategic shifts that occurred within cultural race politics, this chapter will examine the relationship between two exhibitions co-curated by the Vancouver-based artist and curator Henry Tsang, *Self Not Whole* in 1991 with Lorraine Chan and *Racy Sexy* in 1993 with Karin Lee. Organized in conjunction with the Chinese Cultural Centre, *Self Not Whole* explored the construction of Chinese-Canadian identity in Vancouver from within the community itself. In order to contextualize the construction of Chinese-Canadian identity in general, as well as its containment through the discourses of multiculturalism, this chapter provides a brief history of the social exclusions faced by Chinese-Canadians in their 150 year history in Canada. While *Self Not Whole* addressed the needs and interests of a single race-based community, *Racy Sexy* adopted a decentred approach, a theoretical departure characterized by the use of various cultural centres throughout Vancouver, a large curatorial team and an exploration of the intersection of race with sexuality. These

conceptual and strategic shifts developed in response to critiques posited against *Self Not Whole* by Tsang himself, staff at the Chinese Cultural Centre and the broader public. The dialogue between *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy* is demonstrative of Tsang's commitment to working towards increasingly effective and meaningful curatorial strategies under the rubric of cultural race politics.

Cultural race politics came into being alongside the postcolonial work of Homi Bhabha. Exhibitions such as *Self Not Whole* were particularly aligned with his notions of hybridity, whereby colonial ambivalences produce a hybrid "mutation" of the colonizer by the colonized that is at once "almost the same but not white."¹⁶⁸ Although providing useful critical tools for re-conceptualizing the 'centre' and 'periphery' relationship that characterized race relations in Canada in the early 1990s, employing such binary discursive tools served only to entrench this differential power dynamic, rather than providing the means to think beyond binaries. *Racy Sexy* demonstrates an early recognition of these critiques of postcolonial theory and hybridity, with a greater emphasis on the relational approaches advanced by postcolonial critics such as Benita Parry, Laura Christmann and Vilashini Cooppan.¹⁶⁹ Thus, examining the relationship between these two exhibitions by Henry Tsang is not only indicative of the internal shifts occurring within the critical curatorial strategies employed under the rubric of cultural race politics, but it also gives visual form to parallel changes taking place in the realm of social and cultural theory.

¹⁶⁸ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 128; Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 159.

¹⁶⁹ Benita Parry and Laura Christmann, *Postcolonial Theory and Criticism*, x.

'WALKING THE MOUNTAIN'

To trace the shifting perceptions of Asian immigrants in Canada is to reveal the extent to which racisms have underpinned dominant articulations of nationhood in this country. Exposing the power relations that have constructed Asian 'difference' along essentialized and racist terms simultaneously uncovers the construction of normalized Canadian identity, that which can be alternatively termed the 'core' or 'mainstream,' as emerging out of the Western European settler community. Subject early on to the contradictory pressures of anti-Asian sentiment and the concomitant need for cheap labour, immigrants from Asia were often characterized through the 'Yellow Peril' discourse, which viewed them an invasive threat to Canada's predominantly white 'core' culture, economy and civilization.¹⁷⁰ This notion of the Yellow Peril can be subsumed within Audre Lorde's definition of racism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance."¹⁷¹ Grasping these continually shifting misrepresentations of and impositions on Asians in Canada reveals the racist tensions underpinning official Canadian history.

Chinese Canadians began arriving in Canada around 1858 as a result of the gold rush on this country's west coast.¹⁷² Between 1881 and 1885, Chinese labourers were brought in from China to work on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), increasing the number of Chinese in Canada to from 4,000 to 15,000.¹⁷³ Following the completion of the CPR, the Federal Government imposed a Head Tax of

¹⁷⁰ Kirsten Emiko McAllister, "Confronting Official History With Our Own Eyes: Video-Documentary in the Japanese Canadian Community," *West Coast Line: Colour. An Issue* 13/14 (Spring-Fall 1994), 69.

¹⁷¹ Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and the MIT Press, 1990), 282.

¹⁷² Chinese Canadian National Council, "The Redress Campaign," Chinese Canadian National Council, <http://www.ccnc.ca/redress/index.html> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

¹⁷³ Warren E. Kalbach, "Growth and Distribution of Canada's Ethnic Populations, 1971-1971," in *The Canadian Ethnic Mosaic: A Quest for Identity*, ed. Leo Drieger (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), 86.

\$50 on new immigrants from China as part of the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act of 1885.¹⁷⁴ An editorial written in the *Manitoba Free Press* articulates the impetus behind these measures, "If something is not done speedily it will be too late to consider whether the Pacific Province shall be given up to the Chinese or not."¹⁷⁵ Following the construction of the CPR Canada's provinces were unified, thereby making residents of Manitoba fearful of the possibility that, as the article continues, "Ten times more people than Canada now holds could be poured in on us from the teeming soil of China without being missed from the land."¹⁷⁶ By 1900, the Head Tax rose to \$100 per person, and by 1903 to \$500.¹⁷⁷

C. Wilson, an individual present at the 1902 Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, argued for the necessity of such exclusionary measure. He suggested that the Chinese are "not only alien in so far as their birth is concerned, but of a different type of humanity and civilization... who do not assimilate with us, who would not if they could, and who could not if they would."¹⁷⁸ This anti-Asian sentiment is echoed in the following excerpt from a *Victoria Times* article of 1907, which describes Asian immigrants as,

a vast colony, exclusive, inscrutable, unassimilative, bound together in a secret offensive and defensive organization, with fewer wants and lower standards of living than their neighbours, maintaining intact their peculiar customs and characteristics, morals, and ideals of home and family life, with neither the wish nor the capacity to conform to the civilization upon which they have intruded, and gradually, by the mere pressure of numbers, undermining the very foundations of white man's well-being.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Harry Con et al., *From China to Canada: A History of Chinese Communities in Canada*, ed. Edgar Wickberg (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1982), 55.

¹⁷⁵ Con et al., 56.

¹⁷⁶ Con et al., 56.

¹⁷⁷ Chinese Canadian National Council, <http://www.ccnc.ca/redress/index.html> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

¹⁷⁸ C. Wilson in Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 125.

¹⁷⁹ McAllister, 68.

The *Victoria Times* journalist employs a heavy rhetoric of 'us' and 'them,' dissociating Asian immigrants from the so-called civilization of the white man through such characterizations as "unassimilative" and "intrusive." In this way, the line between essentialized racial categories is drawn as definite and impermeable. Together, these statements construct racial difference to justify the social exclusion of Asian immigrants and to differentiate between an assumed 'core' white Canadian culture and alien 'others.' This is evident in the pervasive belief in the inability and unwillingness of Asian immigrants to adapt to life in Canada. The desired outcome of such exclusion is the so-called protection of British cultural homogeneity in Canada – a desire that resonates with Lorde's definition of racism as the naturalization of self-ascribed cultural superiority.

What these primary sources clearly illustrate is the desire to maintain some semblance of racial and cultural homogeneity in Canada, if not British, then at least European. Richard Day, in his book *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*, demonstrates the centrality of Britishness within the Canadian national imaginary, despite Canada's progressive expansion of immigration policies to allow for migration into Canada from nations further and further from the British Isles. The purpose of the Immigration Act of 1869, according to Day, "as gleaned from its explicit inclusions and exclusions, was to open Canada to healthy, wealthy, Anglo-Saxon bodies."¹⁸⁰ However, because British immigration was not able to stay apace with the needs of Canadian western expansion, immigration was expanded to the rest of Europe. Day argues that this shift resulted in the hierarchical arrangement of immigrant identities.¹⁸¹ In this way, Britishness established itself as central to 'Canadian' identity and values, with 'other' European identities 'flooding' in to constitute a periphery. The Chinese labourers entering the country at the same time, thus came to be located at the margins of this

¹⁸⁰ Day, 122.

¹⁸¹ Day, 124.

peripheral group, furthest away from the 'core' identity construction – the inassimilable and irreconcilable 'other' against which the 'core' defined itself.

Artist Sharyn Yuen's 1991 installation work *John Chinaman* speaks to the discrimination experienced by Canadians of Chinese descent living in British Columbia in the early part of the twentieth century (Fig. 5).¹⁸² During this period, around 1911, approximately seventy percent of the 28,000 Chinese immigrants living in Canada were residing in British Columbia.¹⁸³ Drawing on two symbols for death in Chinese culture, Yuen constructed eleven jackets from white, hand-made paper.¹⁸⁴ Upon these makeshift garments, the artist applied images and statistics related to the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act. According to Monika Kin Gagnon, "While the suit jackets, with their uniform formality, elicit the government authority behind the Head Tax, the name 'John Chinaman' represents a generic English name, a moniker perhaps used to overcome the difficulty for Anglophones to pronounce Chinese names."¹⁸⁵ Thus, Yuen presents viewers with representations of a seemingly objective federal policy, while concomitantly providing evidence of the racism that underscored many of these exclusionary policies. The artist charges that the work emerged out of conversations with her father, "My father was a Canadian-born Chinese as I am. He once said to me that he could never forgive the discrimination he experienced growing up in British Columbia at that time. It is hard for me to grasp this suffering as I have not personally experienced such direct racism."¹⁸⁶ The disembodied nature of the empty and fragile suit jackets presented by Yuen points audiences to the precarious position of the Chinese in Canada, at once sought after as a source of cheap labour and then reviled as culturally inferior to the British mainstream.

¹⁸² Sharyn Yuen's *John Chinaman* was included in the 1991 exhibition *Self Not Whole*.

¹⁸³ Con et al., 91.

¹⁸⁴ Monika Kin Gagnon, "Can-Asian, eh?," in *Other Conundrums* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁸⁵ Gagnon, "Can-Asian, eh?," 130.

¹⁸⁶ Gagnon, "Can-Asian, eh?," 130.

Increased immigration to Canada from what were considered undesirable regions such as Eastern Europe and, in particular, Asia, created by 1909 a “problem of diversity” described by Day as “a perpetual lack of unity caused by the presence of a disordered chaos of non-canonical Others.”¹⁸⁷ In order to ‘manage’ the cultural differences co-existing within Canada, the federal government turned to passive and active modes of assimilation through, for example, compulsory education systems, church missions and settlement houses.¹⁸⁸ Where assimilation was not possible for those who had “neither the wish nor the capacity to conform” to the Canadian society upon which they had “intruded,” alternative solutions developed in early twentieth-century Canada. Such solutions, particularly for Asian-Canadians, included the physical removal of so-called undesirable bodies through deportation and the intensification of barriers to immigration. Although the Head Tax was abolished in 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act of the same year limited entry into Canada to university students, merchants, Canada-born Chinese returning from education in China and diplomatic personnel.¹⁸⁹ Put in effect on Dominion Day, 1 July 1923, Chinese communities across Canada labelled the day Humiliation Day, refusing to partake in Dominion Day activities and closing their businesses.¹⁹⁰ The results of these measures can be seen in the relative decrease in size of the Chinese population in Canada between 1931 and 1961, according to the Census of Canada. Whereas the Chinese-Canadian population in Canada in 1931 was approximately 47,000, in 1941 and 1951 it decreased to about 35,000 and 33,000 respectively. In 1961, following the repeal of the Act in 1947, these figures rose again to 58,000.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Day, 134.

¹⁸⁸ Day, 135.

¹⁸⁹ Con et al., 141; According to Con et al, ‘merchants’ were defined by the 1923 Act as including ‘only those of substantial capital engaged in export-import trade between China and Canada,’ in an effort to exclude ‘operators of laundries and restaurants, retail producers and the like.’ Furthermore, university students were only permitted in the country for the duration of their university studies., 141.

¹⁹⁰ Con et al., 145.

¹⁹¹ Kalbach, 86.

Artist Paul Wong, artist and organizer of 1991's *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered*, produced *Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain* in 1992 to explore themes of memory and history through references to the 150 years of migration of Chinese to Canada (Fig. 6).¹⁹² The work consists of a video set within a funerary room devoted to his father, grandfather and two friends that committed suicide. The video itself examines the life, work and death of Chinese railway workers in Canada. The title, *Chinaman's Peak*, refers to a mountain in the Canadian Rockies near Canmore, Alberta, which Wong discovered while participating in a residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts. According to Wong,

While I was up there, I became fascinated with this mountain... I wondered why it was called Chinaman's Peak. There are a number of stories, including one that says it was named for a Chinese railway worker who threw himself off the mountain. It seemed that there was a lot of tragedy involved in this place. It was the end of the road for many Chinese...¹⁹³

These histories evoked by the mountain, whose anglicized name references the same racisms revealed by Sharyn Yuen's *John Chinaman*, become intertwined with the funerary symbols built around Wong's video. According to On Edge Productions, "Walking The Mountain' (Hannng San), in Cantonese, refers to the beliefs and rituals associated with [Chinese] ancestral worship.... It provides continuity between the past, present and future..."¹⁹⁴ In an interview published on the National Gallery of Canada website, Wong goes on to explain the importance of 'Walking the Mountain,'

With... *Chinaman's Peak*, particularly in the context of Canada, where the ritual, ancestral worship has become very much a private practise within Chinese homes, I take that private practise and put it on public display... sharing a cultural practise and taking it out of isolation. Some people may

¹⁹² National Gallery of Canada, "Collection: Media Arts Collection," National Gallery of Canada, http://www.gallery.ca/english/default_40.htm (Accessed 31 July 2007).

¹⁹³ Paul Wong in Chris Dafoe, "From Confrontation to Transformation" in *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) 9 February 1993;

In 1998, the name 'Chinaman's Peak' was changed to Ha Ling Peak, in recognition of the Chinese railway worker who scaled it. (Dave Birrell, "Ha Ling Peak," Peak Finder, <http://www.peakfinder.com/peakfinder.ASP?PeakName=ha+ling+peak>) (Accessed 31 July 2007).

¹⁹⁴ On Edge Productions, "Feng Shui Artists," On Edge Productions, http://www.onedge.tv/20th/93_fengshui01.html (Accessed 31 July 2007).

disagree with that, saying that those things should be private. But I believe that, in many cases, people want to retain things in private, also have other reasons why they are doing that...it's called power. And for me, power is not...retaining the knowledge that I have learned, but sharing that pain...¹⁹⁵

Wong's piece offers a visual representation of the hardships faced by Chinese migrant labour in Canada's western provinces, as well as making visible silenced cultural practices and histories. He stresses the importance of discarding the misrepresentations of Chinese identity constructed in opposition to Canada's self-defined 'core' culture, and sharing the pain caused by the systemic exclusions that worked to obstruct Chinese-Canadian belonging and livelihood.

According to Ien Ang, until the 1960s, Asia and Asians were characterized by so-called 'Third World backwardness' in the Western imagination.¹⁹⁶ Following 1962, country of origin was removed as a primary criterion for immigration into Canada, replaced instead by economic regulations.¹⁹⁷ According to Harry Con et al., "For the first time since 1884 Chinese migrants would enter Canada without the burden of an immigration system systematically weighed against them."¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Ang suggests that it was only with its rise to global economic power in the 1980s and 1990s, through the emergence of the Asian 'dragons' and 'tigers,' that Asia was able to step outside the bounds of the restrictive prescription of 'Asian backwardness.'¹⁹⁹ Kirsten Emiko McAllister goes so far as to argue that, even in the mid-1990s, Asians continued to be labelled threats to the West – either as "unemployed, illegally employed, part of the working hordes' or 'at worst, as powerful owners of capital."²⁰⁰ Occurring over the span of

¹⁹⁵ Paul Wong, "Chinaman's Peak," National Gallery of Canada, http://cybermuse.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuse/docs/wong_clip12_e.pdf (Accessed 31 July 2007).

¹⁹⁶ Ien Ang, "Introduction," in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 5.

¹⁹⁷ Con et al., 244.

¹⁹⁸ Con et al., 244.

¹⁹⁹ Ang, 5.

²⁰⁰ Kirsten Emiko McAllister, "Confronting Official History With Our Own Eyes: Video Documentary in the Japanese Canadian Community," in *West Coast Line: Colour. An Issue* vol.13, no.14 (Spring-Fall 1994), 69.

only two to three decades, these rapid and internally conflicted shifts in the construction of Asian identity led to new fears about the West being outperformed and dominated by the capital of the East; however, the underpinning construction of Asian identity as a generalized 'threat' to Western civilization remained intact.²⁰¹

British Columbia felt the significant effects of this economic shift, particularly as many affluent people from Hong Kong relocated to Vancouver in anticipation of the 1997 Hong Kong hand-over to China. Between 1986 and 2000, immigration from Hong Kong grew exponentially, constituting 20 percent of immigration into Vancouver alone.²⁰² As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, this heightened immigration led to drastic increases in real-estate values, particularly in much sought after neighbourhoods in West Vancouver. Renovations and additions made to homes newly purchased by recent immigrants from Hong Kong, which eventually came to be dubbed 'monster homes,' resulted in heated debates over threats to the 'traditional' character of established Vancouver neighbourhoods. The desire for neighbourhood preservation along the lines of long-established Vancouver residences and the fear that increased immigration would significantly alter the structure of supposedly time-honoured communities are reminiscent of the Yellow Peril mentality of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, the positing of a traditional community intruded upon by non-traditional outsiders echoes earlier constructions of 'core' and 'periphery' as outlined by Day. Thus, through this Vancouver case study it becomes evident that, despite shifts in policy and the changing international reputation of Asia, the racialization of Chinese identity remained centred on it being a threat to the integrity of so-called 'conventional' life in Canada.

²⁰¹ Ang, 5.

²⁰² Edgington, <http://www.riim.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/2003/wp03-12.pdf>.

It is within this framework of a long history of Chinese-Canadian disenfranchisement and systemic exclusions that Henry Tsang, Karin Lee and Lorraine Chan sought to interrogate the construction of identity, race and community in Canada. Considering the pervasiveness of debates circulating around 'monster homes' within the Vancouver media and the level of attention paid to Asian economic successes in the 1980s and 1990s, combined with the formation of the Chinese Canadian National Congress in 1984 and the success of the Japanese Redress movement in 1988,²⁰³ a firm platform began to materialize upon which a cultural race politic revolving around the construction of 'Asianness' could be explored.

Chinese/Chinese-Canadian/Canadian?

Self Not Whole emerged at a time in Vancouver when, despite the confluence of both recent immigrants from Hong Kong and fourth generation Canadians of Chinese descent living in the city, the label 'Chinese-Canadian' remained a homogenizing construct based on race that did not express the community's internal heterogeneity. Organized by artist-curators Henry Tsang and Lorraine Chan, *Self Not Whole* took place at the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver in 1991 (Fig. 7). Taking the city's Chinese-Canadian community as its point of departure, the exhibition sought to both analyze and critique the community from within, effectively *decentring* it from inside its Cultural Centre.

In the exhibition catalogue, Tsang contends that this cultural homogenization can be attributed in part to the systemic racism experienced by Chinese-Canadians in Vancouver, which resulted in "a self-censuring and regression to ideals of a traditional

²⁰³ It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the Japanese Redress movement in greater detail. However, its role in bringing to visibility the inequities experienced by Asian-Canadians was an important catalyst for cultural race politics. For further information on the Redress movement, please refer to: Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004).

culture” within the Chinese-Canadian community that did not reflect “experience within a North American context.”²⁰⁴ While this displays a form of internal calcification in Tsang’s view, he further argues that the Chinese-Canadian artistic community was subject to external pressures to produce works that reflected their so-called traditional culture. He states, “Eurocentric values have placed nonwhite work and subject matter into the category of ‘ethnic,’ a vague and over-determined marginal zone.”²⁰⁵ Therefore, *Self Not Whole* was working against the ethnic ghettoization arising out of the narrow community boundaries that were both internally and externally defined.

Ethnic ghettoization in the arts assumes a natural correlation between culturally diverse artists and the ‘traditional’ aesthetics and styles of their ‘other’ country of origin. It ignores the engagement of culturally diverse artists with the vocabulary of contemporary art practices and reduces their work instead to the level of ‘exotic,’ ‘traditional’ and ‘ethnic.’²⁰⁶ *Self Not Whole* recognized the essentializing propensity of ethnic ghettoization and sought to transgress these rigid definitions and expectations as they were constructed both internally and externally. Through the careful selection of artists, Tsang and Chan were able to demonstrate the heterogeneity of contemporary Chinese-Canadian artistic production as it drew on both Chinese and Canadian subject matter and employed a variety of new and innovative media. These artists included Ana Chang, Diana Li, Mary Wong, Paul Wong, Karin Lee, Kiki Yee, Sharyn Yuen, and the Pender Guy Radio Collective. Tsang believes that what united these artists was “the idea that this term *Chinese* is vague, floating and perhaps undefinable.”²⁰⁷ In this way, *Self Not*

²⁰⁴ Henry Tsang, “Self Not Whole: In Search of a Cultural Centre,” *Self Not Whole: Cultural Identity and Chinese-Canadian Artists in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 2-30 November 1991), 9.

²⁰⁵ Tsang, “Self Not Whole: In Search of a Cultural Centre,” 9.

²⁰⁶ For more on the topic of Ethnic Ghettoization, please refer to: 1) Olu Oguibe, “Art, Identity, Boundaries” in *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2004); 2) Rasheed Araeen, “From Primitivism to Ethnic Arts,” in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives in Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991).

²⁰⁷ Tsang, “Self Not Whole,” 8.

Whole posed a challenge to the previously unproblematized categories 'Chinese,' 'Canadian,' and 'Chinese-Canadian.'

Self Not Whole took place at the Chinese Cultural Centre under the supervision of head curator Saintfield Wong. In selecting this specific site, Tsang and Chan involuntarily entered in dialogue with earlier exhibitions curated by Wong – particularly, *Art Ensemble '86* and *In Transition* (1989).²⁰⁸ Providing a venue for Vancouver-based Chinese-Canadian artists working in Chinese calligraphy and watercolour, as well as photography and sculpture, Wong's exhibitions focused on creating a bridge between so-called 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' artworks within this specific community. However, by returning to an exploration of 'traditional' Chinese art forms, Wong assumed an essential cultural 'centre' influencing artists of Chinese descent. Challenging the limitations such categories as 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' imposed upon the Chinese-Canadian community in Vancouver, Tsang believes that *Self Not Whole* was very much in conversation with Wong's curatorial projects. He expresses this sentiment in the exhibition catalogue,

In a way, *Self Not Whole* continues this lineage, albeit with an altogether different set of agendas: one is that it concentrates solely on the 'contemporary' (=western?) form of art production... The other agenda... is its focus on issues of identity, heritage, and race. What better place to approach Chinese-Canadian audiences with works that question and provoke what it means to be chinese, than a place that calls itself the Chinese Cultural Centre?²⁰⁹

As Tsang suggests, the fractured sensibility evoked in the title 'Self Not Whole' ran in counter-current to the unifying character of the Chinese Culture *Centre*. The fundamental premise of *Self Not Whole* was to locate spaces within the 'centre' for articulating internal differences and thereby work against the reification of ethnic ghettoization and the community essentialism exhibited by Wong in 1986 and 1989.

²⁰⁸ Tsang, "Self Not Whole," 8.

²⁰⁹ Tsang, "Self Not Whole," 8.

Merging the centrality of site-specificity in the exhibition with an exploration of culturally-based marginalization, artist Ana Chang produced *Journey into the Centre (Beyond the Western World)* for *Self Not Whole* (Fig. 8). Consisting of an interventionist text applied to the street-level glass windows of the Chinese Cultural Centre, *Journey into the Centre* was a strategically site-specific and ephemeral work. Tsang describes the textual narrative as shifting “from public to private, formal to personal, Chinese then Canadian then elsewhere.”²¹⁰ A portion of it reads, “‘Where are you from?’ ‘Canada.’ ‘No. Where are you really from...’” Hoping to discover a ‘core’ Chinese culture, these interrogations presume that the subject is ‘other’ than a normalized white, British Canadian. Yet the subject’s response evades such easy classification and problematizes the various expectations revolving around both Chinese and Canadian identities. It denies easy assumptions linking identity and belonging to preconceived racial and cultural expectations. Structurally and metaphorically bound to the Chinese Cultural Centre edifice and adopting what may have been constructed as a contradictory Western visual language, Chang’s text-based work eluded the limiting stereotypes circulating around the seemingly fixed categories of Chinese, Chinese-Canadian and Canadian. As such, it challenged Chinese-Canadian audiences to accept new vocabularies of contemporary art, while concomitantly illustrating the breadth that art by a Chinese-Canadian artist could take.

Unlike Chang’s work, which was created specifically for *Self Not Whole*, Tsang and Chan also selected a 1988²¹¹ hi-8 video experimental documentary by Paul Wong for inclusion, entitled *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* (Fig. 9). However, like *Journey*

²¹⁰ Henry Tsang, “Inside, Outside Upside Down: In Search of Cultural Space with the Chinese Cultural Centre in Vancouver,” in *Questions of Community: Artists, Audiences, Coalitions*, ed. Daina Augaitis (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 1995), 225.

²¹¹ Sources provide various dates for this work. While the National Gallery of Canada, Vtape in Toronto and OnEdge Gallery date the work to 1988, Tsang has it listed at 1989 in the exhibition catalogue.

into the Centre, Wong's work blurs the lines between belonging and an assumed cultural heritage, while exploring the various possibilities contained with contemporary art forms and new media. The 89-minute video is based on forty hours of footage captured while traveling to south-western China with his mother for three months in 1986, in order to visit her village and reconnect with his family and Chinese heritage.²¹² Wong describes the video as a journey, because it takes the viewer from Vancouver to China and back to Vancouver again.²¹³ In interview with the National Gallery of Canada, he explains the rationale behind the title, "It's called *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade*, because it's about ordinary people, doing ordinary things..."²¹⁴ The video begins in Vancouver, with New Year's festivities and a farewell banquet for the artist. Although conversation fills the air, only select portions are translated. These texts reveal stories, insights and conversations that unravel throughout the documentary (Fig. 10). In Vancouver, viewers learn how some of Wong's relatives made their way to Canada: "Oh, all Orientals look the same. He came to Canada using false papers."²¹⁵ In China, a welcoming group of friends and family members show him the "old house," take him to the market and do him the honour of visiting their ancestors' graves with gifts and incense.²¹⁶ In the latter scene, personal family narratives are imparted, "They killed him in 1969 during the Cultural Revolution," and "My brother's grave was found only last year." Throughout the video, Wong is hidden by the camera, but his presence is made apparent as the people being filmed speak with him and look directly into the camera lens that mediates his vision. In this way, viewers are given the privilege of joining Wong during a personal

²¹² Paul Wong, "Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade," National Gallery of Canada, http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip9_e/pdf (Accessed 31 July 2007).

²¹³ Paul Wong, http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip9_e/pdf (Accessed 31 July 2007).

²¹⁴ Paul Wong, http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip9_e/pdf (Accessed 31 July 2007).

²¹⁵ Vtape, "Paul Wong," Vtape, <http://videoart.virtualmuseum.ca/artist.php?id=2§ion=clip>.

²¹⁶ Vtape, <http://videoart.virtualmuseum.ca/artist.php?id=2§ion=clip>.

journey to recuperate a family history that had only been available to him previously through stories.

Of the work's inclusion in *Self Not Whole*, Tsang writes in the exhibition catalogue,

We have included [Wong's] pivotal videotape *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade*, from 1989, in which he traces his relationship with China and a family network. It is more than a document of travels to his mother's village and southwestern China; it is an interrogation of the idea of homeland, heritage, and family. And in the process, he had come home – home to a land that would be otherwise foreign to any Chinese born outside of China.

Here, Tsang raises the interesting question of home and heritage, which are intimately tied with notions of belonging. Does the fact that Wong's journey begins and ends in Vancouver make him more Canadian than Chinese? Or, do his familial and cultural connections in China supersede his relationship with Canada? Ultimately, the personal nature of the video makes such questions irrelevant. Of this private experience, Wong states, "So it was... a return... in many ways, to myself. Working by myself, looking at myself, and looking at my culture, looking at my family."²¹⁷ According to Vtape, "Born of a desire for making real what had only been stories, family and friends known only by hearsay, *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* is a quest for identity, a document establishing history, a winding narrative of discovery and affirmation."²¹⁸ As posited in Chapter One, such a project of recuperating silenced and/or forgotten histories within the often narrow Canadian narrative, strongly associates Wong's 1988 documentary with the early stages of cultural race politics and its parallels with first-wave feminism. However, the work does not create a narrow vision of 'Chineseness,' but rather focuses on the experience of an individual, thereby reaffirming that the personal is political.

²¹⁷ Paul Wong, http://cybermuseum.beaux-arts.ca/cybermuseum/docs/wong_clip9_e/pdf (Accessed 31 July 2007).

²¹⁸ Vtape, <http://videoart.virtualmuseum.ca/artist.php?id=2§ion=clip> (21 July 2007).

As suggested in the curatorial selection of Wong's work, the purpose of *Self Not Whole* was not to celebrate the delineation of a 'common Chineseness.' According to Tsang, it represented "an attempt to position artists who are using the currency of the discourse surrounding race and identity to wedge open more space, to assert their subjectivity, and to remake 'community.'"²¹⁹ Ien Ang argues that such newly opened spaces articulate an innovative language of difference which serves to demonstrate "the multiple disjunctures and tensions between large-scale, publicly reproduced categorical identities – 'Chinese,' 'Asian' – and the concrete social subjectivities and experiences which are shaped and circumscribed by these identity categories but at the same time always exceed their reified boundaries."²²⁰ However, it is important to question the level of success *Self Not Whole* demonstrated in effectively using these interruptive spaces. Did it clearly illustrate the dissonances between broadly defined identity categories and the actual lived experiences of individuals, or did it function to recontain Chinese-Canadian identity? The exhibition title provides guidance here. Employing 'mi' (or 'search') as the exhibition's Cantonese title, according to Tsang, *Self Not Whole* alludes "to a journey or exploration for some thing or place that was perhaps not the self but a centre, be that existential or cultural."²²¹ This is evident in the inclusion of *Ordinary Shadows*, *Chinese Shade*, which interrogates the notion of 'home' as it relates to both cultural heritage and belonging in Canada. However, this dualistic representation of 'home' effectively posits one definition in opposition to other. Home is either 'here,' being Canada, or 'away,' being China. Thus, while presenting "concrete social subjectivities," Wong's work simultaneously ascribes to the very rhetoric of "large-scale, publicly reproduced categorical identities" he strives to dismantle. The tensions underlined in this work permeate throughout the exhibition as a whole. Despite its desire to posit a variety

²¹⁹ Tsang, "Self Not Whole," 10.

²²⁰ Ang, 11.

²²¹ Ang, 223.

of subjectivities within the Chinese cultural community itself, *Self Not Whole* inevitably recontains Chinese-Canadian identity by interrogating it in isolation and in searching for a single cultural centre apart from the white mainstream cultural core.²²²

Ang situates this search for a cultural 'centre' within what she considers a "flawed rhetoric of identity politics," one which she construes as relying on "the recognition and mobilization of difference once the ideal of sameness has proved unreachable."²²³ Here, Ang draws heavily on Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry, which contends that colonial power relationships reinforce ethnic ghettoization and marginalization through assumptions that culturally diverse individuals are "almost the same but not quite," because they "are not white."²²⁴ Thus, mimicry maintains unequal power relationships by continually reproducing slippages and difference within the colonial body. However, Ang argues that, in an effort to avoid colonial containment, identity politics mobilizes difference as a rallying point from which to challenge the self-ascribed authority of a 'core' culture. However, in doing so it can over-simplify difference and in fact reify the very binary relationships of 'core' and 'periphery' constructed to marginalize difference, rather than work to create new relational models. She contends, "while the rhetoric of identity politics generally emphasizes the liberating force of embracing a collective identity, especially if that identity was previously repressed or oppressed, that very identity is also the name of a potential prison-house."²²⁵ This liberating force is often discussed in terms of Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, which is situated in direct opposition to the essentialism circumscribed through ethnic ghettoization. As discussed in Chapter One, strategic essentialism implies a moment where groups posit an identity in a simplified manner, strategically deciding to momentarily set aside internal

²²² Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 228.

²²³ Ang, 11.

²²⁴ Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 127.

²²⁵ Ang, 11.

differences, in order to create a strong and enlarged platform for dissenting against the status quo and naturalized racisms.²²⁶ However, it is within this simplification that the prison-house emerges because, rather than destabilizing the normalization of 'centre' and 'periphery' relationships, strategic essentialism appropriates and strengthens the peripheral designation allotted it by the 'centre' and thereby reifies binary discourses.²²⁷ Thus, in searching for a cultural *centre*, *Self Not Whole* operates within the very discourses that seek to contain and marginalize Chinese-Canadian identity.

As outlined in Chapter One, the function of projects mounted in the first part of cultural race politics was to begin the process of challenging the status quo and creating a social visibility for questions of race. In this way, any strategic use of essentialism may alternatively be viewed as an early critical tool for opening up dialogue and ultimately pushing against the limits of homogenizing definitions of community. Heesok Chang recognizes the critical potential of strategic essentialism, but questions the definitions of community that lay at its foundation. He writes,

Must community remain rooted in the false promise of immanence or communion, memorialized and yearned for by a substantial being, be it a people, a race, or a human race? Can community be thought and practiced otherwise? Can it become deracinated and unnostalgic, evincing an indivisible commonality, but not an identity closed unto itself?²²⁸

Chang thereby questions understandings of community as a rigid category of belonging, instead seeking to imbue it with flexibility and ephemerality. While *Self Not Whole* took the Chinese Cultural Centre (CCC) as its point of departure, thus positing an inherent communal identity for the participating artists and drawing on the Centre's conventional audiences, Chang contends that the 'the spectacular affirmation of a common identity'

²²⁶ Gayatri Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, eds. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (London: Routledge, 1996), 214.

²²⁷ For further information on binary discourses, particularly of the universal and particular, please refer to: Naoki Sakai, "Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, eds. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

²²⁸ Chang, 225.

was not the exhibition's primary objective.²²⁹ In fact, he argues that what the great diversity of artworks included successfully demonstrates is the impossibility of any easy cultural commonality. He argues,

Strictly speaking, these artists do not invent (themselves) as Chinese-Canadians – this would presuppose such a self-identity is, or could be tomorrow or the next day, somehow secure and in (its) place. Rather, they invent themselves from the position – the double-edge – of the adjoining hyphen: neither Chinese nor Canadian, nor Chinese-Canadian, but “-”.²³⁰

Here, Chang suggests the existence of an activated liminal or border zone between identities fixed by their attendant specificities, one which communicates the ever-shifting identities of those living between preconceived poles and using this common experience of destabilization as the basic common denominator forming community.²³¹ However, the curatorial decision to ground the exhibition in the CCC remains a fundamental contradiction in its conception. *Self Not Whole* can be critiqued for its inability to effectively express a deracinated and rhizomatic community identity because it remained mired in the CCC as its primary point of departure, both conceptually and spatially.

This contradiction was made apparent to Tsang and Chan particularly when negotiating the curatorial process within the established protocol and community linked with the CCC. A tension emerged between the curators' desire to create a space for the articulation of an artistic community that problematized fixity and clear-cut definitions, and the CCC management's strong ties and responsibility to a long-standing, non-art Chinese-Canadian community. While several conflicts occurred on the level of organization – relating to artist fees, the curatorial process and exhibition standards –

²²⁹ Chang, 227.

²³⁰ Chang, 229.

²³¹ While Chang provides a useful critical tool for thinking through *Self Not Whole*, his conception of the hyphen closely parallels Bhabha's notion of hybridity. The latter has been critiqued at length for, in the process of creating a hybrid from or between two opposing poles, reaffirming binary systems rather than dismantling them. Nevertheless, Bhabha's hybridity has recently been disinterred by Ien Ang who believes that, if one is aware of its limitations, it can be a useful conceptual device for tracing the shifts that occur as different peoples and communities intersect, collide and intermingle.

the two main factors creating a rift between the curators and the CCC had to do with the marginal position of the curators within the Chinese-Canadian community itself.²³² Tsang describes the reasons for this relational discord,

One was that we were strangers; neither Lorraine Chan nor myself had much previous contact with the CCC... The other factor involved cultural difference. We were westernized, Canadianized, and just because we called ourselves Chinese did not mean we belonged to the Chinese community. Our values, our world views were not only different, they were sometimes perceived as alien. We were clearly outsiders, members of the even further marginalized non-traditional art community, no less.²³³

As expressed by Roy Miki, many artists attempting to redefine the terms and transgress the boundaries of circumscribed communities were not automatically supported by the communities they were working within. In interview, he stated,

Even at the best of time, it was only a handful of people, of artists, who were trying to construct these networks and responsibilities... Otherwise, within these ethnic communities, it was life as usual... Different communities are highly suspicious of radical attempts to cross these boundaries and establish these networks around racialization.²³⁴

Although *Self Not Whole* attracted a diverse audience – including the white mainstream arts community, regular users of the CCC, recent immigrants on their way to ESL classes and Boy Scouts visiting between meetings – it employed an aesthetic vocabulary foreign to the conventional CCC community, one which reinforced the curators' own marginal position within that community.²³⁵

Paul Wong's *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* raised such concerns among the management and board of the CCC. According to Tsang, Wong's installation "alluded to the idea of China as homeland, and exposes a sensitivity to specific local community politics, in particular, communism."²³⁶ The installation conveyed these

²³² Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 225.

²³³ Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 225.

²³⁴ Roy Miki, interview by author, 16 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

²³⁵ Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down" 224.

²³⁶ Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 226.

characteristics through the inclusion of red lanterns, four flags hanging side by side (those of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Canada), windows covered by curtains printed with repeating portraits of the former People's Republic of China leader Zhou En-Lai, and a large image of Mao Zedong overlooking the CCC central courtyard from the second floor windows of the Multipurpose Hall.²³⁷ Wong's installation thereby created a total environment that was visible from various vantage points. The "sensitivity to local community politics" expressed by these seemingly overt symbols stood in opposition to the CCC's self-declared apolitical mandate. This opposition created tensions between the CCC, Wong and the curators, which resulted in the room housing *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* being locked on the morning of the exhibition opening. Resolution came only after hours of negotiation and compromise among the three parties.²³⁸ Tsang posits that these negotiations reaffirmed the lack of homogeneity within the Chinese-Canadian community in general. He writes,

What this more accurately reflected was the marginalization of these artists from mainstream Chinese Canadian cultural values. The artists were confronting the idea of a monolithic Chinese tradition by speaking of contradictions within Chinese Canadian experience, that there was not and could not be a singular perspective of community, that if this was indeed a cultural space, difference within difference must be tolerated.²³⁹

Through its numerous contradictions and the negotiations it precipitated, *Self Not Whole* as a process reinforced understandings that a "monolithic Chinese tradition" in Canada could not encompass the experience of all Chinese-Canadians, and that a truly cultural space would recognize internal heterogeneity.

²³⁷ Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 227.

²³⁸ According to Tsang, the most contentious conflict arose in relation to "a flag of the People's Republic draped over a footstool in front of an ornate, kitschy dragon throne supporting the video monitor. The flag could be construed as lying on the floor, a sign of disrespect and, worse yet, could potentially be stepped on, an insult beyond repair." (Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 227) As a result of the various tensions mounting between the CCC and the artist and curators over *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade*, the room in which the work was located was locked on the morning of the exhibition opening. Resolution came only after hours of negotiation between the three parties, pending the replacement of the PRC flag with a red cloth to avoid its denigration.

²³⁹ Tsang, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down," 226.

Self Not Whole can be critiqued from numerous angles, particularly in terms of uncritically employing the often restrictive language of strategic essentialism. Nevertheless, situated historically within the early development of cultural race politics, the exhibition serves as an imperative first step in examining the social construction of impermeable categories of identity and belonging based on racial difference. It worked to reveal the category of 'Chinese-Canadian' as one which was variously constructed and contained from within the community itself and from without. Ultimately recognizing that to interrogate the experiences of single race-based community was paramount to reifying ethnic ghettoization from within, curator Henry Tsang used *Self Not Whole* as a model for developing increasingly dynamic strategies for probing the construction of community in the 1993 exhibition *Racy Sexy*.

Inside/Outside/Upside Down

Unlike *Self Not Whole*, which was tasked with problematizing fixed notions of community, *Racy Sexy* was a project that explored "community building," "embarking on a journey to find a safe space where cultural difference would be both celebrated and critiqued."²⁴⁰ Conceived of by Henry Tsang and community activist and film maker Karin Lee in 1993, *Racy Sexy* achieved this through a collaborative approach that brought together a culturally diverse committee of over a dozen curators and organizers, numerous community venues throughout Vancouver, and audiences from many communities unaccustomed to intermingling, overlapping and colliding. As the title reveals, race and desire were selected as the underlying themes. Desire and sexuality were of particular interest due to their universality in human experience and their capacity to build bridges between communities rather than focus entirely on a specific

²⁴⁰ Karin Lee and Henry Tsang, "Racy Sexy – An Utopian Collaboration," in *Racy Sexy: Race, Culture, Sexuality*, ed. Scott McFarlane (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 1995), 4.

'cultural community.' In the forward to the program of *Racy Sexy*, Tsang and Lee write, "Who do we desire and why (or why not)? What factors influence our choice(s) in partners? Who do we see as sexy or asexual, sexualized or de-sexualized? What about ourselves or our own self-image? In which situations am I more or less desirable, to whom and why?...Issues of race, culture and sexuality all become implicated, entangled..."²⁴¹ The complicated entanglements described here evince a plethora of criss-crossing experiences and subjectivities. In keeping with this complex and unfixed line of questioning, *Racy Sexy* adopted a decentred approach, taking place over two weeks with more than thirty artists at nine locations throughout Vancouver. This allowed the exhibition to move beyond the confines of a single cultural community to address the intersecting concerns, experiences and needs of numerous contiguous communities throughout Vancouver – bound together by the common framework of race and desire. Building on the questions posed and the problems that arose around *Self Not Whole*, *Racy Sexy* represents a conscious development in the critical curatorial practices associated with cultural race politics, exemplifying the ever-evolving process-oriented strategies tied to the movement.

While *Racy Sexy* was in close conversation with the successes and drawbacks of *Self Not Whole*, the exhibition was also in dialogue with a series of concurrent exhibitions that explored the intersection of sexuality and race. Larissa Lai's *Telling Relations: Sexuality and the Family* at Grunt Gallery focused on women artists of colour working with questions of sexuality and family, *The Two Spirit Performance Series* by Archer Pechawis at Pitt Gallery brought together gay artists of First Nations ancestry, and *Making Out* at Pitt Gallery featured lesbian and bisexual women of colour discussing

²⁴¹ Karin Lee and Henry Tsang in Peter Wilson, "Racy Sexy," in *The Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver) 27 November 1993.

sexuality.²⁴² These exhibitions provided innovative ways of revealing the internal heterogeneity contained within often essentialized racial difference. However, according to Glenn Alteen, the fact that these exhibitions and events employed the artist-run network system and adopted community-specific approaches effectively reduced the breadth of audiences targeted and limited their theoretical scope.²⁴³ In an experiment in community building, Tsang and Lee formulated a broader and more transgressive approach that subverted expectations and blurred boundaries. They asked of the show, “Was *Racy Sexy* a sex show, a showcase for artists of colour and the sexually marginalized, or an act of resistance against mainstream arts organizations?”²⁴⁴ Unwilling to draw rigid conclusions, the answer they provide speaks volumes of the curatorial strategy and outlook, “Perhaps it was all of the above, perhaps not.”²⁴⁵

If viewed as closely-knit acts of resistance, it is possible to track the shifts in critical strategies employed by Tsang in *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy*. Conscious of the dialogue between the two exhibitions, in the catalogue to the 1993 show Tsang reflects on the role played by *Self Not Whole* in catalyzing this conversation,

Self Not Whole swam against the tide of Chinese-Canadian uniformity by highlighting the differences from within, breaking the rank and file, and complicating the notion of a homogeneous ‘Chinese’ culture and identity. This approach was hardly surprising, since the curators... and participants of *Self Not Whole* viewed themselves as working from the margins of such a community.²⁴⁶

As mentioned earlier, while *Self Not Whole* aimed to “complicate the notion of a homogenous Chinese culture,” it simultaneously perpetuated discourses of ethnic ghettoization by adopting an inward focus. Responding to the critiques levied against this

²⁴² Glenn Alteen, “Curating Difference: *Racy Sexy* Within Vancouver Identity Exhibitions,” in *Racy Sexy: Race, Culture, Sexuality*, ed. Scott McFarlane (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 1995), 18.

²⁴³ Alteen, 18.

²⁴⁴ Lee and Tsang, “*Racy Sexy* – An Utopian Collaboration,” in *Racy Sexy*, 4.

²⁴⁵ Lee and Tsang, “*Racy Sexy* – An Utopian Collaboration,” in *Racy Sexy*, 4.

²⁴⁶ Lee and Tsang, “*Racy Sexy* – An Utopian Collaboration,” in *Racy Sexy*, 4-5.

strategy, *Racy Sexy* adopted an outward orientation. This repositioned the artists, curators and venues involved as members of a “community of communities,” rather than as discreet communities operating in isolation.²⁴⁷ This shift would ultimately provide the context for communities to build strategic coalitions around the term colour.

In order to achieve this new direction, Tsang and Lee developed an innovative collaborative structure for the project. Forming both a steering and curatorial committee, Tsang and Lee ensured that the project was driven by a collective decision-making process that would investigate the “intersection of race, culture and sexuality” while ensuring that all communities were accurately represented.²⁴⁸ The adoption of this collaborative approach is demonstrative of an informed self-criticality on the part of organizers and curators, to the extent that process and participation were privileged over a fixed curatorial framework. Such a critical curatorial strategy recognizes the importance of establishing an ongoing dialogue among curator, artist and audience, and extends the role of curator beyond organizing the display of objects to the presentation of ideas, values and politics.²⁴⁹ This new strategy allowed curators and artists to engage in what Gagnon terms a politics of representation that is not simply “communicative” or “expressive” but is also “constitutive,” “in the sense that they contribute to the formation of subjectivities.”²⁵⁰ This transgressive approach functioned to expose the lack of representation of artists of colour and First Nations in mainstream institutions and galleries, and to restrict the authorial role of the curator in favour of an increasingly discursive relationship among curator, artist, audience and site.

²⁴⁷ Lee and Tsang, “Racy Sexy – An Utopian Collaboration,” in *Racy Sexy*, 6.

²⁴⁸ The Steering Committee Consisted of Amir Ali Alibhai, Karin Lee, Cynthia Low, Zara Suleman, Viola Thomas and Henry Tsang. Of the Curatorial Committees, Performance was organized by Celeste Insell, Cynthia Low and Zara Suleman; Visual Arts by Persimmon Blackbridge and Henry Tsang; Film and Video by Andrea Fatona, Karin Lee and Paul Lee, and; Writing by Nick Boston.

²⁴⁹ Joan Borsa, “Post-Institutional Curating: Negotiating Independent Curatorial Practice in Canada,” in *Creative Con/Fusions: Interdisciplinary Practices in Contemporary Art*, eds. Lynn Hughes and Marie-Josée LaFortune (Montreal: Optica, 2001), 153.

²⁵⁰ Monika Kin Gagnon, “Introduction,” in *Other Conundrums* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 23.

The critical curatorial strategy employed by *Racy Sexy* reflected the political motivations of cultural race politics, activating a politicized foundation for the presentation of works that challenged the depoliticizing and ghettoizing tendencies of discourses of 'multiculturalism' and 'ethnicity.' Glenn Alteen argues that this was achieved in the process of establishing community "on the basis of a perplexing foreignness," wherein "the mix of artists of colour, white artists and artists with homosexual and heterosexual identities brought everyone outside their own community."²⁵¹ Such processes established, according to Gagnon, "a space of overlapping cultures" that challenged the ghettoizing propensity of multiculturalisms predicated on "a mosaic of unbalanced parts."²⁵² Performance artist Archer Pechawis is a proponent of this decentred, grassroots approach that expounds cultural overlapping rather than isolation. Pechawis' contribution to *Racy Sexy* included the reading of three works at venues throughout Vancouver – ones that he considers "highly accessible" like the Vancouver Indian Centre, the Trout Lake Community Centre, and Carnegie Centre – and writing an essay for the exhibition catalogue. On 1 December 1993, Pechawis presented a reading of *Blanket Conspiracy Theory* to diverse audiences at the Carnegie Centre. Located at the corner of Main and Hastings, "ground zero in terms of prostitution and intravenous drug use in Vancouver," Pechawis describes this venue in the following terms,

The Carnegie Centre is a City of Vancouver Community Centre... serving the poorest neighbourhood in Vancouver. Unlike most urban 'community centres,' people don't go to Carnegie because it says 'community centre' on the door; it doesn't. People go to Carnegie *because it is where their community is*. Sounds radical and it is. Carnegie Centre is one of the few safe places on Skid Row... When I was on the streets of Vancouver in my teens, Carnegie was a real haven for me, and it is still a place where I feel safe and connected.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Glenn Alteen, 20-1.

²⁵² Gagnon, "Can-Asian, eh?" 129.

²⁵³ Archer Pechawis, "If all the Trees in the Artist-Run Forest Were Clear-Cut, Would Anyone Give a Shit?" in *Racy Sexy: Race, Culture, Sexuality*, ed. Scott McFarlane (Vancouver: Chinese Cultural Centre, 1993), 24.

“Embodying everything that succeeded in *Racy Sexy*,” Pechawis contends that taking art to the audiences, rather than vice versa, in an effort to increase accessibility to the arts, was a powerful aspect of the event’s organization.

Pechawis’ reading fell on the same day as the Day Without Art, commemorating World AIDS Day. Merging race and sexuality within the context of awareness-raising, he tried to conceive of a work that would acknowledge the experience of inner-city First Nations youths who, he states, “through inadequate AIDS education, media focus on AIDS as a ‘gay disease’ and homophobia in our communities, comprise one of the highest risk groups for HIV infection.”²⁵⁴ The power of these thematic intersections was that they were able to address an audience that “just walked in off the street” because the ‘event was happening *in their space*.’²⁵⁵ Jeani Read of *The Province* newspaper in Vancouver, wrote of the provocative cultural dialogues that such intersections could create, “if people at one community centre hear there is something going on somewhere else and decide to take a cultural risk and explore, communication may start the best way: Out of a sense of curiosity and connectedness.”²⁵⁶ Pechawis took advantage of this ability to address new and curious audiences afforded by *Racy Sexy*. A portion of his reading is a satirical exposition on the various power relations that have and continue to place First Nations youth at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS,

Today I heard a man on a CBC radio call show claim that the World Health Organization under the direction of the CIA infected Africans with the AIDS virus... No, that AIDS conspiracy shit is wack. It’s like saying the U.S. government deliberately gave hostile Indians smallpox-infected blankets because it was easier than defeating them militarily. That would be genocide.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Pechawis, 25.

²⁵⁵ Pechawis, 25.

²⁵⁶ Jeani Read, “Targeting Everyone: *Racy Sexy*, an Intercultural Event” in *The Province* (Vancouver) 26 November 1993.

²⁵⁷ Pechawis, 25.

Drawing on traditionally non-art audiences at the Carnegie Centre, a venue intimately connected to his own personal history, Pechawis provides an oppositional and satirical approach to raise consciousness. In his catalogue essay, he contends that his performance “wasn’t just screeching to the converted,” and that everyday people “need art now more than ever,” especially “art that is accessible in terms of content and location.”²⁵⁸ The decentred siting and open-ended nature of the interrogations posed by *Racy Sexy* created the context for moving beyond the invisible boundaries constructed between communities, both social and geographic, and for creating a coalition of individuals committed to enacting social change.

Joan Borsa, in her study of independent curatorial practice in Canada, locates the transgressive strategy employed by the curatorial and steering committees within the category of post-institutional curating.²⁵⁹ With the advent of post-institutional curating, museums of modern and contemporary art moved away from a focus on the acquisition, care and display of permanent collections, towards an emphasis on the production, theoretical development and presentation of temporary and independent thematic exhibitions.²⁶⁰ Within this purview, critical curatorial strategies released art producers and organizers from the bureaucratic strictures embedded in major cultural institutions. This fostered the development of what Borsa has termed “dissenting postures,” whereby communication with audiences “is no longer a logical outcome of one’s most recent offering at the usual ‘institutional’ venue, but a more considered and deliberate exchange which incorporates public and public space as ‘active elements’ of curatorial production.”²⁶¹ Such an approach does not allow itself to be bracketed by the limits of a fixed collection, nor does it carry the baggage of institutionalized discourses and

²⁵⁸ Pechawis, 25-6.

²⁵⁹ Borsa, 153.

²⁶⁰ Borsa, 153.

²⁶¹ Borsa, 154.

bureaucracies. In fact, as Borsa has argued, as curators shift away from working within collections towards temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, they achieve an increasingly direct engagement with the “ongoing life of their communities.”²⁶² In relation to *Racy Sexy*, and particularly the performances by Pechawis, such curatorial strategies can be seen to extend a meaningful degree of ownership over the project and its related events to the audiences invested in the various participating venues.

Tsang and Lee’s decision to independently curate a temporary exhibition comprised of contemporary works of art by established and emerging culturally diverse artists was consciously taken as a means of recontextualizing curatorial practice in a way that decentres the authorial voice of the curator. Arguing that such a curatorial strategy requires a high degree of self-reflexivity by the curator, Tsang explained in interview,

The word outreach has been used a lot around funding and [curatorial] strategies. It’s not a term I like to use, because it always centres the self in a very complacent position. [It implies] that we want to get people out to appreciate what we do, as opposed to reevaluating our practice in a completely different way and recontextualizing it. When you recontextualize it, you can presume that the meaning isn’t the same anymore... But, if you want to maintain your position of influence or power or knowledge, if you want to control the meaning... you haven’t moved at all. And that’s how I see most outreach operating. There is no systemic shift, no institutional critique that comes along with the reconceptualization that is trying to expand the audience.²⁶³

In order to foster such reconceptualizations and expansions, the curators posed numerous questions to themselves during the curatorial process. Tsang points to this process in the following statement made in interview with the author,

There’s a presumption that if you’re going to work within a certain kind of context, medium, genre or with certain kinds of artists, there’s going to be an audience that follows that work. So, if you’re going to tailor to the audience, you’re not doing anything. If you work outside of that, you’re taking risks. You have to figure out what strategies to use. Who do you partner up with? In what kind of spaces are you going to show it? How do

²⁶² Borsa, 154.

²⁶³ Henry Tsang, interview by author, 14 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

you show it? How do you contextualize it? How do you promote it? How do you get people in?²⁶⁴

This line of questioning locates Tsang within the terms of post-institutional cultural production described by Borsa. In this way, “the curator’s role is not that of an expert or cultural authority who produces exhibitions for others to consume, but is more akin to a facilitator engaged in the dynamics of agency, dialogue and exchange.”²⁶⁵ As a process, *Racy Sexy* exemplified the growing interest among curators engaged with the cultural race politics of the late 1980s and early 1990s to offer critiques of normalized notions of race and community. Viewed in relation to *Self Not Whole*, it is possible to trace Tsang’s increasingly nuanced role as a cultural facilitator with progressively more complex notions of community and audience engagement.

In a November 1993 article introducing the opening of *Racy Sexy* in the *Vancouver Sun*, Tsang expressed the concern that art events often only appealed to a “usual arts in-crowd,” saying, “Oh, God, I hope we get non-artists. It’s so, so hard to get anyone else out.”²⁶⁶ Exiting the safe confines of specific community boundaries into the foreignness of working across these limits, Lee is quoted in the same article as saying, “We’re not interested in converting people... It’s not kind of a crusade on our part to say that you should be racy and sexy.”²⁶⁷ Rather, *Racy Sexy* was an effort to traverse the complex terrain of inter-racial desire to offset race-based stereotypes and ethnic homogenization. She continues to dissect the various intersections between race and desire, “Desire was an interesting topic... In North America, where it’s not a mono-racial setting, we experience so many different kinds of perceptions of what our sexuality is, what our desire is, why we choose particular partners, what makes you desired by others

²⁶⁴ Tsang, Interview, December 2006.

²⁶⁵ Borsa, 157.

²⁶⁶ Tsang, “Racy Sexy,” 27 November 1993.

²⁶⁷ Lee, “Racy Sexy,” 27 November 1993.

and so on..."²⁶⁸ While the statements made by Tsang in interview benefit from the critical distance afforded by hindsight, these comments published in the *Vancouver Sun* alongside the exhibition opening in 1993 express the uncertainty and nervousness experienced by the curators as they struggled to open up innovative grounds for cultural interrogation. This uncertainty demonstrates their commitment to taking risks and experiments with new and critical curatorial strategies, a commitment that is also made evident as one examines the strategic shifts between *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy*.

It is important, however, not to paint too easy a picture around critical curatorial strategies, particularly for the exhibitions emerging with cultural race politics in the early 1990s. Reflecting on the difficulties of constructing feasible power-sharing structures for a collaborative project, Tsang and Lee write, "This was perhaps the most difficult and painful lesson to learn as there was no handbook to reference, only abstract ideals on which we based this loose structure we named 'collaboration.'"²⁶⁹ While the exhibition sought to bring diverse communities together as a network of individuals committed to disrupting the status quo of race-based systemic exclusions, the collaborative organization assembled by Tsang and Lee functioned as a microcosm of this network. Together, the curatorial and steering committees had to develop both the tools and the vocabulary necessary to make a larger-scale coalition function effectively. However, this was a slow process. Due to extensive, unremunerated negotiation wherein decisions were often deferred to make space for broader group consensus, the project proceeded

²⁶⁸ Lee, "Racy Sexy," 27 November 1993.

²⁶⁹ Lee and Tsang, "Racy Sexy – An Utopian Collaboration," 7; For further information on the role of community collaboration in exhibition development, particularly relating to the creation of new forms of knowledge and an ethics of collaboration within First Nations communities, refer to: Ruth Phillips, "Community collaboration in exhibitions: toward a dialogic paradigm: Introduction," in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison Brown (New York: Routledge, 2003). For further information on new museology and institutional critique, please refer to: Andrea Fraser, "From Institutional Critique to the Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44/1 (September 2005); Elizabeth Mansfield, *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and; Peter Vergo et al, *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

very slowly in its first year. As a democratic process, collaboration required the development of trust among members on the committee, which also took time. In fact, after the exhibition organizers missed several deadlines, the CCC intervened, warning the committee to make progress or cancel the project. Tsang and Lee remarked on the need to let go of some of the ideals held firmly by the committee in order to move ahead, “Even though there was much discord on the committee level, and we stumbled through the process of collective decision-making, there was still a strong sense of commitment and purpose to the project... We needed to and attempted to shed our egos, to run with the wind, to feel free and be swept up in the events and the works of the artists in *Racy Sexy*.”²⁷⁰ Further difficulties arose around questions of equitable hiring practices and in achieving equal representation of culturally diverse artists from across Canada.²⁷¹ The drive to work through the challenges of the collaborative process arose from a common understanding that sharing power was an important objective, as the curatorial committee did not want to replicate ‘traditional hierarchical structures.’²⁷² In this way, Tsang and Lee made a decisive shift away from authorial modes of curating towards functional collaborative structures. This not only built upon the foundation established by *Self Not Whole*, responding to the criticisms raised against it, but also posited a practical

²⁷⁰ Lee and Tsang, “Racy Sexy – An Utopian Collaboration,” 8.

²⁷¹ Although staff for the project were hired based on equitable hiring practices and required skills, staff turn-over during the lengthy organization of *Racy Sexy* quickly demonstrated that the diversity hiring was not so equitable. Tsang writes, “Our difficulties in finding personnel suggested that few people of colour and First Nations, especially in the gay and lesbian communities, have had adequate access to experience and training in the arts, pointing to a strong need for the development of these skills.” Furthermore, while equitable hiring practices were under strain, so was the aim to provide fair representation of Canada’s diverse regions. Tsang writes, “We learned that... representations cannot be forced. For example, the artists we chose came from only three cities: Vancouver, Toronto and Edmonton. At first we were alarmed by this limited cross-section of cultural production in Canada, but eventually realized that perhaps this reflected the loci of artists engaged in these issues.” Thus, in confronting discrimination and the inequitable access faced by culturally diverse artists to education and the means of production and exhibition, Tsang, Lee and the curatorial and steering committees faced numerous obstacles born out of these very inequities. (Tsang, “Inside, Outside, Upside Down,” 232).

²⁷² Tsang, “Inside, Outside, Upside Down,” 232.

way to think beyond the binary relationships entrenched by strategic essentialism, offering instead an increasingly relational model.

Conclusion

Through this collaborative approach, artists, curators and cultural organizers affiliated with cultural race politics were provided with multiple venues to address questions of access and to gain the experience, exposure and critical response necessary to continue producing works of art. However, displaying the works of only culturally diverse artists engaging with issues of home and heritage, discrimination and inequity, *Racy Sexy* can be critiqued as in fact reifying ethnic ghettoization. This is because it re-affirms the expectation that culturally diverse artists only produce works that contend with identity formation. The sedimentation of these expectations, on top of earlier ones stereotyping the cultural origins of artists and the 'authenticity' of their artistic production, has the potential to recontain the creative potential of these artists. Nevertheless, *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy* represent an important and concerted effort to work against the ethnic ghettoization that served to contain Canadian artists of Chinese descent from both within and across community boundaries. Viewed in conversation with one another, as well as with the other projects and exhibitions associated with cultural race politics, it becomes evident that *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy* were part of the process-oriented curatorial strategy of cultural race politics. Exhibitions did not develop in isolation from one another, but rather engaged with each others' hypotheses, solutions and unanswered provocations.

Tsang's engagement with such strategies continued into his later curatorial practice, as is evident in the exhibition *City at the End of Time: Hong Kong 1997*, which he co-curated with Scott Toguri-McFarlane in Vancouver in 1997. Produced by the Pomelo Project, a Vancouver-based production house for the arts, theory and culture,

City at the End of Time brought together the work of artists, poets and academics in order to explore the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China from a plurality of perspectives.²⁷³ Contending that the concentrated media coverage leading up to the handover focused almost exclusively on Britain and China, Tsang and Toguri-McFarlane worked to give form to the various perspectives of those living in Hong Kong, as well as those making up its diasporic community. Taking place in Vancouver, the exhibition paid tribute to the extensive reach of people and capital from Hong Kong across the globe. Exploring the influence of diaspora across and between various sites, *City at the End of Time* posited a de-territorialized sense of community. This differs greatly from the types of community represented in *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy*, which were regional articulations. Such a shift in focus can be, in part, attributed to the ever-expanding reach of discourses of globalization in the mid to late-1990s, where imagined communities evolved into imagined worlds. The following chapter will explore the shift from cultural race politics, and its attendant interest in examining discourses of the nation and multiculturalism, towards the ever-pressing influence of globalization and transnational cultural flows. This will be achieved through an examination of two works of art by Henry Tsang, *Vancouver (West) – Detached* of 1993 and *Orange County* of 2003.

²⁷³ Henry Tsang and Scott Toguri-McFarlane, *City at the End of Time, Hong Kong 1997* (Vancouver: Pomelo Project, 1998), 7.

CHAPTER 3: COMPLICATED ENTANGLEMENTS

Driven by the passion, frustration and desire of the arts and literary communities to expose systemic inequalities in Canada, cultural race politics gained momentum between 1988 and 1995. This period presented challenges to dominant socio-political discourses which naturalized not only ethnic ghettoization, but also social constructions of race as 'other' to mainstream notions of what it meant to be a 'Canadian-Canadian' as opposed to, for example, 'Chinese-Canadian.' However, cultural race politics appears to have entered into a decline in the mid-1990s, for reasons that are still unclear. This chapter will briefly explore the possible basis for this decline, as well as discuss whether or not it was in fact a *decline* and not the beginning of an evolution within the politics of difference to accommodate and reflect broader socio-economic shifts from the nation to the global sphere. Whereas the nation once stood as the locus of interrogation for individual and community identity, the mid-1990s, with the ever intensifying speed of cross-border transportation and information technologies, marked a decisive shift towards the international sphere as the primary point of departure for questioning the new relationships arising out of what Arjun Appadurai calls 'global cultural flows.'²⁷⁴

Analyzing two works of art by Henry Tsang, this chapter will explore how visual articulations of the politics of difference altered to reflect this global paradigm shift. It will also examine to what extent questions of racialization continued to influence creative production within this changing context. Likening his artistic production to portraits, snapshots of the "here and now" in terms of time, space and place, Tsang creates works that function at both the local and the global level.²⁷⁵ *Vancouver (West) – Detached* was

²⁷⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

²⁷⁵ Tsang, Henry, interview by author, 4 July 2007, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

made in 1994, during the height of cultural race politics, and exhibits an initial engagement with the impact of globalization on race relations in Canada. *Orange County* of 2003 reflects the increasing rate and pace of transnational cultural, technological and media flows, and their effect on expressions of community and belonging within and across national borders. Both engage in Tsang's long-standing interest in the changing role of desire in directing the politics of difference on the local and global level. In Tsang's artistic practice, as with his curatorial work, what remains constant before and after this shift is an unwavering commitment to the destabilization of fixed notions of identity and community. Much of his creative production establishes a fine balance between exploring the local implications contained within site and time-specific contexts, and tracing its wider resonance as the product of new global cultural flows. Although Roy Miki believes that increased consumerism and global marketing in recent years has "muted critical relationships to dominant discourses," both *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* maintain a critical engagement with the dominant discourses that support systemic racisms and normalize ethnic ghettoization.²⁷⁶

As will be discussed further later, both artworks are thematically grounded in an investigation of real estate and architecture and the manner in which the body and the individual, whether physically absent or present, interacts with it. In order to unravel the many layers of signification within these works, I will employ an approach which Erin Manning calls an "excess of seeing." According to her, this is "an exploration of that which exceeds the visible. To exceed vision is to displace the disciplinary contours of thought to engage with the ephemeral... By exploring the limits of vision, what is not represented becomes as important as what is perceived."²⁷⁷ Thus, while it is important to

²⁷⁶ Roy Miki, interview by author, 16 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

²⁷⁷ Erin Manning, *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home and Identity in Canada* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 11.

contextualize the site-specific impetus behind these works, they will also be used as metaphors for articulating the ephemeral, ambiguous and unfixed construction of community and belonging as articulated by Tsang in both the mid-1990s and the early twenty-first century. The theoretical works of Ien Ang, Arjun Appadurai and Erin Manning will be used to this end. *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* will also explore the so-called decline of cultural race politics and the evolved form in which questions of racialization, identity and community persist within the current century's reality of a complicated entanglement of global flows of people, culture, and information.²⁷⁸

Imagined Communities: *Vancouver (West)* – *Detached*

Vancouver (West) – *Detached* is a text and image-based work that appeared in a 1994 special publication of *West Coast Line* entitled *Colour. An Issue*, edited by Roy Miki and Fred Wah (Fig. 11).²⁷⁹ On a 4"x8" black and white page, tucked between poems written by Raj Pannu and Mercedes Baines, *Vancouver (West)* – *Detached* was Tsang's creative contribution to this special issue of *West Coast Line. Colour. An Issue* was part of an interdisciplinary project borne out of the *Appropriate Voice* conference that took place in Orillia, Ontario, in 1992. Organized by the Racial Minorities Writers' Committee in the Writer's Union, *Appropriate Voice* was a retreat for culturally diverse and First Nations writers to gather, debate issues surrounding race and colour, and develop a network of individuals committed to challenging systemic racisms within Canadian cultural institutions. According to Roy Miki, the conference took place over three or four days,

There were about sixty to seventy writers and we just met in a big room in a circle and started talking (about everything) and there were readings in

²⁷⁸ Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001); Appadurai.

²⁷⁹ Henry Tsang, "Vancouver (West) – Detached," *West Coast Line: Colour. An Issue*, eds. Roy Miki and Fred Wah, 13/14 (1994), 193.

the evening... This was [an event] where colour was the determinative thing. There were a lot of Aboriginal, black and Asian writers coming together under this term of colour... Because we were using this term 'colour,' as artists and writers of colour... it was a way of temporarily transcending ethnicity, and foregrounding race.²⁸⁰

As a way of undoing the ethnic ghettoization constructed by the rhetoric of multiculturalism, *Appropriate Voice* "transcended ethnicity" to bring culturally diverse writers together to think about the social construction of race and to bridge the artificial barriers constructed between ethnic communities.

The conference was attended by such culturally diverse authors as Hiromi Goto, Rita Wong, Aruna Srivasta and Larissa Lai. Each participant was asked to produce something as a reflection of their discussions at the conference. In order to create a record of the event and to constitute a community of writers, Miki and Wah committed to compiling a collection of essays, short stories and poems by writers in attendance in Orillia. Including the works of numerous visual artists of colour, such as Tsang, Jin-me Yoon and Shani Mootoo, *Colour. An Issue* aimed to cross disciplinary lines in order to subvert the possibility of anthologizing a discreet, and therefore ghettoized, collective of 'minority writers.'²⁸¹ Miki and Wah state, "*Colour. An Issue* is not an anthology, a collection of texts that have been selected, arranged, and edited into a 'whole' that advances the coherence of collectivity. The methodology adopted proposes an open-ended process that could yield much more than provisional patterns of interconnections for the diverse materials included."²⁸² In this way, *Colour. An Issue* presents a multitude of voices organized in neither a linear nor thematic manner so as to work against entrenched ways of reading and narrating race. Wah and Miki continue,

²⁸⁰ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

²⁸¹ Lien Chao, "Anthologizing the Collective: The Epic Struggles to Establish Chinese Canadian Literature in English" *Essays on Canadian Writing* 57 (1995).

²⁸² Roy Miki and Fred Wah, "Preface," *West Coast Line: Colour. An Issue*, eds. Roy Miki and Fred Wah, 13/14 (1994), 5.

In the actualities of language, contemporary writers have located a medium to make visible the subjectivities, histories, narratives, and theoretical issues that surround [the] four letter word ['race.']. Or 'Colour,' with a 'you.' How 'we' has to figure it out. How some of us can't make a move without thinking it. How some of you never think it, don't have to, don't even bother because it is no bother to you. How some have to double-think it, hyphenate it, dilute it, disappear into it.²⁸³

Although Tsang not in attendance at *Appropriate Voice*, his contribution to *Colour. An Issue* not only situates him in the company of a then-developing network of artists and writers of colour, but also reconfirms his commitment to supporting work that denies homogenizing discourses of race, identity and community in favour of processes that are more fluid and unfixed. His contribution also places him in firm company with those members of the literary community deeply attached to cultural race politics, demonstrating the dedication to interdisciplinarity and border-crossing by both writers and artists.

Vancouver (West) - Detached, at first glance, appears to be an innocuous series of twelve text- and photo-based real-estate advertisements, replete with room-size specifications, parking information and data on hydro and sewage (Fig. 12). However, a closer reading reveals numerous occasions where the objective description of space transforms into personal reminiscences of a specific place. In the sections marked "Water:/Garbg:/Sewer:/Dyking:/Other:" descriptions of the property that appear to be written from the perspective of the owner are inserted, deviating from the technical and abbreviated language that pervades the initial descriptors (Fig. 13). Some of these accounts remain relatively formal third-person depictions of house and architecture, maintaining a sense of distance between the site and the personal histories tied to it. For example, one of the listings reads,

²⁸³ Miki and Wah, 5.

3 bedroom family home. X hall living & dining room with H/W floors, bevelled French doors and windows. Updated kitchen with E/A. Master bdrm has 3 piece en-suite with marble floor. Set back circular driveway.²⁸⁴

Others, on the other hand, adopt the first person to informally convey a personal history tied to the real estate being placed on the market. For example,

I was nine, in a new school in a new neighbourhood. We had made it, we have moved to the *West Side*. Here, we were poised on the edge of the university lands, destined to study in higher places.²⁸⁵

It is unclear how one is meant to read these narrative components of the advertisements.

Are the advertisements to be approached as one would read a letter or continuous narrative, from top left to bottom right? Or, should one set about scanning them randomly, as one might advertisements in the local home buyers' guide? Depending on the direction a reader takes, these discursive interjections can be interpreted as either a single author providing a continuous and linear narrative or as a range of unconnected voices speaking with, against and over one another. This ambiguity allows the individual approach of each reader to guide his or her experience with *Vancouver (West)*.

"Brown child, mixed child, mulatto child/your bloodlines push against each other/the world will demand you identify with only parts of yourself."²⁸⁶ So reads the poem "Brown Child" by Mercedes Baines which follows *Vancouver (West)* in *Colour. An Issue*. Although not obvious initially, these words complement one's understanding of *Vancouver (West)*. As with Baines' poem, the voice(s) that emerge from *Vancouver (West)* appear to be those of one or more people reflecting back on their childhood. This is indicated in references to starting in a "new school" and having "my own bedroom" and "a large back yard with a fish pond my father built in the back corner." The individual(s) represented are disembodied to the reader, not only as we are provided solely with

²⁸⁴ Tsang, "Vancouver (West) – Detached," 193.

²⁸⁵ Tsang, "Vancouver (West) – Detached," 193.

²⁸⁶ Mercedes Baines, "Brown Child (dedicated to my mother Dorise)," *West Coast Line: Colour. An Issue*, eds. Roy Miki and Fred Wah, 13/14 (1994), 194.

uncontextualized portions of what is obviously part of a larger narrative, but also because no visual representation of the individual(s) is offered by Tsang. Readers are forced to reconstruct the image of the narrator(s) in their mind with the information provided. In this way, as with Baines, the reader is forced to “identify with only parts” of the narrator, parts which are at times deliberately racialized.

If *Vancouver (West)* is read in a narrative form, from left to right and top to bottom, there is a clear progression from formal to increasingly informal, detached to personal and faceless to deliberately racialized. Readers are also drawn into a dramatic plot-line where the narrator(s) reveal their personal experiences with racism. The following text demonstrates this,

I didn't know why I was called that, didn't know what it meant. All I knew was that it hurt to hear it, it made me draw back, it made me turn inward and become silent. I suppose it was the way it was said.

The vulnerability of the speaker presses upon the reader and, in its disembodied form, alludes to the experience of more than one individual. The absence of an identifiable protagonist allows the narrative to resonate as that of a community of individuals for whom the world has “demand[ed] that you identify only with parts of yourself” – the colour of one's skin, an accent, one's manner of dress. This brings us back to Miki and Wah's statement that, for some, colour is something that has to be “hyphenated,” “diluted” and “disappeared into.”

Focusing specifically on ‘Chineseness’ as a marker of difference, this text- and image-based work speaks directly to a specific moment in Vancouver's history when anti-Asian sentiments proliferated, centred initially on real-estate disputes and then extending to expose the systemic racisms that underpin social constructions of difference and ethnic ghettoization in Canadian society. This period, which saw heightened immigration from Asia in the years preceding the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, was briefly discussed in chapter two. Following the Asian economic boom

in the mid-1990s and the relaxation of Canadian immigration laws following WWII, immigration from Asia multiplied and immigration from Hong Kong in particular came to constitute twenty percent of new arrivals into Vancouver. A Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis (RIIM) research study shows that many of these immigrants from Hong Kong were wealthy and adept at investing their capital internationally.²⁸⁷ This spike in immigration from Hong Kong quickly came to be associated with rising real-estate values in Vancouver as immigrants increased market demand and, therefore, value. These new home owners from Hong Kong, after leaving the spatial restrictions of Hong Kong behind them, often sought large homes in suburban neighbourhoods near the downtown core, such as West Vancouver. These houses came to be dubbed monster homes, as the new owners renovated them to become larger and more private, including the addition of thick walls and high hedges, large additions and flat roofs.²⁸⁸

It becomes apparent that Tsang's advertisements are intimately connected with this history, particularly as the listings are limited to West Vancouver and the prices range from \$658,000 to \$670,000. Some of the narrative portions of the text further highlight renovations made to some of these homes. For example, one description alludes to the tall fences constructed around many monster homes, "The pond was stocked with goldfish, and one summer a frog came to live there... I didn't know how it got there, since our yard was surrounded by a tall wooden fence, but there it was."²⁸⁹ Although this text reads only as a fragmented narrative, it provides the context for the process of racialization that follows. Roy Miki recalls that during this period Vancouver was called "Hongcouver," a term which comprised "part of the racialization process that

²⁸⁷ Edgington, David W., Michael Goldberg and Thomas Hutton, "The Hong Kong Chinese in Vancouver," Research on Immigration and Integration in the Metropolis, <http://www.riim.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/2003/wp03-12.pdf> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

²⁸⁸ Edgington, <http://www.riim.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/2003/wp03-12.pdf> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

²⁸⁹ Tsang, "Vancouver (West) – Detached," 193.

was dominant at that time” and which exemplified the “white backlash against Asians in the early 1990s.”²⁹⁰ According to the RIIM study,

There were no doubt legitimate objections to these ‘monster houses’ (especially on aesthetic grounds) by local Richmond residents who vigorously opposed their proliferation within the municipality. But the debate, which throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s permeated public meetings, letters to the editors of the local press, television coverage and City council sessions, soon assumed a harsher and more hostile tone. The ‘monster houses’ were depicted in the local press as inimical to the traditional scale and design attributes of Richmond’s established residential neighbourhoods. Moreover, their tendency (at least indirectly) to inflate housing prices and residential taxes was seen as presaging a classic invasion and succession process. In this way the more affluent new immigrants were perceived as displacing existing households, and thus dramatically reshaping the social morphology of the community. The vehemence of some of these objections invoked a vigorous counter-reaction among new immigrants, including accusations of racism and discrimination.²⁹¹

The desire for neighbourhood preservation along the lines of ‘long-established Vancouver residences’ and the fear that increased immigration would significantly alter the structure of time-honoured communities are aligned with the Yellow Peril mentality of the early twentieth century, outlined in chapter two. However, here, issues of race are intimately infused with questions of class and access. With the absence of a racialized body to identify or identify with, the architectures presented by Tsang come to be codified as lived spaces signifying race and class. With an understanding of the impassioned debates surrounding the Vancouver housing market in the early and mid-1990s, Tsang’s use of ubiquitous real-estate advertisements created a snapshot of a particular moment in Vancouver. Through the insertion of personal narratives, which provide a child’s perspective on the racisms emerging out of this period, Tsang is able to *pare down a sweeping phenomenon to the level of private histories.*

²⁹⁰ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

²⁹¹ Edgington, <http://www.riim.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/2003/wp03-12.pdf> (Accessed 4 April 2007).

Tsang's involvement in the larger project that was *Colour. An Issue* also inextricably links Tsang's work to the movement of cultural race politics across Canada, a connection made through the artist's direct engagement with issues of racial construction and racism. In interview, Miki speaks of this social construction of race, "The racialized body is produced by the limits of [racial] discourses that not only describe it but also give it its social visibility... The problem around race categories is that there is an automatic response to the socially visible marking as actual reference points to the body itself."²⁹² Here, Miki illustrates the tendency of such discourses to force people to identify only with parts of themselves. However, he contends that the problem with many of the responses to these discourses by the arts and literary community was that they were "highly reactive." For example, the direct approach employed by Tsang can be viewed as an oppositional strategy, confronting audiences with questions of racism in a targeted and personal way. Of works critiquing this process of racialized, Miki suggests,

[They] took on [themselves] these dominant social modes of visualizing the racialized body to try to attack it, resist it and say, 'That is not me.' 'I hate the stereotype and I am going to destroy it.' There was this notion that you were trying to deconstruct [such stereotypes]. The problem was, from the internal perspective, once this was deconstructed, the body wasn't there... By only reacting, we were not tapping into the kinds of contradictions, the complexities, complicities and the layerings of those discourses within our own subconscious. So, we were not free.²⁹³

In this way, Miki believes that to challenge racism by internalizing and attacking the very discourses that construct difference only functions to reify their existence and position of power over the marginalized and subordinated. Larissa Lai reiterates this point, arguing, "In terms of master and slave dialectics, the power of that movement was in the reclamation of the racist name. But as long as you're taking that position and claiming the racist name, you're naming yourself in relation to the master and you can never let

²⁹² Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

²⁹³ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

go of the master.”²⁹⁴ Arguing that cultural race politics was marked by an impassioned and angry response to systemic racism, Miki states, “until you get rid of your own anger... you can’t really be free.”²⁹⁵ This critique stands not only as a cautionary reminder in reading *Vancouver (West)* as a historical index, marking a unique political response at a particular moment in time, but it also contextualizes the eventual decline of cultural race politics’ highly reactive and oppositional mode of resistance in the mid-1990s.

Numerous explanations exist for what can be considered the decline of cultural race politics, including what Lai has called a “collective fatigue” amongst activists and what Miki has termed a “whole dissipation of energy.”²⁹⁶ While some believe that this fatigue arose out of the over-exertion of a small community of artists and activists, others point towards the commodification of difference as providing new avenues within which difference could be articulated. Proponents of the latter perspective, such as Miki, Lai and Ashok Mathur, do not consider cultural race politics to have *declined* so much as having *transformed* to respond adequately to changing individual, national and global circumstances.²⁹⁷ Changes in the public sphere reflect what Miki calls the “neoliberalization of difference,” whereby works grounded in cultural difference became “stylish,” increasing the market visibility of culturally diverse artists and writers and creating spaces for them within the Canadian canon.²⁹⁸ Nationally, in the mid-1990s, the Quebec referendum began to draw attention away from the debates revolving around identity politics towards seemingly larger-scale ones of national unity. Finally, immense changes in global political and monetary flows increasingly shifted attention away from the national arena to the international. These changes included the retracing of

²⁹⁴ Lai, Larissa, interview with the author, 14 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

²⁹⁵ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006; Lai, interview with the author.

²⁹⁶ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006; Lai, interview with the author, 14 December 2006.

²⁹⁷ Miki, interview with the author; Lai, interview with the author; Mathur, interview with the author.

²⁹⁸ Miki, interview with the author.

innumerable borders globally because of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Gulf War, the decline of the Soviet Union, the intensification of capital as seen in booming US markets, the Asian economic crash and the growing international division of labour. Combined, these various shifts resulted in local concerns giving way to those of the global and the international.

The decline or transformation of cultural race politics in no way implies that the issues challenged and questioned by those involved were resolved. Rather, they shifted in form. With the neoliberalization of difference characterized by Miki, where “overnight it became cool to be different,” he recognizes that “racialization was still embedded” and that it was simply now “more difficult to make that visible.”²⁹⁹ Despite the fact that the market was increasingly more apt to support the work of culturally diverse artists and writers, the question of the social construction of race remained relatively unchallenged on a broad societal level. Ashok Mathur highlights the tension this creates for artists and writers, like Tsang, who continue to produce artworks today. He suggests,

Commodification is taking over so much of what we are doing. The matter is now surfing. How do we ride this wave? My interest now is, how do we produce work that is flowing into this market in a certain way? I’m not naive enough to say that I’m going to do my own work and be glad that nobody is reading it because that shows that damn that’s good. How do we get this stuff read and worked into a system in a way that has a political savvy so that we’re still doing stuff that we want to do.³⁰⁰

Mathur questions the form artistic production must take in the current transnational context in order to remain politically engaged, while also reflecting the lessons learned from cultural race politics. *Vancouver (West)* functions as a historical index for the strategies and representations associated with cultural race politics, as well as engaging with burgeoning understandings of the globalization of people, capital and information. However, it also resonates more broadly as a metaphor for the construction of

²⁹⁹ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

³⁰⁰ Ashok Mathur, interview with the author, 14 December 2006, Vancouver, digital recording, Carleton University, Ottawa.

community and belonging through systems of desire and consumption. The transition from cultural race politics into transnationalism will be elucidated in greater depth in following section through an in-depth comparison of *Vancouver (West) – Detached* with Tsang's more recent work, *Orange County*.

Imagined Worlds: A Comparison of *Vancouver (West)- Detached* and *Orange County*

The decade between the publication of *Colour. An Issue* and the production of Henry Tsang's *Orange County* was witness to the intensification of global flows of people, information, culture and technology.³⁰¹ With this escalation, attention appears to have shifted away from the nation-state towards greater interest in the global sphere. According to Ien Ang, the increasing access to information and transportation technologies by a globally mobile elite has resulted in a "transition from a world of nation-states who organize themselves more or less effectively as socially distinct, culturally homogeneous and politically sovereign," to an "interconnected, intermingled world in which virtually all nation-states have become territories where various economies, cultures and people intersect and interact."³⁰² In this way, Ang offers a way of conceptualizing the persistent dematerialization of the nation-state in terms of cultural, political and economic homogeneity. She continues to argue that with these transformations at the supra-national level have come the "growing visibility of diasporas" as the key "instances *and* symptoms of today's globalizing world," wherein the "old certainties – of place [and] of belonging... – are rapidly being eroded."³⁰³ Agreeing that "diasporic public spheres... are the crucibles of a post-national political order,"³⁰⁴ Arjun

³⁰¹ Appadurai, 9.

³⁰² Ang, 5; Appadurai, 9.

³⁰³ Ang, 75, 152.

³⁰⁴ Appadurai, 22.

Appadurai contends that “globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers... obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments.”³⁰⁵ Within this context, it is interesting to explore how Tsang’s representations of identity and belonging have shifted to accommodate changing circumstances. If the nation has stopped being the primary locus of interrogating the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other,’ how, if at all, does the insistence by cultural race politics on challenging ethnic ghettoization and discourses of race and belonging function within the current *global* sphere? How has Tsang’s commitment to continually denying the possibility of fixity, begun during the period of cultural race politics, adjusted to transnationalism?

Orange County was completed in 2003 as part of Tsang’s Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of California at Irvine.³⁰⁶ The work is a four-minute video installation comprised of four projections, each on one wall of an enclosed room, depicting the Mediterranean- and French-style architecture that has come to be associated with the suburban gated community of Orange County (Fig. 14).³⁰⁷ As its name reveals, expectations are that one is viewing footage of the Californian community made famous by the television series, the *O.C.*, which first aired in 2003.³⁰⁸ Each projection contains a centred close-up of a large, two-story home with stuccoed walls of white, dusty rose or burnt mustard, tiled roofs and prominent carports with space for at least two vehicles. Manicured lawns contain perfectly clipped grass and plant features that highlight the architectural details of each home while providing some privacy (Fig. 15). As it begins, an individual enters one frame, walking at a relaxed gait along the

³⁰⁵ Appadurai, 9-10.

³⁰⁶ Track 16 Gallery, “Happy Beautiful Desirable,” Track 16 Gallery, <http://www.track16.com/exhibitions/wipeyourfeet/> (Accessed 16 May 2007).

³⁰⁷ Jeffrey Inaba, Peter Zellner, Danielle Levitt, “Urbanism without Urbanists,” Volume, <http://www.archis.org/plain/object.php?object=868&year=&num> (Accessed 6 June 2007).

³⁰⁸ *The O.C.*, created by Josh Schwartz, 2003, FOX television network.

sidewalk that runs parallel to the paved road at the base of each frame. The male figure, clad in blue jeans, a three-quarter length black jacket and worn brown leather shoes, passes from frame to frame almost seamlessly, with only a slight lapse in time between each one. As time passes, the same male figure starts to appear in the frames with more frequency – he comes to walk simultaneously through two frames, then three, then four (Fig. 16). Following a brief pause where all the frames are empty, the frequency heightens and the same man appears in multiples within a single frame, walking in a follow-the-leader form. This amplification of human presence is made more noticeable as the sound of footsteps escalate in rate of recurrence and volume, overlapping without creating any distinct pattern. Unlike *Vancouver (West) – Detached*, viewers are provided with representations of each home as they exist in both time and space, in full technocolour. It is a full corporeal experience, as viewers are surrounded on all sides by the 4-channel video projection, creating a total environment.

As one spends more time with *Orange County*, the lapses that occur as the figure passes from frame to frame begin to reveal other moments of disjuncture between each of the scenes depicted - dissonances in time and space materialize. While two of the homes shown have lush lawns and vegetation and rich blue skies, the other two have seemingly burnt lawns and shrubs, trees that appear to have been recently planted and skies of a muted blue. Despite these subtle differences, the most apparent moments of slippage occur when passersby randomly enter the frames. For example, in the second set of scenes, an Asian man in a blue uniform pushing a garbage cart walks directly in front of the camera, briefly obstructing our view of the man walking in the middle ground. At another time, in the same set of frames, four soldiers identifiable as Asian march past in the foreground, the rhythm of their heavy shoes quickly capturing the viewer's attention, before a man on a bike pedals by (Fig. 17). The only obstructions that seize the viewer's interest in the first set of frames include an unmanned blue pick-up truck

which occupies one of the driveways momentarily and a woman who wanders past pushing a stroller. These discrepancies reveal to the audience that they are in fact witnessing scenes from not one, but two communities – Orange County, California, and Orange County, Beijing.

Orange County, Beijing, is a gated community composed of 143 quarter-million-dollar townhouses and million-dollar-plus luxury properties replete with shops, a community centre and an artificial lake.³⁰⁹ Located near the site of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games, it is an attempt by the SinoCEA company in China, which is half-owned by the Chinese government, to offer a simulation of the American suburban experience to those with the ability to pay. SinoCEA hired Orange County architects and interior designers to work on the site in order to ensure as ‘authentic’ a replica of the original as possible.³¹⁰ Jeffrey Inaba, remarking on the fact that all units were sold within hours of going on the market, explains that the Beijing media labelled the ultra-planned community the ‘Orange Storm.’³¹¹ As expounded by Appadurai, we see within the case of Orange County an expression of the local becoming global through the processes of intensified global cultural flows and expanded international access to information and media technologies. Of this international cultural exchange, Chris Ziegler from OCWeekly.com writes, “It was a moment Tsang sees as an ‘absurdity of modern living,’ “a symptom-cum-situation endemic in a new kind of global society trading in ideologically unfettered capitalism and the whirlwind exchange of images.”³¹² This “whirlwind exchange” is facilitated by easy access to the information technologies transforming

³⁰⁹ Inaba, <http://www.archis.org/plain/object.php?object=868&year=&num> (Accessed 6 June 2007).

³¹⁰ Track 16 Gallery, <http://www.track16.com/exhibitions/wipeyourfeet/> (Accessed 16 May 2007).

³¹¹ Inaba, <http://www.archis.org/plain/object.php?object=868&year=&num> (Accessed 6 June 2007).

³¹² Chris Ziegler, “The Simulated Simulacra,” in *OCWeekly* (Orange County) 2 May 2003.

global media services which, according to Appadurai, 'offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds.'³¹³

Mapping the articulations of desire – often manifested in consumption patterns – within the construction of the self has long been of special interest to Tsang. Early on in his practice, as was made most evident in *Racy Sexy*, Tsang explored how cross-cultural desire transgressed supposedly fixed community boundaries. However, with *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County*, Tsang's engagement with desire investigates the manner in which the global movement of people, capital and culture can inform constructions of the self on the local level. Imaginations of the self are no longer limited by the parameters of community on the local, regional or national scale, but come to reflect the machinations of globally imagined communities. In interview, Tsang explained how globalization has increased the capacity for imagining the self beyond the here and now, "We are all the West. Any place that can access Western media and Western technologies is the West... It's all part of the global construct... It's not about the local or the regional, but about a set of networks between significant urban centres."³¹⁴ Appadurai contends that this transnational imagining is driven by mediascapes which, "whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements... out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places."³¹⁵ Through the ebb and flow of these networks and mediascapes, Tsang has entered into a dialogue that explores the effects of desire and the ability to consume on global imaginings of the self and, in turn, on one's ability to belong in his or her community, whether it be imagined locally and/or globally.

³¹³ Appadurai, 3.

³¹⁴ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

³¹⁵ Appadurai, 35.

As demonstrated earlier, during the early 1990s' case of large-scale Hong Kong-based immigration into Vancouver, local consumption patterns shifted to reflect these newly formed networks and came to be closely intertwined with discourses of racialization. *Vancouver (West)* demonstrates how the role of desire underpinning the consumption patterns of new residents in Vancouver led to a market boom in West Vancouver neighbourhoods. During interview, Tsang had this to say,

That idea of mobility, the desire to always improve yourself, meant this real need to live in the West, for Vancouver... Part of the intent of [*Vancouver (West) – Detached*] was to create a portrait of desire because people will look in certain areas because they desire those areas. And for what reasons? It gives you status, personal comfort, safety.³¹⁶

This desire for status, personal comfort and safety is deeply connected to mobility, not only the physical dislocation from one site to another, but also the social mobility associated with creating an adequate home and community for oneself in a new city. Both *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* are deeply invested in this desire for social mobility – however, the avenues employed to achieve it differ greatly. While the former relies on trans-Atlantic relocation into already established neighbourhoods, the latter demonstrates the new capacity for the importation of foreign cultural landscapes without necessitating cross-border travel. Though notions of desire resound in *Orange County*, access to improved social status, comfort and safety no longer rely on the trans-Atlantic relocation of the 1990s. The yearning felt by Chinese consumers in the twenty-first century for western-style suburban accommodations can be met by the importation of knowledge and design. In conversation with Ziegler, Tsang states, “China is trying to catch up... Anything Americans make, they want. That’s why my video installation employs a follow-the-leader motif. And here, they’ve gone to the trouble of hiring OC designers to do the real thing. The authenticity of American-ness is a huge selling

³¹⁶ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

point.”³¹⁷ He is able to trace how cultural appropriation within and across boundaries influences constructions of the self and community. Whereas during the early 1990s in West Vancouver identity was closely tied to place, the situation of Orange County within the context of twenty-first century transnationalism reveals the easy reproducibility of self and community in a less site-specific form. Viewed in succession, each demonstrates the ever-increasing ability to belong in a given imagined community or world based on the capacity to be what you buy.

Like *Orange County*, in *Vancouver (West)* there is a focus on achieving an ostensible level of authenticity in terms of community. Of *Vancouver (West)*, Tsang suggests that the housing boom and the rapid influx of Chinese-Canadians into the predominantly white West Vancouver neighbourhoods represented an attempt to build a sense of cohesive community and belonging. In interview he stated, “You want to be in the company of other people who are similar. That’s what community is about. This desire for community is expressed through real estate, through housing, through neighbourhoods.”³¹⁸ This community is constructed along both racial and cultural lines, as well as economic ones. Cultural community is expressed in the various renovations made to new and existing homes in order to reflect a specific cultural heritage, while economic community is manifested by the desire to situate oneself within an established, prestigious and high-income community. In the specific context of West Vancouver, the coalescing of communities based on race and economic desire creates what Homi Bhabha calls a ‘hybrid’ articulation of space.

Vancouver (West) denies the possibility of authenticity because of the hybridity it accentuates. To a greater degree, *Orange County* demonstrates the sheer impossibility of authenticity because what is assumed to be the original ‘authentic’ source proves itself

³¹⁷ Ziegler, 2 May 2003.

³¹⁸ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

as always already a copy unto itself. Together, these works map the incremental understanding that, as Appadurai has observed, ours is “a world of signs wholly unmoored from their social signifiers (all the world’s a Disneyland).”³¹⁹ Born out of mimicry, *Orange County, Beijing*, adopts a visual code that has been reproduced throughout the world. Tsang contends that when audiences view the *Orange County* footage, they say, ‘That could be Toronto; that could be Miami – that could be anywhere.’³²⁰ Ziegler develops this notion, arguing that while all the Beijing houses are an adaptation of what is assumed to be an American product, there is no real point of origin. He writes, “The American style they’re selling is French, Spanish and Italian. But if you go to France, Spain or Italy, you won’t find it... Instead... what the Chinese have done is copy a copy – simulate a simulacra... and transplant a uniquely ahistorical architectural vernacular into the country that hosted Mao’s cultural revolution.”³²¹ Bhabha demonstrates how mimicry and translation reveal the so-called original to be, in fact, a simulacra. He writes,

Translation is... a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense – imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied... made into a simulacrum and so on: the ‘original’ is never finished or complete in itself.³²²

Thus, *Orange County* and *Vancouver (West)* confront audiences with two instances of communities that were deliberately constructed as sites of commonality and belonging, either from scratch, following an existing template, or within long-established neighbourhoods. In Tsang’s work, audiences are shown two communities that

³¹⁹ Appadurai, 30-1.

³²⁰ Tsang in Ziegler, 2 May 2003.

³²¹ Ziegler, 2 May 2003.

³²² Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” interview by Johanthan Rutherford, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. John Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 1990), 210.

demonstrate a yearning for authenticity, security and social mobility, all the while producing the slippages that make authenticity impossible.

In both cases, one is pressed to question the location of the body within these so-called unmoored sites based on mimicry and hybridity. Like *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy*, one of the fundamental characteristics underpinning both *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* is a desire to explore Chinese identity and racialization – the earlier exhibition and artwork remaining relatively contained to testing the limits, boundaries and experiences of the Chinese-Canadian community in Vancouver, and the latter two situating Chineseness within broader contexts of transcultural and transnational desire in order to transgress and reveal the social construction of those boundaries. Within these two particular artworks, Tsang develops this increasingly nuanced exploration by subtly incorporating elements of narrative and autobiography, simultaneously playing with the tension between the body as both subject and object. Through distinct absences and presences of the body, Tsang is able to paint a portrait of each period and demonstrate the shifts that took place in how the racialized body experiences and has access to belonging and community within and across specific sites.

Ashok Mathur articulates the transformation in identity construction that occurred between the early 1990s and the early twenty-first century. He writes,

If the mythic 90s were marked by an insistence of presence - disenfranchised groups and individuals demanding to be seen, heard, and included - the current decade, awash with the reemergence of unapologetic militarism and fresh new enemies in the mist of a globalization that means everything and nothing, is typified by a desire to keep up. But that keeping up often amounts to a type of shape-shifting, or, more accurately, the grand extension of postmodernity's desire to slip freely between identities. Not just an ability to rustle off one's skin in serpentine manner, but a type of reverse-ecdysis, a shuffling *into* another's shedded outer layers, embracing a type of passing through borrowed appearance.³²³

³²³ Ashok Mathur, "Transubracination: How Writers of Colour Became CanLit," TransCanada, <http://www.transcanadas.ca/transcanada1/mathur.shtml> (Accessed 8 March 2007).

Despite the absence of a physical presence within *Vancouver (West)*, the work marks what Mathur calls an insistence to be “seen, heard, and included.” Employing ubiquitous real-estate advertisements as his medium, Tsang constructs a narrative within a dominant form of mass media in order to subvert expectations of ownership over place and the right to belong. According to Roy Miki, Tsang achieves this by inserting elements of his own autobiography into the work, to himself “inhabit these particular dominant forms” and enter into these spaces as a Chinese-Canadian subject.³²⁴ In interview, Tsang discussed the costs of longing for upward mobility as a Chinese-Canadian having himself moved to West Vancouver in the first part of the 1990s,

In some cases you are moving to neighbourhoods in which you want to belong, but once you move there you find you don't belong. This is because of difference, because you don't fit in so well. Say a Chinese family moves into a primarily white neighbourhood - maybe they will fit in, but maybe they won't. That was my experience of moving into the West side from Central Vancouver, which is more multicultural and has a much greater diversity of people living there. The West, on the other hand, was more homogenous and alienating. I wanted to create that snapshot.³²⁵

Tsang translates this personal experience with alienation in *Vancouver (West)*. As the title of the work reveals, the narrator's sensation of being detached from the community into which he or she has relocated mimics the types of homes being retailed in the advertisement. If read chronologically, the last frame of *Vancouver (West) – Detached* offers the most personal reflection on the narrator's experience of detachment after having come to live in this new neighbourhood. It reads,

I became quiet and withdrawn. My world shrank backward and inside out. I felt powerless and constantly under scrutiny. I was vulnerable and did not know yet how to fight back. Each day I feared being singled out, being made fun of, taunted, having my Chineseness become the object of derision, being made to experience deep, deep shame for seeming so different, so special.³²⁶

³²⁴ Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2006.

³²⁵ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

³²⁶ Tsang, “Vancouver (West) – Detached,” 193.

Ironically, this narrative places the experiences of the speaker under the scrutiny of an ever-growing audience, reducing his or her ability to withdraw. Here tension mounts between the first-person narrative subject speaking and the racialization of a third-person object vulnerable to public derision and inspection.

In keeping with the shift from the first to the third-person, the above statement can be viewed further as a metaphor for belonging not only in a specific community, but also in the nation in general. It demonstrates that, despite carrying Canadian citizenship, Chineseness, as a marker of difference, inhibits total access to the signifiers of belonging in Canada. Although possessing a home in the physical sense, being under constant scrutiny creates a sense of homelessness, inducing some to become “quiet and withdrawn” and to have one’s world shrink “backward and inside out.” Manning draws a parallel between access to discourses of home and belonging and the nation. She suggests that, “the image of the home as an extension of the nation surfaces often. The home provides not only a tangible example of how we perpetuate the vocabulary of the nation... it offers also a visceral instance of our desire for attachment and belonging.”³²⁷ The desire to be homed echoes the longing to belong within and have access to the vocabulary of the nation, a language that “determines which bodies are qualified to speak.”³²⁸ However, Manning goes on to argue that, despite a “tenuous desire to ‘belong...’ this very lack of belonging – or homelessness – affords me intimate insight into my own alterity, alerting me to the danger of propagating a cohesive discourse of national identity based on a homogenous notion of what it means ‘to be at home.’”³²⁹ Inserting his personal narrative into *Vancouver (West)* situates Tsang within this position of alterity, allowing him to interrogate the homogeneity and alienation buttressing the limited vocabulary of the nation that constructs Chinese-Canadians as ‘other.’

³²⁷ Manning, xvii.

³²⁸ Manning, xv.

³²⁹ Manning, xvii.

Nevertheless, despite the significant parallels between the narratives presented and Tsang's personal history, it is not his intention to create artworks so specific that they can only be appreciated by individuals with similar experiences. Rather, he hopes that each work can be read metaphorically and thereby resonate for all audiences, without being universal. This is reminiscent of what Bhabha' calls the "middle passage" of contemporary culture. He writes, "What is striking about the 'new' internationalism is that the move from the specific to the general, from the material to the metaphoric, is not a smooth passage of transition and transcendence... [It] is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience."³³⁰ Regarding works that begin as site- and case-specific, Tsang explains the process of extracting metaphor is also aligned with Manning's notion of an "excess of seeing,"

It's an act of trying to understand [the situation] through physically being there... How does the body feel there? What kinds of bodies move through the space? Which don't and why? How does it feel under your feet? What other conditions exist under the obvious and visible? I do try to start from the specific, and then by focusing on the exploration of a specific, working towards a metaphor – hoping that the gestures are expansive rather than contained... I'm interested in questions and the kinds of perspectives that people can bring to the work.³³¹

Together with Bhabha and Manning, Tsang articulates the necessity for artists to exist within the art-making process in order to articulate the displacements and disjunctions of lived experience. In interview, Miki spoke about the necessary role of the artist as a critical voice aware of the social construction of subjectivities. He suggests,

You can never be programmatic. You have to be inside the process, to move within the contradictions and all the tensions... To me, the representation is the product of the whole multiplicity of micro-movements through the material in all its contradictions. Also, [the artist] as a subject who is subjected and produced by things that are beyond your control... is in a creative ethical relationship with those forces that created you.³³²

³³⁰ Homi Bhabha, "Introduction," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 8.

³³¹ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

³³² Miki, interview with the author, 16 December 2007.

Vancouver (West) – Detached employs both the visible and invisible to enter into a “creative ethical relationship with those forces” that are beyond the control of the artist. With a personal investment in the experience of racism in West Vancouver, Tsang gives expression to the generalized interconnections among race, real estate and belonging. The ambiguity carried by the disembodied voice(s) presented allows Tsang to engage in the dilemma outlined by Ien Ang and Homi K. Bhabha, wherein “traces of Asianness cannot be erased completely from the Westernized Asian: we will always be ‘almost the same but not quite,’ because we are ‘not white.’”³³³ In this way, racism is presented and challenged overtly in *Vancouver (West)*. *Orange County* produces similar slippages in presentation of the body as almost white “but not quite,” and demonstrates a concerted effort to understand not only the metaphoric, but also the physical experience of place. However, it does so by omitting the narrative elements so prominent in the earlier work.

Orange County is representative of what Mathur calls the desire to keep up,” one that “often amounts to a type of shape-shifting, or, more accurately, the grand extension of postmodernity’s desire to slip freely between identities.” Employing his own Chinese-Canadian body as that which negotiates the transnational terrains that are the two Orange Counties, Tsang interrogates the capacity of a racialized body in the twenty-first-century to “slip freely between identities.” Although Tsang’s use of his body within *Orange County* is markedly different than the disembodied nature of *Vancouver (West)*, it is integral that audiences remain cognisant of the technological shifts taking place between the two periods that, in themselves, allowed for new forms of engagement. Like *Vancouver (West)*, the body in *Orange County* is an object situated within a broader context defined by the physical experience of place. However, unlike the 1994 work, the narrative framework supporting the body is limited, begging viewers to pose their own

³³³ Ang, 9; Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Men,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

questions and draw their own, if tentative, conclusions. Offering his own interpretation of *Orange County*, Tsang suggests,

The figure moves from one space to the next almost seamlessly. But there is the lag time in between; is it the time zone difference, the jet lag? Where does he go? When he re-appears, nothing has changed, the clothing is the same, the knee-length black jacket, the slightly scruffy black jeans that don't quite match but don't quite position him as a target for police questioning. He is Chinese, so he flows from America to China and back without restriction, without question. Twenty years ago, he would not have been able to pass; he would have been too western in one, too Asian in the other. But now, the worlds have collided, we are the world; there will be a Starbucks nearby soon.³³⁴

In interview, Tsang explains that Orange County, California, was in fact more Asian than he had expected, created by a 'brain drain' of, for example, Indian, Chinese, and Filipino people come to work in the state's technology sector.³³⁵ He indicates that "being East Asian in Orange County [in 2003] wasn't an oddity anymore. In fact, it was the common denominator between [the two Orange Counties.]"³³⁶ Unlike *Vancouver (West)*, the insertion of the racialized body was employed to demonstrate similitude, rather than dissonance. Focusing on questions of mimicry circulating around the work's suburban architectural landscapes, *Orange County* required a body that would blend seamlessly into both contexts.³³⁷

Ang ascribes Tsang's ability to exist unproblematically within and between the twenty-first century West and Asia to the ever-growing visibility of diasporas.³³⁸ She argues that these "formations of people bound together, at least nominally, by a common ethnic identity despite their physical dispersal across the globe – makes them without

³³⁴ Tsang in Mathur, <http://www.transcanadas.ca/transcanada1/mathur.shtml> (Accessed 8 March 2007).

³³⁵ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

³³⁶ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

³³⁷ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007; Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in his ability to travel freely and unquestioned between each site inserts elements of Tsang's own subjective and privileged experience into the work.

³³⁸ Ang, 75.

doubt one of the key instances *and* symptoms of today's globalizing world."³³⁹ Nevertheless, according to Ang, despite the continued economic success and influence of Asian markets and the increased dispersal of Asians across the globe, "the 'West' stands for those people, communities and regions that appear economically and politically superior" to others, while 'Asia' symbolically stands for all that the West is not.³⁴⁰ However, she believes that tension is mounting between the two categories as undeniable overlaps develop between them. Tsang exposes this tension through the fluidity by which his body is able to move between Asia and the West. Such a perspective relies heavily on the foundations established by Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, which shows the so-called 'East' to be a 'Western' construction, while demonstrating that it is no longer possible to view the two as discrete entities.³⁴¹ The body presented by Tsang, his own, can be viewed as a hybridization of both the East and West, or what can be now seen as two 'moderns' existing within different hemispheres.³⁴² As such, the ever-increasing overlap between these two constructed categories creates a point of tension for Tsang to exploit, within which he exposes the fact that fixed ownership over and belonging within each category are vulnerable and in constant flux.

It is at this point, however, that the viewer can begin to question, in *Orange County*, whether Tsang's body functions so seamlessly because it belongs unproblematically in both sites, or because, in some form, it is doubly marginalized in both? Is it perhaps too Western in one to be 'authentically' Asian and too Asian in the other to be 'authentically' Western? Or does it question the constructedness of an authentically "pure" notion of belonging? This again raises the question, does the

³³⁹ Ang, 75.

³⁴⁰ Ang, p.172-3.

³⁴¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism, Second Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

³⁴² Ang, 172.

racialized body almost but not quite belong in either context and, if this is the case, are audiences re-presented with the question of homelessness within the contemporary context of globalization? Orange County, Beijing, the physical manifestation of transnational cultural flows, is located in what Ang calls an “unsettled and unsettling location between China and the West.”³⁴³ She argues that this unsettled position produces “multiple ambivalences,” in which “a desire to have it both ways is continually undercut by the refusal or inability to identify with either.”³⁴⁴ Ang contends that such a position of ambivalence, what Manning calls alterity, opens up the space to interventions and casts doubt on dominant discourses on identity, race and belonging. She writes,

...this unstable, ambivalent, doubly marginalized positionality [is] the very place from where [the diasporic intellectual] can enact a ‘specific kind of social power,’ the power to interrupt, to trouble, to intervene tactically rather than strategically in the interrogation of dominant discourses.³⁴⁵

The roots of this argument can be found in Bhabha’s postcolonial theory of hybridity, which argues that the impossibility of authenticity revealed through simulacrum implies that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.”³⁴⁶ Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge, rather than remaining fixed on interrogating points of origin. It creates a dynamic positionality or political stance that refutes the possibility of fixity and systems of categorization. In employing his own body in a way that travels seamlessly between locations while evoking an ambiguous sense of belonging in either site, Tsang creates for himself such a position of alterity, evoking a form of third space that exists only when viewers engage in an excess of seeing. In this way, *Orange County* further complicates the notion of homelessness begun in *Vancouver West*, while concomitantly reinforcing Tsang’s

³⁴³ Ang, p.2; here she is in fact speaking of Hong Kong and the diasporic intellectual – but it is possible to abstract from this example to include Orange County, Beijing.

³⁴⁴ Ang, 2.

³⁴⁵ Ang, 2.

³⁴⁶ Bhabha, “The Third Space,” 211.

commitment as both an artist and a curator to the destabilization of fixed categories of identification.

Conclusion

Together, *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* not only trace the shifts in race politics and representation over the course of almost two decades, but they also underscore the artist's commitment to an unfixed and rhizomatic analysis of identity and community. Strategically employing elements of his own voice, experience and body in the two works, Tsang situates himself, as a racialized and hyphenated artist, ambiguously within, across and between numerous identity constructs. Doing so, he removes the capacity for a linear and singular reading of either work, allowing the subjective experience of viewers to inflect upon their understanding of each piece. This approach can be characterized by Ang, whose understanding of the role of the diasporic intellectual translates to describe Tsang's ethics of art making. The impulse of these individuals, Ang writes, "... is to point to ambiguities, complexities and contradictions, to complicate matters rather than provide formulae for solutions, to blur distinctions between colonizer and colonized, dominant and subordinate, oppressor and oppressed."³⁴⁷ Indeed, Tsang offers no solutions, providing instead a series of questions to be explored, debated and discarded in favour of new questions. He believes that "people tend to like really clear answers that are fixed. Those people end up being in positions of influence. I am initially impressed by those answers, but then I start to see them as limiting."³⁴⁸ However, unlike Ang's presentation of blurring distinctions between sets of binary opposites, it can be argued that Tsang transgresses the limits of such binaries, articulating, rather, increasingly dynamic and three-dimensional relationships

³⁴⁷ Ang, 2.

³⁴⁸ Tsang, interview with the author, 4 July 2007.

among people, sites, objects and experiences. This worldview remains unmoored from fixity and simple classifications, expounding, in Appadurai's words, a "configuration of cultural forms in today's world" that are "fundamentally fractal" – "possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures or regularities" – and "also overlapping."³⁴⁹ In the decade between *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County*, Tsang's engagement with the 'fundamentally fractal' composition of today's world has become increasingly sophisticated. Both works interlace race-based critiques of the status quo with explorations of the impact of class on questions of belonging in time and space. Tsang's artistic interpretation of these two contexts is further complicated by his subtle insertion of an exploration of desire as catalyst for social mobility and change. Furthermore, both function as unanchored metaphors and free-floating signifiers of the effects of desire and simulacra on exclusionary notions of belonging based on the assumed authenticity of an originary group identity.

With their emphasis on both the physical and sentimental architectures of lived spaces, *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County* enter into dialogue with Manning's question, "What does it mean to *be at home* within the discourse of the nation?"³⁵⁰ Articulating the need for a "rhizomatic deterritorialization" with respect to discourses of national identity in Canada, Manning contends that cultural works have the capacity to mediate and challenge conventional encounters between individuals and the nation.³⁵¹ Similarly, Appadurai argues that, while the noun 'culture' can privilege conventional constructions of nationhood by silencing "the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated," the adjective 'cultural' "moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts and comparison that is more helpful."³⁵² Manning reiterates the

³⁴⁹ Appadurai, 46.

³⁵⁰ Manning, xxi.

³⁵¹ Manning, xxi.

³⁵² Appadurai, 12.

slippages contained within these alternative definitions of culture and the cultural, “I situate culture as the stuttering voice of ‘national identity,’ where culture is figured both as that which echoes and sustains the nation and as that which refutes and deconstructs the nation.”³⁵³ She continues, explaining the role of cultural texts in exposing the limitations of the discourse of the nation,

Placing culture at the forefront, I delineate ways in which cultural texts are capable of subverting the nation, concurrently drawing attention to the manner in which the language of the ‘culture’ of the nation-state can itself perpetuate exclusions based on race, gender, and citizenship... If we are to employ culture as an instance of a countercoherence to the nation’s vocabularies of exclusion, we must locate within cultural texts the promise not of a stable language, but of an alternative that retains its ephemerality.³⁵⁴

To this end, Manning supports an excess of seeing, discussed earlier in this chapter, whereby looking beyond the visible allows viewers to engage with the ephemeral and begin a process of undermining hierarchies and the rigid systems of categorization, exclusions and inclusions, that support them.³⁵⁵ She calls for a, “tying and untying of the knots of accepted systems, simultaneously entangling them and setting them loose... [drawing] our attention to the liminal site of the intermingling of exteriorities and interiorities, to the moment when... everything is suspended in a state of redefinition.”³⁵⁶ Manning calls for the deconstruction of the nation through artworks that challenge not only the exclusionary binary logics of ‘us’ and ‘them,’ but also promote an increasingly rhizomatic and fluid way of conceiving individual and community construction. Ang conceives of the end result of such processes of incessant questioning and indeterminacy as achieving a situation wherein “the confluence of cultural difference and diversity... become increasingly routinized,” making the world a “space of complicated

³⁵³ Manning, xxi.

³⁵⁴ Manning, xxi.

³⁵⁵ Manning, 11.

³⁵⁶ Manning, xxix.

entanglements, of togetherness-in-difference.³⁵⁷ Ang's articulation of togetherness-in-difference can be viewed as erasing the liminal spaces of alterity demarcated by Manning as well as questions of access to the rhetoric of globalization that allows for the confluence of difference and diversity. However, bound together with Manning's suggestion to continually write and rewrite territory by simultaneously tying and untying the knots of accepted systems, the notion of complicated entanglements offers a powerful tool for conceptualizing the concatenation of questions that emerge out of Tsang's artistic production.

³⁵⁷ Ang, 12.

CONCLUSION

Henry Tsang's artistic and curatorial production gives form to the conversations, critiques and strategies advanced during cultural race politics. Although cultural race politics arguably declined in the mid-1990s, Tsang's recent work reveals its continued relevance today. This conclusion will demonstrate how Tsang's practice is situated in relation to a key exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Bruce Grenville's 2003 *Home and Away: Crossing Cultures on the Pacific Rim*. It will also work to summarize key elements of *Racy Sexy* and *Self Not Whole* in relation to *Vancouver (West) - Detached* and *Orange County* as they inform understandings of cultural politics and race relations in today's increasingly transnational environment. This will allow for future explorations into the role that the politics of race and culture can play in Canada as it negotiates its position within an increasingly interconnected global network.

'the unknowable home'

Although the title of curator Bruce Grenville's *Home and Away* indicates a binary relationship between a fixed point of origin and a foreign terrain, the works of art included in the 2003 exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery dismiss the possibility of such easy association. Bringing together six contemporary artists from Pacific Rim countries, the exhibition explores representations of home, nation and subjectivity.³⁵⁸ Because the artists included were born in one place and often work and live in numerous others, geographic dispersals and intersections underscore the identities of these contributing artists – Sharon Lockhart, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Do-Ho Suh, Fiona Tan, Yin Xiuzhen and Jin-me Yoon. With ever-increasing possibilities for international mobility, *Home and Away* questions the changing state of 'home' and 'nation,' notions that, as suggested

³⁵⁸ Kathleen S. Bartels, "Foreword," in *Home and Away*, ed. Bruce Grenville (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003).

earlier in this thesis, seemingly originated in conjunction with those of borders and impermeability. As these seemingly rigid borders have been pushed against and penetrated by cultural works such as those by Henry Tsang, *Home and Away* explores the new, multi-directional spaces that have resulted.

Do-Ho Suh's *348 West 22nd St.* (2000) exposes the fragility of notions of the home that highlight such rigid qualities as impenetrability, security and fixity (Fig.18). Manning associates these unyielding characteristics of home as metaphors for the nation. She argues that notions of 'safety' are interchangeable between the two, where "the home mirrors the politics of state-sovereignty" and offers "protection from the outside by condoning an ethics of exclusionary violence on the inside."³⁵⁹ She cautions that "we must... develop an awareness that, as we mortgage our lives and construct fences and walls, install security systems and guard dogs, we are offering unwavering support to a vocabulary that is at the heart of the imaginary of the nation."³⁶⁰ Complicating such understandings of home, ones that appear at first glance to be naturalized and universally recognizable, Suh presents audiences with an insight into the home as it is infinitely unknowable and, by association, insecure. Made of a semi-transparent lightweight nylon, *348 West 22nd St.* reconstructs the life-size architectural form and detailings of a New York apartment down to the bathroom tub, tiles, plumbing fixtures and radiators. Playing on audience members' identification of easily recognizable symbols of home, Suh's ephemeral home quickly dispels easy association with socially constructed notions of security and stability by literally blurring their boundaries and making transparent their supporting structures. Its lightweight and easily transportable construction also dismisses the correlation between home and a permanent

³⁵⁹ Manning, xvi-ii.

³⁶⁰ Manning, xvii.

geographical location. The implicit lack of security conveyed by Suh's edifice destabilizes expectations surrounding discourses of the home and, in turn, of the nation.

Like the nylon structure implies, the edges of the nation are becoming ever-more blurred and its construction is increasingly transparent. Implying a binary relationship between the fixity of home and the stability of a single destination, the exhibition title implicitly references other such dichotomous pairs as 'self'/other' and 'us'/them.' However, 'home' and 'away' do not serve to contain the works included in the exhibition. Rather, according to Grenville, "The work in this exhibition suggests otherwise. Each artist offers an image, a consciousness of something new that flashed into view but cannot be held or contained within traditional notions of home and away."³⁶¹ In this way, Grenville builds upon the momentum initiated by such exhibitions as *Racy Sexy* and engages in global transnational flows in the same way as *Orange County*. While *Racy Sexy* complicated notions of race by bringing together communities unaccustomed to intermingling, *Home and Away* reaches beyond the borders of both Vancouver and Canada to bring together a group of artists concerned with the common question of identity in an increasingly mobile and fluid world. Like Tsang, who walks seamlessly between Orange County, California, and Orange County, Beijing, the six artists included in *Home and Away* produce works that resonate between and across national boundaries. However, rather than exploring the outcomes that mimicry and desire produce out of transnational cultural flows, artists such as Suh seem to populate the flow itself, giving it form if only for a fleeting instant. In this way, the ephemeral home Suh constructs seems to follow suit with the architectures presented by Tsang in *Vancouver (West)* and *Orange County*, where the concrete linking of belonging to a singular place

³⁶¹ Bruce Grenville, "Home and Away: Crossing Cultures on the Pacific Rim," in *Home and Away* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003).

increasingly gives way to the possibility of a complicated entanglement of multiple layers of belonging moving between and across space and time.

Home and Away articulates the influence of Pacific Rim countries on the cultural composition of Vancouver, a city which is both 'home' and 'away' (and any combination of the two) for many people. However, where the exhibition diverges from its predecessors from the period of cultural race politics is in its attention to audiences. Both *Self Not Whole* and *Racy Sexy* engaged in critical curatorial practices that aimed to address the needs and interests of its audiences. *Racy Sexy*, in an effort to appeal to a diverse range of communities and non-art audiences, adopted a decentred and interdisciplinary approach. Because the exhibition was situated at the Vancouver Art Gallery, the institutional appeal of *Home and Away* expanded audiences to address the broader Vancouver public. Does this shift from the non-art audiences targeted in *Racy Sexy* and *Self Not Whole* towards the mainstream art audiences of the Vancouver Art Gallery indicate that the questions catalyzed in part by Tsang in the 1990s have become concerns of *all* Canadians today? Or, on the other hand, does the attention paid to identity by Grenville in a public institution effectively depoliticize the thematic scope because no mention is made in the exhibition catalogue to the role of cultural race politics in initiating these interrogations in Canada? Either way, with its emphasis on the unknowability of both 'home' and 'away', Grenville's exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery closely parallels the work of Henry Tsang, who continuously foregrounds instability over fixity, evolution over stasis. Tsang's work underscores process and is in constant engagement with the shifting cultural terrain. With concept and form developing simultaneously, Tsang's projects engage questions of community at a deeply personal level while resonating more widely through the adoption of a readily accessible visual vernacular.

Towards a Politics of Knowledge

This thesis has employed an ever-narrowing structure in order to explore the development and transformation of race and cultural politics in Canada from the late 1980s to today. Contextualized within Canada's history of colonialism and official multiculturalism, cultural race politics is not examined as an isolated event. It is viewed as the manifestation of numerous elements converging at a particular moment in order to respond to the social construction of race and racism in Canada. Although cultural race politics focused its efforts within the arts, the racism against which it was directed was not conceived of in narrow terms specific to the late 1980s and early 1990s. Rather, it defined racism in relation to Canada's long history of systemic exclusion and both the physical and symbolic marginalization of culturally diverse Canadians. In doing so, it was able to address a broad spectrum of social inequities as they intersected with race, such as class, gender and sexuality. Understanding that cultural race politics maintained a broad scope of inquiry facilitates efforts to draw parallels between the events organized from 1988 and 1995 and more recent curatorial and artistic practices.

Providing critical discourses and innovative strategies for exposing and challenging the systemic exclusions faced by culturally diverse artists, writers and curators in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the various successes and failures of this Canadian movement both implicated Canada with the postcolonial theories that gained momentum in the last two decades of the twentieth-century and provided the foundation for critical examinations of community, identity and belonging within twenty-first-century transnationalism. Cultural race politics succeeded in bringing to visibility the various tensions revolving around race in Canada, while simultaneously creating 'cross-cultural' coalitions of individuals rallying around the term 'colour' that began to challenge the ethnic ghettoization embedded within multicultural policies and national imaginings. Cultural race politics, although critiqued for its oppositional strategies, developed useful

tools for initiating meaningful dialogues between and across communities. Through the early curatorial work of Henry Tsang, it is possible to track these successes, as well as chart the development of the critical curatorial strategies that placed audience participation on the same level as aesthetic considerations. Tracing the development of his curatorial and artistic practice across two decades, this thesis demonstrates Tsang's ongoing commitment to exploring continuously evolving constructions of identity, race and belonging without seeking rigid categorical definitions for these terms. In this way, his curatorial and artistic projects can be interpreted as historical indices for particular experiences, articulating the nuanced experience of the body as it is situated within a specific context. However, they can also be interpreted as metaphors with the potential to resonate beyond the particular and to work towards a continual commitment to articulating a critical and strategic politics of knowledge.

ILLUSTRATIONS

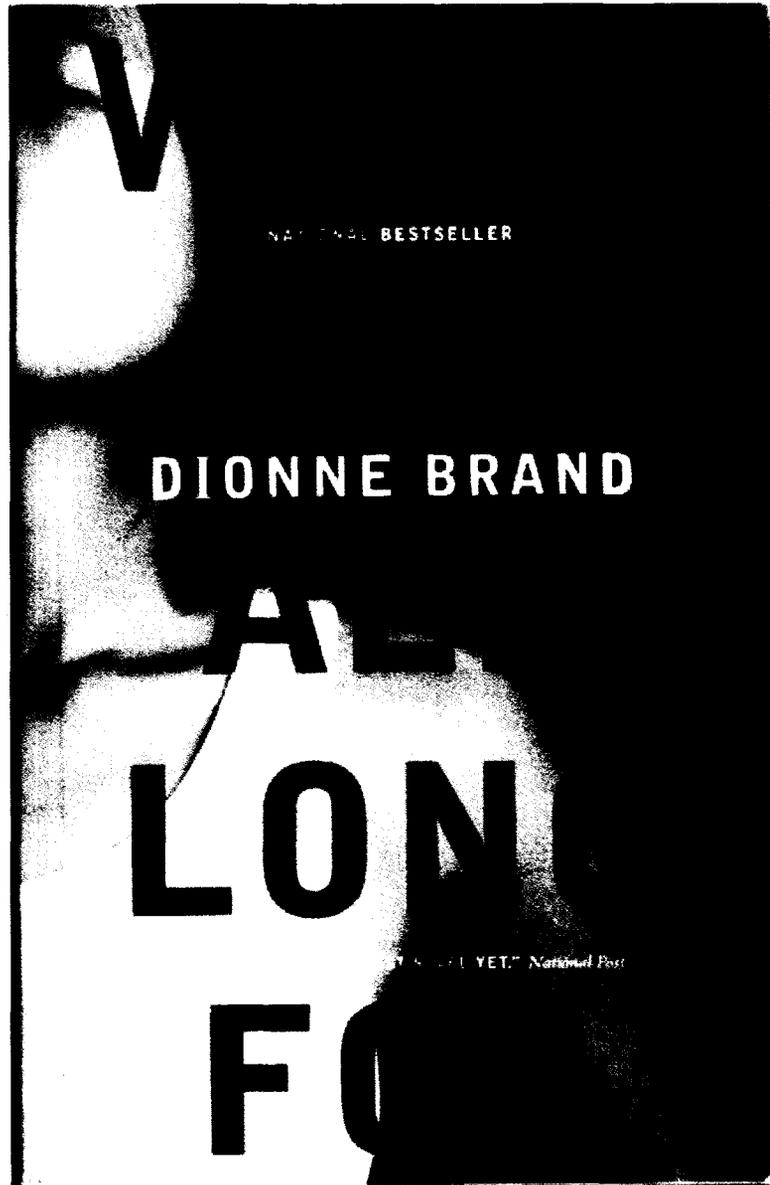


Figure 1
Dionne Brand, *What we all long for* (2005)
Cover: Kelly Hill

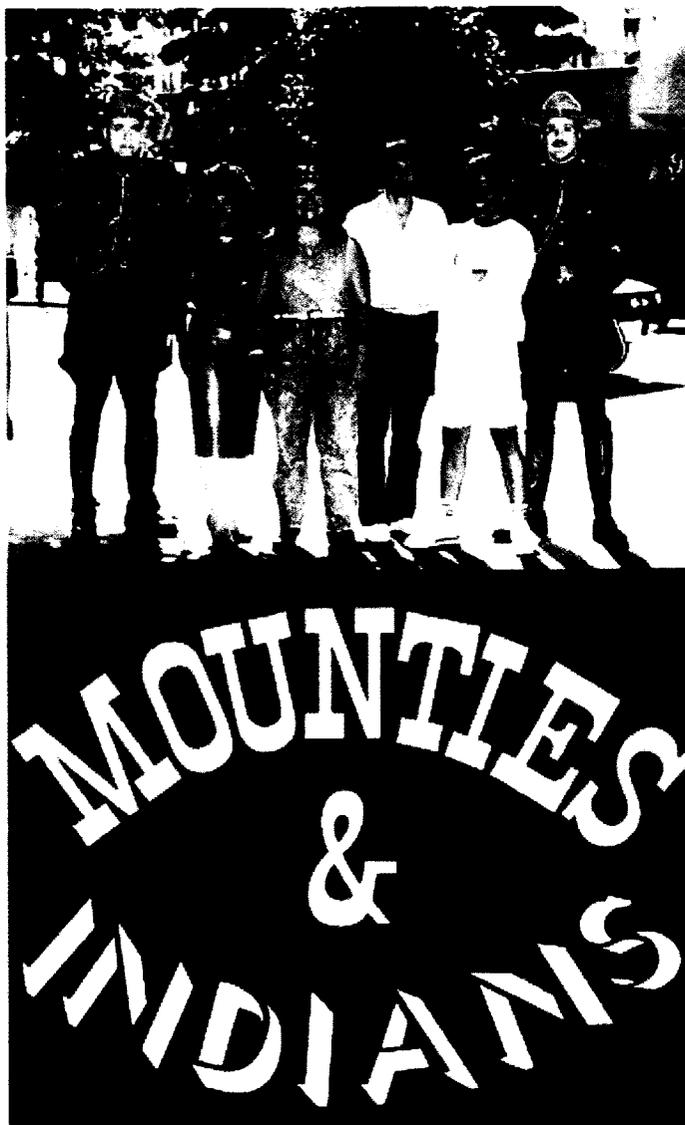


Figure 2

Ken Lum, *Mounties and Indians* (1989)



Figure 3
Dionne Brand and Claire Prieto, *Older, Stronger, Wiser* (1989)
Video Still

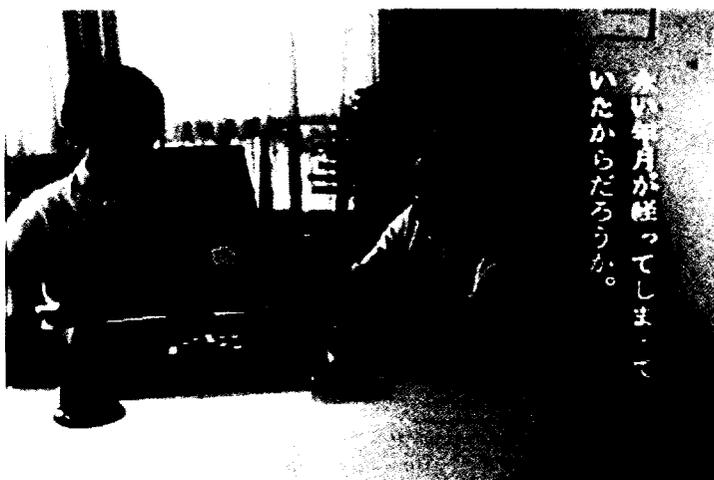


Figure 4
Midi Onodera, *The Displaced View* (1988)
Video Still



Figure 5
Sharyn Yuen, *John Chinaman* (1991)

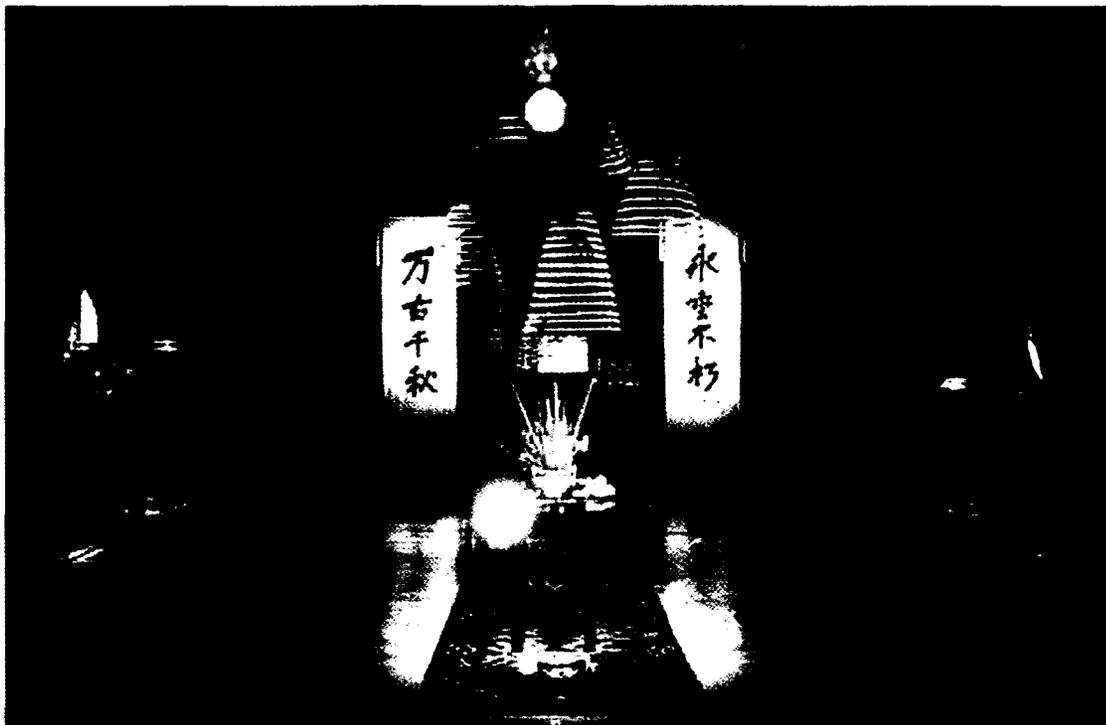


Figure 6

Paul Wong, *Chinaman's Peak: Walking the Mountain* (1995)
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

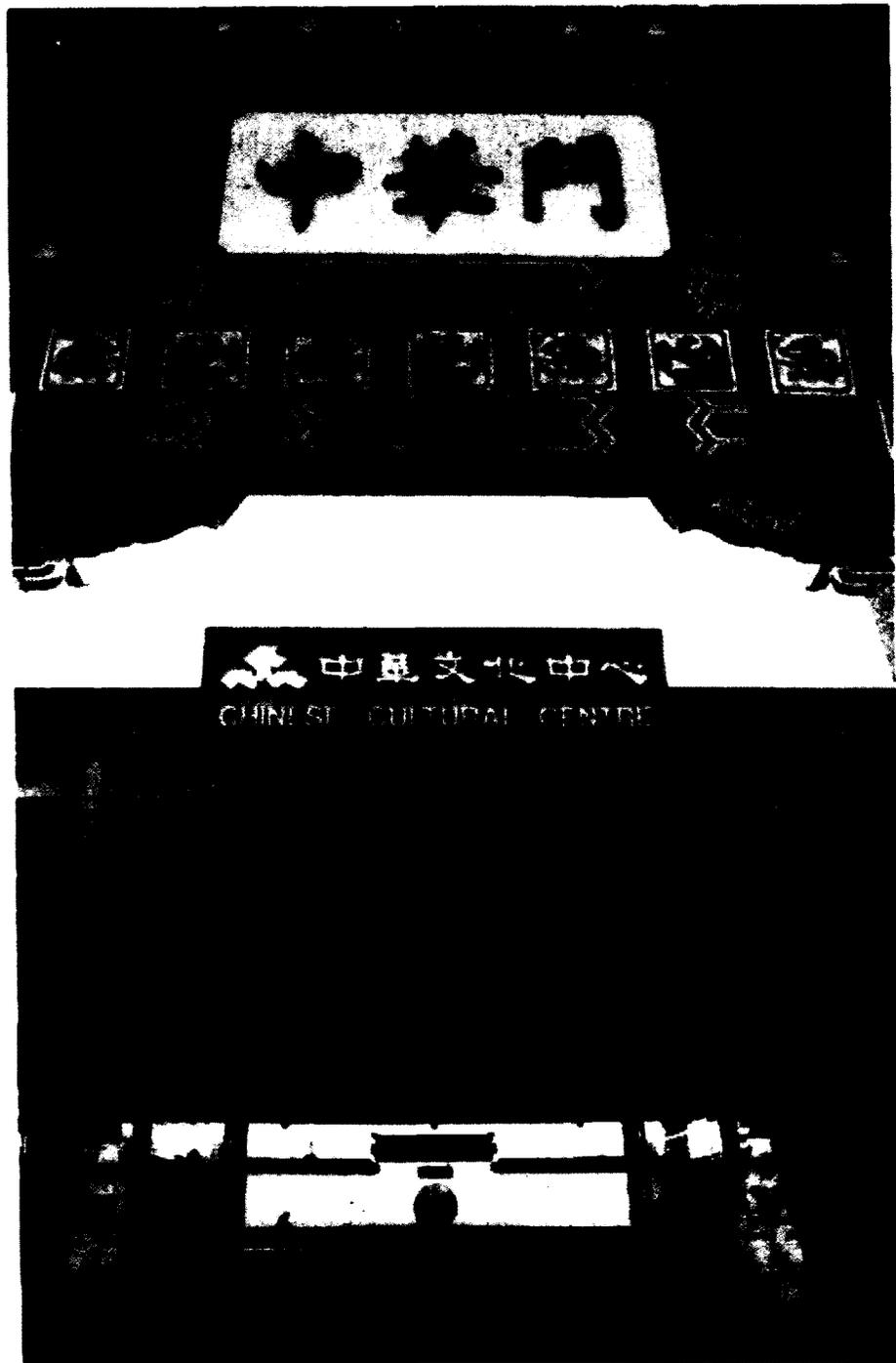


Figure 7
Chinese Cultural Centre
Vancouver, British Columbia



Figure 8

Ana Chang, *Journey into the Centre (Beyond the Western World)* (1991)



Figure 9
Paul Wong, *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* (1991)
Installation view, Chinese Cultural Centre, Vancouver



Figure 10
Paul Wong, *Ordinary Shadows, Chinese Shade* (1991)
Video Stills

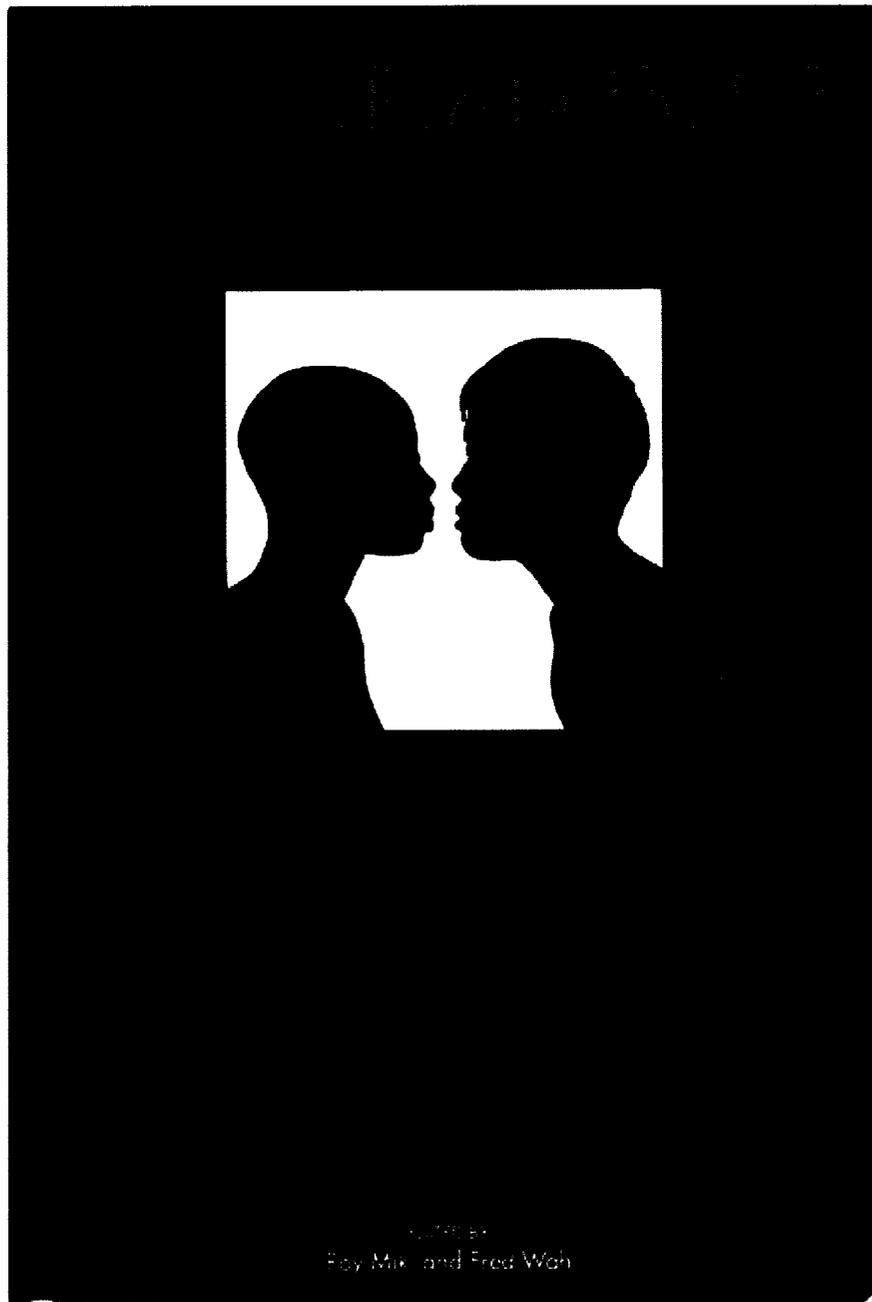


Figure 11
West Coast Line, Colour. An Issue
13/14 (Spring-Fall 1994)
Cover: photography by Chick Rice, concept by Jin-me Yoon
Editors: Roy Miki and Fred Wah

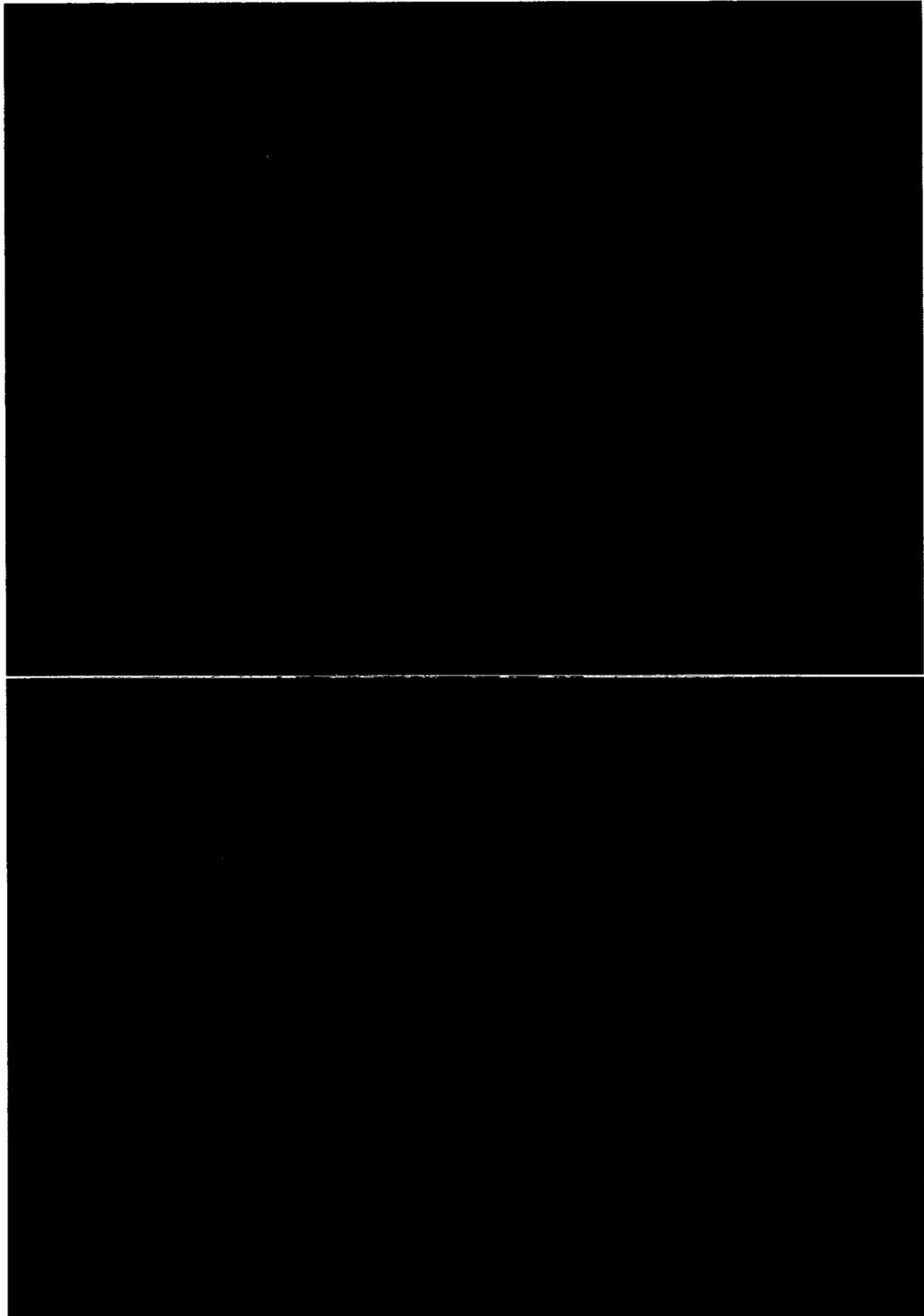


Figure 14
Henry Tsang, *Orange County* (2003)
Installation View, University of California, Irvine
Courtesy of the artist



Figure 15
Henry Tsang, *Orange County* (2003)
Video Stills
Courtesy of the artist



Figure 16
Henry Tsang, *Orange County* (2003)
Video Stills
Courtesy of the artist



Figure 17
Henry Tsang, *Orange County* (2003)
Video Stills
Courtesy of the artist



Figure 18
Do-Ho Suh, *348 West 22nd St.* (2000)
Details

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