

**PROMISING TRANSNATIONAL BIRTHS:
THE WOMB AND CYBORG POETICS
IN ASIAN CANADIAN LITERATURE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Up until this point, 2006, Asian Canadian criticism has sought legitimacy within a national framework in its efforts to carve out a distinctive Asian Canadian identity space. However, Canada is now explicitly “transnational”; it has been and continues to be a site of interconnected local and global movements that come together to produce particular spatial, political, and cultural configurations. Asian Canadian criticism has the potential to leverage itself as a critical medium for disturbing and deterritorializing constructed borders.

The permeable critical lens of the present rereads the nation as a womb-space whose naturalized borders have allowed the nation-state to obscure its heterogeneity with the myth of stable identity reproduction. Literary texts like SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children*, Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, and Kerri Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field* have a tendency to write according to national confines because they have yet to break out of naturalized domestic borders. Other texts like Anita Rau Badami’s *Tamarind Mem* and Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* claim belonging within the nation by reproducing dominant paradigms that reify constructed borders. However, recent works like Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child*, Ashok Mathur’s *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar*, and Kerri Sakamoto’s *One Hundred Million Hearts* have moved beyond claiming the nation to using present transnational contexts to rethink supposedly fixed identity spaces.

Hiromi Goto’s *Hopeful Monsters* and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* are examples of texts that further denaturalize the borders of the nation by claiming materiality and productivity within ambivalent subject positions. Donna Haraway’s “cyborg” is a crucial term for thinking about these recent Asian Canadian texts that negotiate the

multiple material and discursive forces that shape their subjectivity. The cyborg exposes Asian Canadian as a fundamentally mixed and intersectional subject position.

Asian Canadian criticism moves beyond a national framework through this critical performance that mobilizes the category as a productive rereading medium. Works like Laiwan's "notes towards a body," "notes towards a body II," and *Remotely in Touch* presage a future for Asian Canadian literature in which it can leverage its own cyborg power for performing and producing change.

Keywords:

Asian Canadian literature; transnational; womb; cyborgs

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family for all the love and support that they have given me over the years. Above all, I wish to thank my Porpor for serving as a role model for the kind of person I can only hope to be someday.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

From the National to the Cyborgian:

The Future Present of Asian Canadian Literature

Where is here now for Asian Canadian criticism? In 2006, Asian Canadian criticism stands at a moment of praxis as one of multiple Asian Canadian bodies that have worked within the previously naturalized borders of the nation. With the spread of globalization and its destabilizing effects, new spaces for rereading the borders of the nation have opened up. As Diana Brydon writes, “it’s time for a new set of questions” (14), arguing that twenty-first century Canadians must move beyond seeing the nation as a static, coherent entity to conceiving of it as a contact zone of identities that are “negotiated, interactive, and open to change” (16). Brydon makes statements that are particularly relevant to Asian Canadian criticism that is poised to articulate the potentials of reconceived national space. Asian Canadian criticism has largely sought legitimacy within a national framework in its efforts to carve out a distinctive Asian Canadian identity space. However, the present conditions of globalization create the possibility for a more permeable critical lens that reconsiders the position of Asian Canadian literature and its criticism vis-à-vis the nation. This critical lens reveals that Asian Canadian has and continues to be a category that produces in excess of the artificial containment of national boundaries. The future of Asian Canadian criticism depends on leveraging the category as a critical medium for transforming constructed boundaries into sites for disruption, contestation, and above all, generative change.

Asian Canadian critics have so far been slow to respond to the call to denaturalize identity borders. Instead, recent Asian Canadian criticism has attempted to shape its fragmented form into a more coherent Asian Canadian identity site. As part of his launch into the new millennium, Donald Goellnicht published "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature" in which he probes the lack of unified Asian Canadian cultural production in relation to its more institutionalized Asian American counterpart. Goellnicht looks specifically at the origins and evolution of "the clear identification of an ethnic minority literary tradition in English and the academic study of it as such" (2). In other words, Goellnicht wishes to make a future for Asian Canadian by using his present gaze to "look back" and trace the borders of an Asian Canadian critical and literary tradition. He uses his own critical body to fill in "the historical contours of this literary academic field" (2) because he believes that "we will be able to understand the full implications of this term only after we have begun to understand its institutional history" (2). However, in the process of doing so, Goellnicht discovers conflict, inconsistency, and absence in his search for definable presence. After citing creative and critical work from the 1970s, he expresses frustration with his inability to locate an originating moment and a contained Asian Canadian body. He poses the following question: "Lacking a unifying national metaphor equivalent to the U.S. concept of 'manifest destiny,' is Canada itself so devoid of a national identity, the collective psyche so divided and splintered, the nation so geographically regionalized, that it is virtually impossible for a national ethnic minority identity to assemble itself in a Canadian context?" (19).

Goellnicht asks this question because he believes that a body of literature and criticism must have a definable beginning in order to have a present and a future. He looks at "the development of a national panethnic Asian American Movement" and attempts to account for "the 'failure' of a parallel Asian Canadian movement to develop

in the late 1960s” (3). He contrasts the dearth of a strong Asian Canadian literary and institutional presence with an imagined future in which Asian Canadian carries the established weight of a category such as “Asian American.” In his quest for this imagined future, he attempts to gather up the dispersed threads of Asian Canadian into a coherent body of literature and criticism. He tries to impose unity on what proves to be an uncooperatively fragmented group of literary communities. These communities include East/Southeast Asian writing and South Asian Canadian writing (Saclit) that has often spilled over into Commonwealth or Postcolonial literary studies. Goellnicht questions the place of various communities within a larger identity category as he attempts to differentiate Asian Canadian territory from its “outside.” He notes that the writing of these communities could fall into classifications such as postcolonial, diasporic, and Asian North American but asserts that these categories are productive “only if this field can avoid the already identified dangers of ‘deterritorialization’ or ‘denationalization’” (22). Goellnicht proposes instead “a stronger pan-Asian approach” that “might give Asian Canadian literature as a whole a higher profile” (17) while still remaining attentive to individual differences.

Goellnicht remains wedded to the logic of a national space that privileges clear borders and a central ordering construct even though he is aware of the negative effects of such constructed spaces. For instance, he critiques the nation-state for its repressive minority policies as well as its containment of ethnic groups through a policy of multiculturalism that keeps “each isolated and focused on its own cultural ‘heritage’” (9). He is also highly critical of “the institutional practices that discipline Asian Canadian cultural production” (16) by placing it in a marginal position in relation to the dominant CanLit establishment. Nevertheless, he responds to the attempts of “institutional formations and practices in North America” “to discipline and contain various Asian ethnic groups and their cultural production” (3) by working to

construct a similarly contained Asian Canadian identity space. Goellnicht is convinced that Asian Canadian writers and critics need an identity formation that will “serve” them by providing them with “some form of solidarity for the purposes of resistance to the dominant hegemony” (29).

The Past: The Nation as a Naturalized Womb-Space

As Goellnicht discovers, Asian Canadian criticism remains a largely undefined critical field whose function in relation to the nation is still highly provisional. Asian Canadian critical writings represent non-linear interventions that do not add up to a coherent critical narrative. These articles address particular literary texts or question the state of Asian Canadian as an identity category but do not collectively converge into a stable Asian Canadian critical body.¹ For example, Roy Miki’s “pathbreaking paper” (Goellnicht “A Long Labour” 1), “Asiancy: Making Space for Asian Canadian Writing,” represents more of a complicating of the boundaries of Asian Canadian literature than a space-defining moment. Instead, the article stresses “the act of ‘deterritorialization”” (145) and “the passageway between inside/outside” that “(suddenly) transforms into a place of static, of noise, of perceptual destabilizations” (142). Miki argues for a place of noise and destabilization where an assemblage of Asian Canadian critical texts can defy efforts to contain them within tidy identity borders. In this place, the tracing of a trajectory would be yet another constructed exercise that would create a community out of scatter and impose centrality where once there was none.

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Asian Canadian exists as an unstable critical assemblage, individually, many of its critical texts are motivated by the importance of borders and the identity spaces that they demarcate. The critics of these texts wrestle with the artificial impetus to see the category as a “space” that they must claim from

larger national territory. Miki references “space” in his own “deterritorializing” critical act as he attempts to complicate the desire to claim. This preoccupation with “space” results from a relationship to the nation and its identity reproduction that has often misdirected the focus of Asian Canadian critical energies. The naturalization of the borders of the nation has given rise to a belief that Asian Canadian critics must overcome the failure to achieve a similar identity space. Many critical texts invoke words such as “belonging” (Bannerji 65), “establish” (Chao “Anthologizing the Collective”), “emergence” (Beauregard “The Emergence”) that imply that there is a definable national space that Asian Canadian must “belong to” and “emerge in” in order to claim its own place of agency. These critics frequently subscribe to national logic even in their efforts to question the nation and to carve out a space for Asian Canadian literature and its criticism. Asian Canadian critics are torn between their awareness of the shortcomings of the nation and their residual desire for national affirmation.

This claiming of the nation is rooted in a history of naturalized Canadian borders. The weddedness to the given of identity spaces is a response to a Canadian state that has repeatedly naturalized its borders from its initial nation building efforts in the nineteenth century, to the renewed nationalism of the late 1960s, to the consolidation of its identity space through the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. These state initiatives have produced national subjects who subscribe to the myth of the garrison and its borders. Asian Canadians have been reluctant to look “outside” the nation because the state disowns those who do not align with its self-conception. Northrop Frye proposes the mythic trope of the “garrison,” defined as “a closely knit and beleaguered society” in which “its moral and social values are unquestionable” (226), in order to highlight these evolving efforts to instate boundaries between a Canadian Self and its Other. The fraught negotiations involved to bring about confederation and

later, to hold the nation together, have created an uneasy relationship between “the nation,” the state, and its Others.² The state has and continues to use a constructed idea of the nation in order to manage the multiplicity of voices that each perform a different claiming of Canada.³ As Benedict Anderson argues, the nation “is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). In other words, the nation is premised on a levelling of difference that overwrites the power differentials that “actually” exist. In this case, the Canadian “nation”⁴ covers over the many competing narratives, like that of Asian Canadians, that challenge how Canada should be represented. This nation functions as a naturalized identity space that allows the state to monopolize the production of identities within its borders.

Canada thus emerges out of a history of border maintenance that comes to visibility through a rereading strategy that applies the lenses of the present to past literature and its contexts. The key critical terms in this dissertation – womb, transnational, and cyborg – each have their own individual histories; however, within this discussion of Asian Canadian literature and criticism, they function more as critical lenses that form part of an overall reading strategy than as labels that operate according to strict bounds of usage. As a result, their meanings are dependent on the specific contexts in which they are used and on the particularities of the reading moment. This close attention to context and to textuality keeps these terms rooted in the literature and its history while simultaneously generating new meaning through the reading act. As contingent and shifting critical lenses, the terms allow for new moments of contact that read the texts beyond the often naturalized blinders of the past.

This rereading begins with a critical term that draws attention to the nation as a naturalized womb-space where distinctions between inside and outside contain acts of creation. The womb provides a means of thinking about borders and the links between

the nation and a regulated female reproductive body. It recognises that national identity control has a distinctly gendered aspect with the female body frequently serving as the handmaiden for states seeking to circumscribe their national spaces. As Bracha Ettinger argues, the notion of “the One-body with its inside and outside” (“Weaving” 86) has often confined women and their bodies to representational projects that leverage the security and claustrophobia associated with the womb in order to police national borders. The womb lends itself particularly well to this policing because, as a defined space within the female reproductive body, it gives physical articulation to artificial distinctions such as outside/inside, self/other, and foreign/domestic. Those individuals who benefit from this border maintenance work hard to to disclaim that the conflation of the nation with the female body has specific discursive and material effects for those who live within naturalized domestic borders.

Applied to the category Asian Canadian, the womb recognizes the boundaries that have contained Asian Canadian subjects within an artificial national space. The naturalization of this division of space has allowed Canada to obscure its recombinant nature with the myth of stable identity reproduction. Those in control of the nation have been aware that they must have a monopoly over the identities within Canada if they wish to forge a stable national future. However, like the physical womb, the national womb only *appears* stable. As Donna Haraway writes, “in short, where there is sex, literal reproduction is a contradiction in terms. The issue from the self is always (an)other” (*Primate Visions* 352). In other words, reproduction is a misnomer because it is premised on the *recombination* of multiple genes from more than one source to produce a new body. Similarly, the state seeks a stable reproduction cycle in order to mask the multiple discursive and material conditions that come together to produce the nation. The unmasking of these discursive and material conditions emphasizes that the relationship between the nation-state and its imagined womb-space is a *process* that

seeks to naturalize and then reproduce what is, in fact, a highly fictionalized identity. The state constructs a coherent womb-space that obscures the multitude of social, cultural, political, and economic motivations from both within and without that constitute identity.

However, despite the claims of the state, the Canadian garrison has never been a pure, closely knit community. The Canadian state has attempted to cover over this fact by representing certain bodies as being aberrant within normative national space. Time and time again, it has policed the constructed boundaries of the nation by wielding its powers against the racialized body. As David Palumbo-Liu asserts, “one of the fundamental questions for the modern state has been how to address dramatically increased flows of people, moving across borders and inserted into national spaces in ever more informal, chaotic, and uneven ways, how to exploit these flows and at the same time neutralize their threat” (*Asian/American* 31). Its solution has been the use of the racialized body as a boundary marker that separates its Self from its Other in an artificial covering over of domestic interconnectivity. The representation of Asian Canadians as Other is the product of a state that has used difference to manage and cover over the penetrability of its borders. The spectre of the Asian-identified Other has been an effective means of placing a firm divide between the constructed nation and its menacingly unpredictable “outside.” Asian Canadians have had to combat this institutional discrimination that has frequently disbarred them from claiming a place within the national womb-space. They have learned through experience that the benign appearance of the nation hides the discursive menace of the state that can institutionally legitimate the racist Othering of certain marked groups.

Consequently, in a bid to control the borders of its womb-space and neutralize the threat of its Others, the Canadian state has often exercised its legislative might through frequently violent measures. The womb thus also highlights the literal

reproductive effects of the state control of Asian Canadian subjects. State measures have had significant material repercussions for those Asian Canadian bodies that do not fit the conception of the nation that the state has constructed. Incidents like the enforced harbouring of the Komagata Maru in 1914, the Japanese Canadian internment during World War II, as well as legislation such as the Chinese Head Tax and the Chinese Immigration Act⁵ of 1923, have demonstrated the use of state powers to enforce who can hold citizenship within the nation, as well as what form that citizenship can legitimately take. Not only did these moves regulate the flows into the nation, but these moves also worked to control, if not suppress, the generative abilities of Asian Canadians. For example, the Canadian government devised a Head Tax policy that aimed to limit the growth of the Chinese Canadian community by restricting the entry of Chinese immigrants into national space. As well, the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II splintered familial networks and significantly reduced the presence of Japanese Canadians on the West Coast. The discursive and material constraints around Asian Canadian reproduction have aided the Canadian state in propagating a coherent narrative that has made it extremely difficult to create outside of its internal cycle. The state has attempted to naturalize its womb-space through what Donna Haraway refers to as “evolutionary stable strategies” (*Simians* 61) that have ensured the replication of the national Self into the future. It has deployed specific strategies against the racialized body in order to purge its unwanted “foreign” elements and to solidify the slippery relationship between itself and its created national space.

These specific strategies have evolved as the Canadian state has responded to changing threats from its perceived “outside.” More recently, the Canadian state has adopted a more sophisticated managerial approach to difference as significant shifts in immigration patterns have altered the demographics of its womb-space.⁶ After the introduction of a 1967 Points System that saw a dramatic increase in the number of

immigrants from Asia entering the nation, the government moved from denying the presence of difference within its borders to recognizing it in a contained and appropriative manner.⁷ The nation-state developed new means of monitoring the relationship between itself and its racialized bodies through a multiculturalism policy that it introduced in 1971 and legislatively solidified in 1988 through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.⁸ This Multiculturalism Act allowed the state to construct a new “nation” more suited to deal with the disruption from the implementation of the Points System:

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada. (6)

In its Preamble, the Multiculturalism Act recognizes diversity with a national façade that builds difference into its coherent mythology. The seemingly laudable celebration of diversity hides the new role that the racialized body assumes within the reconstructed multicultural nation. Whereas the state previously worked to suppress the generative abilities of the racialized body, under multiculturalism, it appropriates this body within a multiculturally contained womb-space in order to reproduce its own identity agenda.

“Racial” difference in a multicultural nation therefore metamorphoses into an essentialized “ethnic” commodity that the state claims for its own use. These “ethnic” commodities play into the privileging of representations that maintain a clear separation between their celebrated differences and normative Canadian society.

Smaro Kamboureli critiques the multicultural use of “folklore” “both to obscure and

reveal. Endorsed and promoted as the most transparent form of cultural authenticity, it can also lead to cultural insiderism, an absolute belief in essential differences” (107). This emphasis on essential differences has led the government to promote Asian Canadian events and creative work that work within its cultural mosaic.⁹ The willingness of designated ethnic minorities to perform their difference for the multicultural state attests to the ability of the state to co-opt the racialized body into stabilizing its identity reproductions. As Himani Bannerji argues, the Act superficially opens the national womb-space to heterogeneity while simultaneously functioning as a policy of containment that places limits on the disruptive potential of “cultural fragments” (10). She writes that multiculturalism “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” (10). Bannerji challenges a multicultural nation that recognizes diversity without allowing it to unsettle its hierarchical distinctions. In other words, the Canadian government essentializes its Others in order to mask the continued and evolving permeability of national space. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act allows the state to cover over the disjuncture between its national projections and the heterogeneous and often violent reality of its identity spaces.

The result of such discursive and material consolidation of Canadian borders has been both writing and criticism that operate within a naturalized national framework. In order to claim national membership, Asian Canadian writers have often felt compelled to suppress, deny, and cover over the “foreign” aspects of their identity. They have had to limit their acts of textual creation, frequently writing according to, and not openly against, the confines of the national womb-space. Joy Kogawa states that “after the war Japanese Canadians similarly tried to distance themselves from their ethnicity” (qtd. in Cheung *Articulate* 6). Asian Canadians found themselves writing

within a claustrophobic womb-space that limited their ability to acknowledge the “outside” creative influences that had and continued to inflect Canadian society. This situation produced texts like Kogawa’s *Obasan* that depicted Asian Canadian subjectivity that defined itself primarily through its national connections. These texts contained ambivalent representations of Asian Canadian subjectivity that were the creations of writers who grappled with how to write for the domestic while covering over their racialized difference. In *Diamond Grill*, Fred Wah speaks of this dilemma when he writes of “the racism within me that makes and consumes that neutral (white) version of myself, that allows me the sad privilege of being, in this white white world, not the target but the gun” (138). Just as Wah inhabits a body that can visually “pass,” many Asian Canadian writers wrote texts that “passed” by camouflaging their foreign connections. They found themselves reifying artificial boundaries in order to fit into national space.

Meanwhile, the efforts of the state to build a coherent “nation” have been replicated in its literary critics who have also sought various means to force coherence out of disarray. This parallel “nation-building” has placed yet another containing wall around Asian Canadian literature. Asian Canadian consists of a series of interconnected womb-spaces that have worked together to regulate its generative capacity. One womb-space is the English Canadian canon, “CanLit,” that developed within a context of nation building following the centennial year of Canadian confederation. During this period, thematic critics like Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, and D. G. Jones imposed coherence on the body of Canadian literature through themes that embodied their vision of Canada. These critics performed a “looking back” on Canadian literary history that left little room for those Other voices who were disconnected from the privileged origins of CanLit. This “looking back” claimed origins through figures like Susanna Moodie that exemplified what, in 1972, Margaret Atwood

called the “Survival, la *Survivance*” (32) that gives Canada “a single unifying and informing symbol at its core” (31). This drive to form a national literature had such a profound impact because of its naturalization of a constructed version of Canadian experience. This CanLit established a need for a national canon that was not only narrow in focus, but also whose narrowing tendencies would render illegitimate stories that deviated from the norm. Cynthia Sugars in her introduction to *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* speaks of “the ostensibly unifying anti-colonial nationalism and (sometimes) colonial expression of the 60s and 70s” that “has given way to a more complicated and heterogeneous sense of the postcolonial as it applies to Canada” (xx). However, she cautions against being too “complacent” as “the Canadian locale is far from *post*-colonial (by which I mean a sense that the forces of colonization have been superceded in some idealized utopian postcolonial time/space” (xx).

Sugar makes a caution that is particularly necessary given the ability of CanLit, since the canon formation of the 1960s and 1970s, to shift in order to reaffirm itself as *the* defining body of the nation’s literature. The stable appearance of CanLit belies the disruptive moments in its history when writers like Joy Kogawa and SKY Lee presented competing narratives to its literary garrison. As these and many other minority voices of the 1970s and 1980s began to challenge the mono-culture of this canon, CanLit shifted its womb walls in order to regain control of its identity space. These “resistant” texts often voiced incidents like the Japanese Canadian internment or the Chinese Canadian involvement in the building of the CPR, that revealed the multiplicity of Other elements that had an equal claim to a place within the history of the nation. These disruptive creations were a challenge to the stable structures of CanLit that privileged narratives that fit contained national projections. The establishment of the Asian Canadian Writer’s Workshop (ACWW) in 1979, the publication of anthologies

such as *Green Snow* in 1976 and *Inalienable Rice* in 1979, as well as the emergence of writers such as SKY Lee, Jim Wong-Chu, and Paul Yee, rattled CanLit as it continued to claim to be the the body of literature that spoke for the nation.

CanLit critics have successfully contained competing narratives with strategies that mirror the efforts of the state to manage the difference within its midst. This regulating literary body has taken its lead from a national womb-space that effectively absorbs difference into its identity reproduction. The inclusion of Other texts into the CanLit body appropriates dissent before it becomes unruly as it encloses dissonance within a multicultural national space. Later revisioning of this canon has granted place to “minority” texts within its space but without permitting a simultaneous questioning of the overall containing borders of CanLit. Instead, the canon reworks its master narrative to assimilate diverse voices into its story and to underline the strength of its naturalized borders. The proliferation of Asian Canadian writers and critics, the increasing institutionalization of Asian Canadian literature, and the canonization of earlier, once disruptive texts, give the appearance of inclusion as Canada moves towards a more benign view of its minority citizens. However, this “inclusion” has led to an inability to avow “race” in the present. For instance, the appearance of *Obasan* in CanLit anthologies and on university course syllabi, as well as the 1988 Japanese Canadian Redress Settlement, permit the Canadian state to believe that it has made peace with its violently disjunctive past. As Miki writes, “disavowal as a dominant – and dominating – reaction towards the race codes that bind needs to be recognized as a lynch-pin for social productions of the body” (*Broken Entries* 205-6). He draws attention to the current potential for new liberal revisioning of the canon to “cover over its own transgressionary practices” (161). The furor surrounding the “Writing Thru Race” conference in 1994 and the refugee boat people crisis in 1999 proved that the

violence attached to an artificial national space is still very much a present concern.¹⁰ As a result, these transgressionary practices continue despite a reconfigured multicultural image.

The consequences of such canon formation are Asian Canadian texts that have had to negotiate their relationship to the nation as a derivative body marked as “Asian Canadian literature.” While the literature itself varies in its content and concerns, the term Asian Canadian has attached itself to the literature because of its subsidiary status in relation to a normative national canon. CanLit has granted place to its “minority” texts but this privilege is contingent on their marked status within the borders of its womb-space. Although the texts span time, geography, and culture, they possess a common visibility that binds them together as a forced and constructed literary community. Asian Canadian literature has found itself struggling to claim full membership within the larger body of Canadian literature that dominates the national literary landscape. CanLit’s status as *the* national literary body has fuelled such an impetus to belong. This desire persists as Asian Canadian writing continues to exist in an implicit hyphenated position that disconnects it from and yet connects it to the nation and its literature. This position leaves Asian Canadian literature in a state of unfulfilled desire as it strives to belong to something in which it seems forever marked. Miki questions, “What’s a racialized text like you doing in a place like this?” (*Broken Entries* 160-180), as a reminder that racialization marks and contains as “different” those who fall within its constructed borders.

The constructed borders of the nation have equally marked Asian Canadian criticism. The overall result has been a body of literature and criticism that lacks a definable form but that is still convinced that it needs to establish a place for itself within the nation. The state has naturalized the national womb-space and its borders to such an extent that critics have postponed their confrontation of the potential roles for

Asian Canadian literature beyond these constructed borders. However, recent critics have begun to realize that Asian Canadian criticism, in its search for national legitimacy, has in many ways reified the very national borders it has sought to challenge. They are conscious of the dangers of a subscription to national discourse that covers over both the permeability of both themselves and the nation. Writer and critic Larissa Lai looks back on the identity politics movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, writing that “the discussion remained largely circumscribed within the discourse of the nation-state [...] But our energies, mine included, were largely directed towards the production of a place for racially marginalized people within the nation” (“Future Asians” 168-9). However, Lai argues that “the debates have also shifted with the shifting political climate and the shift in international geopolitics. On the level of theory, intellectuals inside and outside the academy are just beginning to deal with this shift, which will invariably require a shift in priorities at an activist level and thus, I think a shift in strategy” (169). Lai underlines a concern that the old strategies, though important at their particular contextual moments, require rethinking at a time of altering global contexts. This concern causes her to pose necessary questions that call for workable theoretical and material strategies for breaking Asian Canadians writers, critics, and activists out of a naturalized womb-space.

Critics like Lai are thus expressing an awareness that a shift is needed to renegotiate the relationship Asian Canadians have with the nation and its constructed womb-space. The answer lies in the revelation that “the nation” merely creates the illusion of an enclosed identity territory that, in fact, hides the interpenetrated reality of most Asian Canadian subjectivities. The category is a fiction that masks an unstable body of creative and critical writing that has thrived more on scatter than on regulating rules of inclusion and exclusion. Asian Canadian criticism must now actively reconceptualize itself in order to work beyond its supplementary national position. This

rethinking will require a recognition of Asian Canadian as a category that locates itself *across* rather than *within* constructed borders. In his contribution to the *Essays on Canadian Writing* 2002 “Race” special issue, Guy Beauregard points to the need for “the necessary rethinking of the analytical tools that we need to understand the production of racialized and gendered subjects in a transnational world” (“What is at Stake” 231-2); similarly, Roy Miki in his article “Altered States: Global Currents, The Spectral Nation, and the Production of ‘Asian Canadian’” stresses the present opportunity for a reconceiving of the nation:

The fragmentation of formerly (more or less) coherent public spheres can provide the motivation for practices of critique, countermoves and alliances. These practices have the capacity to enable a rethinking of ‘nation’ as a complex of heterogeneous global/local formations, constituted not solely as enclaves of identification but more generatively as the instance of negotiations across and within temporalities and boundaries. The time of the nation needs to be reconceived as non-synchronous. (54)

Miki argues that the nation is composed of “heterogeneous global/local formations.” Under this reconception, Asian Canadian emerges as a production of multiple forces and discourses that defies not only spatial and temporal enclosures, but also fixed definitional boundaries. As Miki writes in another article, “at this moment, in other words, it may be critically provocative to read Asian Canadian as a kind of ‘signifier without a signified’ (to use Slavoj Žižek’s phrasing), and to approach its uncertain status as the effects of concealment and disclosure in the social sites where its alterity is played out” (“Can Asian Adian?” 58). Asian Canadian criticism will gain the critical leverage of a “signifier without a signified” once it acknowledges that both it and the nation are constructed identity formations.

The search for origins and for the establishment of a clear Asian Canadian identity site are constructed battles that overlook that Asian Canadian derives considerable critical strength from its status as a floating signifier. Susan Koshy in her article "The Fiction of Asian American Literature" argues that Asian American critics must recognize "the catachrestic status of the formation. I use the term 'catachresis' to indicate that there is no literal referent for the rubric 'Asian American,' and, as such, the name is marked by the limits of its signifying power" (342). Koshy makes assertions that are particularly relevant to an Asian Canadian category whose assemblage resists the more linear and established narrative trajectory of its American counterpart. Critics like Beauregard, Lai, and Miki recognize the productive instability of the category Asian Canadian; however, unless a shift occurs that claims this instability, Asian Canadian will lose sight of its strength as a disruptive and deterritorializing critical medium. As the number and profile of Asian Canadian literary texts increase, along with the interest in the literature as a field for critical study, Asian Canadian threatens to assume a more static form. Already many universities are offering Asian Canadian literature courses and hiring specialists to teach and produce under an Asian Canadian critical label. Moreover, it is tempting for critics to claim a place for Asian Canadian criticism within the national womb-space that will serve as a "home" for future academic and literary production. However, Asian Canadian criticism risks naturalizing its constructed borders and losing its power as a floating signifier if it continues its bid for a signified that will pin down its definitional borders.

The Present's Transnational Borderspace

Asian Canadian criticism can make the transition out of a bounded national womb-space by leveraging current contexts that offer new ways of seeing past once naturalized borders. Canada is now a globally inflected national space that is producing markedly different texts from the nation-centred ones of the past. Globalization and the interpenetrations between supposedly static sites have revealed the nation as a construct that covers over its porous identity spaces. The realities of global trade and the movement of capital, information, and people around the world have made the isolationist myths that the state propagates increasingly untenable. These myths still wield considerable influence but the state has had to acknowledge that its projected identity is a façade that deflects attention away from its cracks of vulnerability. As Jan Penrose writes, “it is suggested that by reducing the centrality of the nation as *the* basis of personal and group identities, new spaces may be opened up for the creation and/or expression of additional identities; ones which may ultimately prove instrumental in redirecting global integration away from the reinforcement of prevailing hegemonies and toward more balanced, fulfilling and equitable human experiences” (18). At a time when globalization and technoscience are exposing master narratives like the nation’s as fiction and revealing new spaces for agency and control, critics can mobilize Asian Canadian to rethink the nation as a transnational borderspace.

The transnational adds a new dimension to the rereading process by focusing on the blurring and disruption of once naturalized geographical, cultural, and political boundaries. While such terms such as the global, the cosmopolitan, and the international also attempt to capture the changes that are occurring in a post-Fordist world, they lack the ability of the transnational to function as both a label and a

medium for seeing interconnection. Aihwa Ong privileges the transnational for its ability to highlight the transformative elements of current political and economic shifts:

Trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something. Besides suggesting new relations between nation-states and capital, transnationality also alludes to the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism” (*Flexible 4*)

The “trans” in transnational consequently adds an element of movement that emphasizes what the term can *do* as opposed to what it *is*. These transformative powers arise from present altered national and cultural borders that allow for an ability to see past once naturalized boundaries. This act of seeing overturns the womb-like distinctions between inside and outside and reveals the heterogeneity within seeming homogeneity.

In this case, the uneasy disjuncture between the Canadian nation and the state reveals transnational interconnections that exist within a supposedly pure national womb-space. The recent blurring of national borders provides opportunities for rethinking the interrelationships between the local and the global. Canada is now much more explicitly “transnational”; it has been and continues to be a site of intra and inter uterine movements that come together to produce particular spatial, political, and cultural configurations. The spread of globalization that has accelerated the movement of people, capital, and goods across its boundaries has destabilized the ability of the nation-state to claim impermeability. For example, the Canadian government renegotiated its purported impenetrability for perceived economic benefit when it ratified the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement in 1989 and NAFTA in 1994. Jan Penrose writes that the processes of globalization “have also actively disrupted

assumptions about cultural unity and distinctiveness which have long been used to ‘prove’ the existence of a nation and to thereby legitimize the right to statehood” (30). She continues, “thus, even where it once *seemed* that a distinctive group of people was the sole occupant of a state, this illusion of uniformity has become increasingly difficult to sustain” (30). Nonetheless, despite these disruptions to its cultural uniformity, the nation-state continues to pursue its reproductive agenda to the detriment of the Others within its womb-space. The present difference is that the increased visibility of this process creates new opportunities for questioning and reworking its once naturalized assumptions.

The nation still has a fundamental role to play within a globalized context but the realities of global trade and the open movement of people into and out of its borders has made it more difficult for it to claim that it is a disconnected womb-space. Michael Peter Smith in his work, *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*, speaks of a new space that “is a translocal, multi-sited, spatially reconfigured world of cross-cutting social networks ‘from below’ as well as ‘in between,’ formed by social actors engaged in a reterritorialized politics of place-making” (17). Moreover, Smith argues that “transnational networks of social practice are constituted by their interrelations with and groundedness *within* localities” (15). The nation is thus made up of transnational networks that it has previously overlooked, suppressed, and covered over with artificial stability. Once invisible people and relationships suddenly come to the forefront of the critical reading process when the transnational removes the blinders of national thinking. Kandice Chuh describes this process as “recognizing *the transnational within the national*” (*Imagine* 69). This process, according to Chuh, involves a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between the national and the transnational in which they are “coextensive, as unfolding simultaneously and in intimate relation (69). Chuh underlines that the transnational is a way of seeing that

the nation and its hitherto “outside” are highly implicated with one another. This transnational borderspace destabilizes binaries to see mutually constitutive relationships. Asian Canadian is one of many elements that interact within a national womb-space that the destabilizing effects of globalization have brought into view.

This emphasis on the revelatory powers of the transnational means a term like the transnational that originates within a context of twenty-first century globalization can also play a significant role in rereading the past for covered over interconnections. As Chuh writes, “I mean transnational as a cognitive analytic that traces the incapacity of the nation-state to contain and represent fully the subjectivities and ways of life that circulate within the nation-*space*” (62). Taken as a cognitive analytic, the term circulates within earlier contexts in order to highlight and unmask the dynamic interchanges and interdependencies within supposedly pure identity spaces. In short, the transnational operates as a signifier with a constantly recontextualized signified. And because its meaning is contingent on continually shifting contexts, the transnational elements in one particular context may not necessarily be transnational in the same way as those that appear elsewhere. For example, early Chinese Canadian narratives deal with the desire of the Canadian government to cover over its use of foreign labour to construct its national space; meanwhile, texts that treat Japanese Canadian internment grapple with the shame of being marked with traces of a perceived wartime enemy. These two examples illustrate a range of transnational meaning that is the product of very particular reading contexts. While these different applications of the transnational vary depending on context and the specific conditions of the reading act, they share an overall commitment to searching out and negotiating interconnections within seeming stasis.

The future of Asian Canadian criticism therefore lies in taking advantage of the transnational interconnectivity that critics can now finally see through the permeable

lens of the present. While Asian Canadian criticism must still realize this future, it can look to its literature that is already performing within this transnational borderspace. Asian Canadian authors are conscious of the present and past contexts in which they write, and more importantly, are able to articulate their mappings of local/global configurations. While earlier texts aimed to write themselves into a naturalized womb-space, recent Asian Canadian texts are representing a national space whose blurred borders and unstable flows resist static territorial claims. These texts not only express a willingness to travel beyond the borders of the nation, but they also bring the fruits of their travels back to national space. Writers like Ashok Mathur, Hiromi Goto, and Larissa Lai unmask the constructed frames of the nation and then proceed to write from these globally inflected local spaces. The “images upon images upon images of characters and messengers and stories all shouting their existence onto a mirage of screens high above the transitional goes and comes below” (Mathur 212) that appear in these texts elude the more binary inside/outside of a national critical gaze. Asian Canadian writers match explicitly transnational contexts with texts that expose, map, and situate the networks and histories that are an integral part of the nation.

Moreover, Asian Canadian writers have seized these networks as they engage in both content and form with a reworked national womb-space. This national space renegotiates a new role for itself within local/global interpenetrations that differs from its previous naturalized identity claims. These writers are responding to these shifts by generating texts that defy a straight-forward narrative trajectory that once relied on the nation as the central ordering construct. They confront new more complex power configurations that demand equally complex literary representations. For example, in *Salt Fish Girl*, Larissa Lai depicts a main character who lives “on the west coast of North America” (11) where she is subject to corporate control and biotechnology instead of just the isolated power of the nation-state. Lai writes of a space of creative potential in

which “there was no order, nothing had a clear relationship to anything else. The land was not the land, the sea not the sea, the air not the air, the sky not the sky” (1). Lai and these other recent writers have adapted their literary creations to reflect transnational borderspaces where borders exist as denaturalized constructs. They posit a permeable identity category that produces through its multiple interconnections. Asian Canadian writers are gaining proficiency in their juggling of the intricacies of altered national spaces. Their present work performs new alternative reading strategies for critically shifting Asian Canadian into a transnational borderspace. Asian Canadian writers have moved beyond “claiming the nation” to using their present contexts to rethink sacrosanct national space. Their exposing of stable national identity reproduction as fiction, both in its past and its present, provides Asian Canadian critics with a model for rereading the literature and criticism that have gone before. As both Canadian and Asian Canadian identity formations are revealed to be signifiers without signifieds, these writers challenge and reread their constructed boundaries.

Feminine Textuality and Future Cyborg Poetics

These recent Asian Canadian literary texts show that the transnational connections that are an explicit part of Asian Canadian’s “now” are an equally important part of its “then.” In other words, Asian Canadian writers are creating new textuality that motions its criticism to new conceptual pathways with new possibilities for agency. These new possibilities arise from realizing that the repressive policies that the state has enacted against Asian Canadians have merely created the appearance of an arbitrary oppressor/oppressed model. These once arbitrary disciplinary measures are part of the border maintenance that the state has used to make invisible *what has always been* within the national womb. As Scott McFarlane writes, “the Canadian State,

so dependent on Canadian history for legitimacy, is haunted by the insistent return of armies who challenge its representative authority. And these armies are masked” (“The Haunt of Race” 20). He continues, “the textuality of the political, social and cultural fabric is more and more in evidence. The nation is written. The nation is graphic. As writing it is doubly marked by identity and otherness” (20).

Ten years after McFarlane wrote these words, the now explicit textuality of the nation reveals that the anxious control embedded in the nation-building history of the Canadian state has a distinctly gendered aspect. New agency apart from the nation is possible as Asian Canadian critics gain the ability to reread *both* the racialized and gendered aspects of state identity management. This act of seeing reveals that the Canadian state has taken action against a particular Asian Canadian body in order to naturalize its reproduction process: the female body. In other words, it has often served the ends of those in control of the nation-state to treat the feminine as a given when monitoring and regulating the growth of its projected Asian Canadian Others. As Anne Balsamo writes, “the role of the gendered body in this boundary setting process is significant; it serves as the site where anxieties about the ‘proper order of things’ erupt and are eventually managed ideologically” (*Technologies* 10). Balsamo underlines that the boundaries of the gendered body often determine who can suppress “anxieties” and dictate the “proper order of things.” This racialized female body has posed a threat to national boundaries because it can produce material evidence of the difference in its midst. The Canadian state has combated this threat by casting the Asian Canadian female as a passive body that labours for a national reproductive agenda. The longing of the state for reproductive stability has translated into an intense preoccupation with controlling, regulating, and disciplining racialized female bodies to prevent them from disrupting its coherent womb-space.

However, the movement from a coherent “nation” to its current transnational condition has reduced the ability of the state to incorporate the racialized female body into its identity reproduction. At a time of global exposure, the Canadian state must acknowledge that it has covered up its production of the “nation” through the exclusion, suppression, and frequent cooptation of the racialized female body. In short, global exposure reveals that the state has naturalized its treatment of this body in order to solidify its own identity borders. However, Asian Canadian writers are now beginning to reclaim the generative powers that the state has used in its production of the “nation.” They have preceded their critics in gaining renewed agency as they pierce appearances and seize the power of the racialized female body to create new, more potent textuality: “It’s my goddamn body and I make my own decisions on what I will and will not do with it!” (Goto *Hopeful Monsters* 62). These writers are challenging a history in which the racialized female body has served as the naturalized Other to a national Self by reworking their own relationship to this generative body. As Griselda Pollock asserts, the denaturalization of the womb “can raise that interior female bodily/psychic cavity to the level of a *subjectivizing* borderspace” (54) and transform it into a space of agency. While the conflation of the nation-state with a constructed domestic space has stymied Asian Canadian production, the denaturalized womb is now a site of ongoing contestation and potential productive power.

As the nation splinters into many competing fragments that the nation-state previously sutured together, the transnational linkages that threaten national space are now visible. In the past, the naturalized borders of the nation prevented Asian Canadian writers and critics from claiming a place amidst the fissures and contradictions of the borderspace. However, they can now move the Asian Canadian female body to a place of agency by claiming a cyborg subjectivity. The cyborg adds further productivity to the rereading process by introducing an element of situatedness

and materiality to the blurring and disruption of borders that the transnational performs. Donna Haraway describes the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 291) that emerges out of “a specific matrix” (qtd. in Goodeve 129) and that “refer[s] to those kinds of entities that became historically possible around World War II and just after” (128). Haraway situates the cyborg within this historical moment but she also states that “what interests me most about the cyborg is that it does unexpected things and accounts for contradictory histories while allowing for some kind of working *in and of* the world” (129). The cyborg is thus a term that can perform unexpected critical work as it inhabits a borderspace of shifting and contradictory histories. The “cyborg subject position” within “the belly of the monster” (“The Promise of Monsters” 300) opens up the possibility for other identities that also locate themselves amidst chaos and fragmentation. Moreover, Haraway emphasizes a materiality of the inbetween that lends itself particularly well to Asian Canadian writing that claims textuality at points of border contestation.

The Asian Canadian cyborg is a sibling of Haraway’s cyborg because it also posits identity as an assemblage of discourses, technologies, and material impositions, but in ways that are specific to a Canadian context. Asian Canadians have and continue to be cyborgs who occupy mixed subject positions within the belly of an interconnected Canadian womb-space. Although early literature appears free of cyborg traces, a closer inspection reveals subjectivities within fragmentation that were not possible or that were foreclosed within repressive identity conditions. A cyborg reading lens reveals that the Canadian state has suppressed mixed subjectivity in an attempt to prevent Asian Canadians from engaging with the textuality that the national façade masks. In other words, the state has feared a cyborg subject that can challenge a coherent national façade in its refusal to accept “racial” and gender alienation. As

Haraway asserts, “‘women of colour’ might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 311). The Asian Canadian cyborg subject can reclaim this fusion as it inventories the specific outsider identities that give it such potent and fearful subjectivity.

Recent Asian Canadian writers are claiming similarly “potent” cyborg subjectivities as they situate themselves and their texts in the borderspace that separates humans/technology and male/female: “*of a frozen time / of the not yet born / of the still being born*” (Laiwan “notes towards a body II” 147). They see the nation as a construct that regulates the relationship that the racialized female subject has with her body. The resulting cyborg textual bodies break their residual ties to naturalized national space as they unearth the buried material threats to the national façade. While the cyborg hitherto existed as the invisible within Asian Canadian literature and its criticism, it gains materiality and texture through overlooked traces that now come to view in a global, techno-infused world. The current porosity of the nation allows Asian Canadian writers to view not only present cyborg bodies, but also the past possibilities that the nation denied, suppressed, and aborted in order to protect its identity space. The cyborg subject exposes and then challenges the efforts of the state to use the racialized female body to solidify its own unstable body politic.

Asian Canadian literature is therefore already producing new textuality that claims a cyborg subjectivity through the reconfiguration of old connections through the lens of the transnational present. As Asian Canadian criticism performs its own rereading of the nation-bound past, its “beyond” will also produce a cyborg subjectivity. This “beyond” sees its promise in recent literary texts that claim a gendered and racialized textual body that takes a stand in an ambiguous and conflicted location. For example, the artist/poet Laiwan seizes the productivity of the transnational borderspace in a cyborg textual performance:

here is an image of being *not yet* in this world

a floating, bouncing, jumping shape closer to cyborg than human (“notes towards a body II” 146)

“Home” for the cyborg subject is in the borderspace that challenges the suffocation that the border demarcates. The exigencies of “race” and gender as well as the numerous other discursive and material factors that impinge on the Asian Canadian body take on a renewed context. As Irene Gedalof argues, it is imperative “to positively redefine locatedness in ways that are more enabling for women” (“Identity in Transit” 342) and to use the cyborg as a figure particularly “adept at shape-shifting herself into use for thinking about identity in ways that both take account of women’s embodied locatedness and suggest possibilities for positively redefining it” (347). This redefinition of locatedness that looks at multiple bodily fragments prevents writers like Laiwan from fixating on their national territorial claims.

More importantly, recent literary texts depict an Asian Canadian cyborg that claims materiality, but also productivity within a highly ambivalent subject position. Larissa Lai in *Salt Fish Girl* writes of characters that claim what she terms “cyborg hope” (“Future Asians”): “both of us, such putrid origins, climbing out of the mud and muck into darkness. But I did not want to unmake what I had made, imperfect and wicked as it was” (*Salt Fish Girl* 253). Asian Canadian literature claims its own space and agency without transcending the context out of which it emerges. The complex textuality of recent Asian Canadian literature evidences the productivity of cyborg subjectivity rooted in transnational context; an Asian Canadian critical “beyond” will produce its own new cyborg agency through a similar reworking of context. Donna Haraway admits that “the main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.

Their fathers, after all, are inessential” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 293). Even though the racialized female bodies in these texts are the offspring of the nation-state, capital, and patriarchy, they reconfigure these relationships by seizing their own creative resources. These “hopeful monsters” are the bodies of the texts and the characters that these writers create: “*Nonetheless, Goldschmidt believed that a small percentage of macromutations could, with change and luck, equip an organism with radically beneficial adaptive traits with which to survive and prosper. These he called “hopeful monsters”*” (Goto *Hopeful Monsters* 135). These Asian Canadian cyborgs recognize national borders and then write through the limits of the category into a space of potential. The result of this bordercrossing is the materialized cyborg body of inter and intra subjectivity.

Asian Canadian literature shows that the cyborg is the future for criticism that will look to its own productivity, and not that of the nation, for legitimacy. This future envisions Asian Canadian functioning as a critical medium for performing and producing change more than as a definable space within the nation. As long as Asian Canadian resists limiting itself to a fixed identity space, it will claim its strength as a floating signifier with transnational rereading potential. This rereading performs a cyborg poetics, a poetics that unmask the border as fiction, rereads the many transnational connections that its constructed limits have kept out, and finally claims and reworks these unmasked connections into a new form of cyborg textuality. Recent Asian Canadian works are examples of cyborg texts that claim located, self-producing subject positions as they reread the past beyond the nation. This rereading is a seizing of the body of the Asian Canadian subject and the texts themselves as the ultimate critical medium. These textual creations exemplify a cyborg poetics that locates generative agency within the pauses and discontinuities of a space of dismantled borders. The ability to differentiate “the nation” from the state and then seize the

resulting slippages sets in motion Asian Canadian criticism's own cyborg poetic possibility that Asian Canadian literature is already realizing. The looking back to reevaluate the inter and intra factors of national space is the "here" and "beyond" for Asian Canadian criticism that is committed to the complexities of context. Moreover, the cyborg remains conscious of the threat of appropriation and the new boundaries that reform around its body by keeping the borderspace in negotiation.

Critical Reading Practices and Performance

Asian Canadian criticism moves beyond its moment of praxis through this present critical performance that mobilizes the category as a productive rereading lens. The subsequent chapters reread Asian Canadian literature as they trace its role as the Other to the nation-building efforts of the state; its disruptive voicings against the nation; its cooptation within national identity reproduction; and its seizing of the loosening ties between "the nation" and the state, and of the increasingly visible connections between inside and outside. The dissertation ends with a literary cyborg present and future whose permeable and interconnected textual creations facilitate this rereading of the past. Because the application of the present onto the past to produce a reconfigured future is a critical reading performance, the results are dependent on the interactions between multiple constitutive elements: the critic and his/her context, the reader who reads the critical work and his/her own context, the texts being read and the relationality that arises from their juxtaposition, and the contexts of the textual production.

As a result, the six chapters that follow represent *one* claiming of location that demonstrates the productive capacity of these new conceptual frameworks to bring to visibility once hidden relationships and conflicts within the boundaries of the reading

moment. Above all, the performance of multiple Asian Canadian rereadings that rely on the specificities of the reading lens testifies to Asian Canadian as a cyborg poetic medium. Asian Canadian literature produces a critical future through textuality that lends itself to renewed critical intervention. The result is a cyborg critical body that exposes, situates, and reworks the transnational affiliations that a national focus overlooks. Above all, it is the importance of context and its momentary bringing together of variance to create new meaning that drives this rereading performance. Out of this performance emerges six critical readings that demonstrate the efficacy of a looking back that questions border maintenance and opens up these literary texts to more transnational interpretations.

The following summaries of the six critical readings map out the movement from the national to the cyborgian that the individual chapters perform. The readings return to contexts of border construction, resuturing, and recontainment, but with a present lens that closely reexamines the texts for transnational traces and for foreclosed cyborg possibilities. Above all, it is the collision of the texts themselves with each other and with the rereading lens itself that produces the revelatory and productive critical moment. The resulting network of texts and their readings is a snapshot of a critical future for Asian Canadian literature that crystallizes its performance within the contexts of its production. This snapshot highlights the power of Asian Canadian as a critical medium for rereading the past to disrupt and reconfigure previously static relationships.

The dissertation begins with the chapter, “The Search for Original Bones: Chinese Canadian History and Nation-Building in SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children*,” that rereads a naturalized national space in which the state and “the nation” are forged together as a single identity unit. *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine’s Children* are two texts that recast a

crucial period in Canadian nation-building when the state used its discursive and legislative authority to regulate the flows of immigrant bodies into its nascent identity space. The texts mark a time of border construction and, more importantly, of border naturalization. The uneasy joining of various groups into a single nation in 1867 necessitated the construction of an imagined community that would obscure discord and heterogeneity with a stable identity myth. Moreover, the desire of Canadians to differentiate themselves from their burgeoning neighbour to the south called for a strong national space with clearly established borders. The state defined this space through a search for origins that located the nation within a decidedly Anglo-European tradition that would then allow it to claim and colonize national territory. However, this colonizing of Canadian territory demanded huge amounts of labour, such as that provided by Lee's Gwei Chang and Chong's Chan Sam, who the nation recruited from "outside" its boundaries as it literally built up its national façade. In other words, the bodies of Chinese Canadian labourers haunt Canada's originating moment with transnational taint.

Chong and Lee focus on these haunting bodies that suffered within a state that reconciled their disruptive presences by using "the nation" to project impermeability. The Canadian state alienated Chinese Canadian bodies by positioning them as transnational Others and by using an evolving immigration policy in order to restrict them to a temporary national existence. The lack of females that characterize the recreated communities in the two texts are the product of a nation that excluded alternative reproduction as it placed a firm disconnect between Self/Other and displaced the transnational to an "elsewhere" beyond the nation. This solidification of the link between the state and the nation has profound consequences for Chong and Lee as they attempt to speak out against a nation that has shut its doors to early Chinese Canadian history.

Chong and Lee launch their own parallel project of claiming the nation by looking back at early Canadian history for its hidden Chinese Canadian bones. Both writers are engaged in a search for origins that sees them uncover a space for Chinese Canadians within the larger Canadian historical and literary trajectory. Ironically, Chong and Lee respond to the confinement of this national historical and literary space by establishing their own definitional borders. Their efforts echo those of Lien Chao who argues that early Chinese Canadian publications such as *Inalienable Rice* and *Many-Mouthed Birds* “signified the collective social advancement and cultural development of contemporary Chinese Canadians in society. As landmark publications, they help to reclaim community history, and to define and redefine Chinese Canadian identity in a dynamic community” (“Anthologizing” 166). Chao makes comments that apply equally to texts that “establish” “the collective” right of Chinese Canadians to a piece of constructed national ground.

However, what Chong and Lee discover are bodies that exceed the seemingly claustrophobic space of the Chinese community and the larger Canadian nation. They focus on the women of early Canadian Chinatowns who are wedded to superficial roles but whose actions betray a knowledge that their boundaries are artificial. These women create mixed offspring who overturn the division between family and not family and demand that the nation and the Chinese Canadian community acknowledge them as their own. Their interconnected bodies disrupt the smooth linearity of the texts and the claims that the texts make to a stable place within the national family. In the end, however, these writers treat transnational disorder in ways that evidence their continued entrapment in a naturalized national space that effectively forecloses the possibility of cyborg subjectivity. Chong reseals the borders of her grandmother’s womb as she severs her ties to China and plants herself unequivocally in Canadian soil. Lee recognizes the pressures to close the textual and national womb but the borders of

the nation still prove to be too solid for her to resist their confining tendencies. The cyborg possibility that her characters Kelora, Ting An, and Kae embody must thus remain a haunting threat that exists “outside” of the borders of both the nation-state unit and the text itself.

The following chapter, “The Absent Mother: Resuturing the Nation in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and Kerri Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field*,” probes the momentary fracturing of this nation-state unit during World War II, and its subsequent postwar resuturing. It examines the violent consequences of the nation’s forcing of its fissuring elements into unity. The texts critique a state that displaced the transnational onto its Japanese Canadian citizens in an effort to solidify its wartime boundaries. The visibly “outside” bodies of Japanese Canadians posed a threat to a state intent on deflecting attention away from its own heterogeneity as well as its complicity within violent overseas events. The Canadian government solved this problem by designating Japanese Canadians as “resident aliens” and then by relocating them to internment camps in an attempt to contain the transnational within its space. Kogawa and Sakamoto write of the stunted growth of the Japanese Canadian community through the absent mother whose reproductive body the nation has claimed for itself. Her missing, deformed, and disintegrating body represents the violent appropriation of the racialized body’s generative powers that the nation-state replaces with its own repressive reproductive agenda.

The texts also challenge the success of Canada’s post-war identity reconstruction that sought to transcend the disruptive moments of the war in a reconstituted present. They capture a nation-state that, after the war, had to deal with the unwanted transnational bodies that still remained within its identity and geographic space. The Canadian government found itself having to close the gap between a coherent national appearance and the violent disciplinary actions of the wartime state. It accomplished

this re-production of the nation by assimilating the transnational and the nation's violent past into its newly minted façade. The characters in *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* live within reconstructed national borders that force them to deny their transnational connections if they wish to reclaim a place within the post-war nation. These characters suppress the cyborg mother who the nation expelled from its borders as they succumb to the transnational shame that will guarantee them national membership. However, this national membership comes at the price of their own creative agency.

Despite this suppression, the cyborg mother continues to haunt the borders of the nation, demanding entry. She eventually spills into the body of the nation and the texts themselves and forces the characters to confront the proximity of their transnational connections. Her increasingly vocal calls for recognition parallel, in many ways, the literary voicings that Kogawa and Sakamoto make against the national silencing of Japanese Canadians. These authors speak out against a national present that carries few traces of the violent memories of the past. Nonetheless, the conclusions of both texts foreshadow the possibility of recontainment that exists as long as naturalized national boundaries persist. Kogawa ends her text with the voice of the Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians, and Sakamoto concludes with the threat of recontaining binaries. Kogawa and Sakamoto seek redress from a nation-state that still retains control over its discursive and material borders. They work to prove exclusive Canadian membership for Japanese Canadians because of the continued hold transnational shame has over their creative work. The ambivalence of having to voice that which these authors feel bound to deny creates an irreconcilable tension within the narratives that disrupts while it also reinscribes constructed national borders. This tension keeps the fractures of the nation in view where it wavers between recontainment and the chaos of transnational revelation.

However, these fractures are masked in two texts that feed the demand of a nation-state for “ethnic” narratives that reaffirm the division between the nation and its Others. The chapter, “Transnational Nostalgia: Reproducing Dominant National Paradigms in Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* and Anita Rau Badami’s *Tamarind Mem*,” examines two representations of Asian Canadian families struggling to reconcile the competing pressures of their bicultural existences. These immigrant narratives project the appearance of “transparency” that obscures their specific strategies to manage border transgression. Choy and Badami construct naturalized immigrant narratives that keep Asian Canadian identity apart from its normative Canadian counterpart. Not only have both their texts achieved significant mass market success, but they also have received considerable academic attention both in classroom and critical discussion. Their popularity stems from an ability to transform their narratives into well-packaged commodities that replicate the dominant desire for contained, non-disruptive “ethnic” renderings. These “ethnic” textual bodies are pleasurable because they titillate national borders without posing a serious destabilizing threat. Choy and Badami demonstrate the national appeal of literary works that write according to naturalized Canadian borders.

Both texts achieve this pleasurable reading experience by depicting immigrant subjectivity as an irreducible cultural divide that pits one side of the binary against the other. Their characters suffer from the tension of “in-between” subjectivities that pressure them to deny their Asian sides in order to acculturate into dominant Canadian society. Both texts confront cyborg possibility with characters who unsettle the status quo with relationships that cross the tightly policed boundaries that regulate their lives. The possibility of the characters giving birth to cyborg offspring who openly brandish their mixed origins threatens to overturn the naturalized limits of their domestic lives.

In the end, the texts neutralize the in-between subject position through an aborted cyborg body that represents failed transnationality.

Choy and Badami use nostalgia to erase the traces of this border disruption and to soften and make palatable the more subversive implications of their writing. As their texts return to the predictability of constructed borders, the intrusion of the cyborg becomes a mere trace that haunts the remainder of the narrative. The incidents of violence do not unsettle because they are safely located in the past whose nostalgic overlay titillates without becoming a materialized threat to the textual borders. The result are texts that create national appeal by deploying nostalgia to decontextualize the stories they tell. Their apparent mimesis of immigrant experiences hides their relegation of Asian Canadian experience to a past in which the nation is still able to discipline those who question its pre-fragmented and impermeable national body. Choy and Badami write contained ethnic commodities that reinscribe the borders that drive their characters to take violent and often self-destructive measures to end the tension of the in-between space.

The next three texts depart from this replication of dominant representational paradigms by making visible the constructed nature of identity borders. While Choy and Badami fix their characters within the givenness of national space, other Asian Canadian writers are navigating the productive potentials of moving across borders in a transnational borderspace. “Rereading Terra Nullius: Transnational Voyages in Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child*, Kerri Sakamoto’s *One Hundred Million Hearts*, and Ashok Mathur’s *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar*” addresses recently published Asian Canadian literature that is seizing the spaces of agency that have opened up in the now globally altered nation. Goto, Sakamoto, and Mathur confront the now exposed wavering border between nation and state in order to take their identity explorations “outside” of national discursive and geographic territory. Their texts mark a shift in

Asian Canadian literature in which its writers are willing to see national borders as fiction and then break out of them. This shift is especially pronounced in Goto's and Sakamoto's novels that depart from the national frames that housed their previous narrative works. The writing of these authors is explicitly transnational as it negotiates with the multiple and conflicting connections that they unmask as they circulate within suddenly permeable identity contexts.

While the characters in these texts begin in naturalized national spaces, the penetration of the foreign into the domestic soon launches them into a transnational borderspace. The contact moments between local and global force the characters to reevaluate the assumptions and more importantly, the borders that they have taken for granted. They realize that their previous entrapment was due to their adherence to artificial limits that prevented them from seeing the transnational possibility that existed beyond national borders. The texts reach out to this transnational possibility in their depiction of characters who literally leave the nation on a quest to map out their now interpenetrated subjectivities. In *One Hundred Million Hearts*, Miyo travels to Japan, in *The Short Happy Life of Harry Kumar*, Harry embarks on a globe-trotting trip to find his friend Sita, and finally, in *The Kappa Child*, a Japanese kappa impels the narrator to leave her static familial space.

Once "outside" of the nation, the characters perform a mapping of the borderspace by delving into the many layers that compose a particular local configuration. In this unearthing of context, Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto deconstruct superficial national projections and offer instead a view of the nation that leaves it in fragmentation and disarray. They embark on what Sau-ling Wong refers to as "denationalization" ("Denationalization" 1) but with a difference in that they remain committed to the ground-level particularities of context. Instead, they respond to Lisa Lowe's call for "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" (65) in order to reveal that

“the processes that produce such identity are never complete and are always constituted in relation to historical and material differences” (64). In short, they bring the opening up effects of their transnational travels to Canadian local space. These texts position their characters and Asian Canadian literature at a praxis point where they are capable of seeing opportunities for change. They conclude with ambivalent possibility that promises an altered, transnational return to national space.

This ambivalent possibility is realized in two recently published works by Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto that propose a new form of female creativity that produces in excess of the new scattered hegemonies that they depict. The chapter, “Mutant Bodies: Immaculate Conception and Cyborgs in Hiromi Goto’s *Hopeful Monsters* and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*,” focuses on two texts that take Asian Canadian literature to a future present where corporate interests and biotechnology have superseded the previously central concerns of the nation. In these two new texts, the mythic community of the nation is a mocking memory of a time before the ascendancy of globalized power forces that prey on fragmentation and disarray. Their characters inhabit borderspaces where nation-states have ceded some of their control to transnational capital that preys on individual subjects who cannot locate themselves amidst such deterritorializing movements. Goto and Lai expose the new masking process in which capital and technoscience disassemble the body in order to reassemble it into a semblance of unity. They assert that under global capitalism, the body has become both raw material and the tool of production to produce superficial coherence. This unity hides the dispersal and violence necessary to ensure the efficient and unquestionable workings of twenty-first century globalization.

The texts find agency for these despatialized bodies by situating them in the chaos that surrounds them. They direct their gazes at the bodies that capital and technoscience want to sanitize: the cyborg bodies that brandish disruptive material

traces that situate themselves in the cracks of interconnected local and global space. Goto and Lai recognize that the nation-state may have been torn apart but that the now altered space of the nation still has a role to play for locating agency against the new contexts that their bodies face. They advocate a return to reenergized local space that uses the hidden blood, sweat, and odours of global capital to claim a material location for their cyborg characters and to unearth the violence beneath the shiny surface of commodified life. They show the extent to which twenty-first century subjects deny their cyborgian natures in order to continue their participation in a marketplace that uses the pleasures of consumerism to erase the pain of dispersal. In other words, exposure is insufficient to deal with power forces that are able to appropriate and commodify even their own critiques.

As a result, Goto and Lai do more than just remap context. They also act on these exposed power networks to rework them to new, more enabling configurations. They recognize their complicity within patriarchy and global capitalism but also claim the ability to generate new ways of negotiating these power relationships. They advocate an alternative form of immaculate conception that resists returning to an essentialized womb-space but that instead produces out of the intricacies of the “old” to mutate in excess of past containment. The racialized female body is their tool of resistance. This seizing of the body as a form of cyborg agency extends to the body of the texts themselves as Goto and Lai play with the texture of their writing to create change. They grapple with the slippages and collisions of meaning construction as they assemble their textured fragments into new creative works. Their texts stand for a “future present” because they engage with the complexities of the present to forge a place for themselves in the future. While the texts defy the “transparent” nostalgia in *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem*, they are equally committed to Asian Canadian and its representational concerns. They demonstrate this commitment by leaving Asian

Canadian as a question marked category that produces through borders and the future that awaits from their reworking. The title of Goto's work, *Hopeful Monsters*, emphasizes the two strands of creative projects that create hope, uncertain and wavering, in the material fleshiness of the Asian Canadian cyborg body.

The concluding chapter, "A Voice from the Womb: Laiwan's Cyborg Poetics," looks at the work of the artist/writer/poet/filmmaker Laiwan whose ability to claim agency and productivity within fragmentation exemplifies a cyborg poetics. While a national critical focus struggles with Laiwan's uncategorizable poetics, Laiwan and her work take on new meaning under a transnational rereading. This rereading recognizes that although Laiwan takes her text to an unfamiliar transnational borderspace, her critical work is still an active engagement with Canadian space. She complicates the fixity of Canadian national territory through writing that engages with spaces beyond constructed borders. Nevertheless, the traces of Laiwan's displacement to and subsequent racialization within Canada inflect her body as she explores her identity and its relationship to the histories and contexts of specific borderspaces. She is aware of this racialization process as she questions those who both gain and lose from border maintenance, as well as reclaims the body through an unearthing of the history that has been lost to forgottenness.

Laiwan presages a future for Asian Canadian writing in her exploration of permeable identities that produce through their multiple connections. The performance of these works evidences a cyborg poetics that can engage with the complexities of twenty-first century impositions on the body while still engaging with the specific contexts in which the racialized female writer produces. The poetic voice speaks from a space of multiple denaturalized borders. Her movements across cultural and national borders and her status as a multidisciplinary and multimedia artist position her as a subject who reflects the interpenetrations of the present globalized

environment. For example, Laiwan is an artist of Chinese ancestry who was born in Harare, Zimbabwe, in what was then Rhodesia, and then later moved to Canada in 1977 to escape the civil war. The product of such a border-crossing subjectivity are three works, “notes towards a body,” its sequel piece “notes towards a body II,” and the video piece *Remotely in Touch* that chart an initial unmasking of the master narratives of duality and colonialism, and then an evolving ability to engage with a technoscientific borderspace.

The first text delves into the many layers that compose Mozambique’s local space in order to disrupt the erasure of both the colonial and the post-independence claiming of place and its history. The poet uses her position in-between the divisions between Mozambique and Canada to see the violence that the surface hides and rematerialize the bodies that Mozambique’s naturalized space has kept away. Mozambique metamorphoses into a “*mozambique*” that evolves with an equally fluid and contingent poetic gaze. The poet recognises and reworks the borders of Mozambique, a specific local site outside of the Canadian nation, as she locates productivity within permeable space. Armed with this productivity, she then turns in the two other pieces to another local space, the individual body, as she reinserts texture into the relationship of the body to reality, perception, and science and technology. The texts confront techno-scientific images that represent the new scattered hegemonies that penetrate and monitor the body in a context of deconstructed borders. While the texts explores the alienation of this technoscientific bodily invasion, they also reject the desire to return to a naturalized womb-space that denies the multitude of contextual markings on the body. Instead, they argue for a return to context that posits the body as the ultimate local site within contexts of contradiction. The poet leverages her position as a multimedia artist and her mixed “origins” to locate herself and her creativity within the contingencies and possibilities of textuality. In the end, Laiwan’s

three works provide a condensed performance of an Asian Canadian future that uses the enabling moments of the present to reread the past to agency-producing configurations. This future envisions a literature and a criticism that shift from writing within national borders to performing through them.

CHAPTER TWO

The Search for Original Bones:

Chinese Canadian History and Nation-Building in SKY Lee's

Disappearing Moon Cafe and

Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*

Nation Building and Border Maintenance

In her foreword to *The Concubine's Children*, Denise Chong explains the desire “to recover the family’s past in Canada” (XII) that initiates her creative negotiation of her familial history. She writes, “long after my grandparents, Chan Sam and May-ying, had passed on, I would often return to the cedar chest upstairs in my parents’ bedroom in our home, open the bottom drawer and take out the pile of black-and-white photographs there” (XI). Chong delves into her family drawer in order to reconstruct the narrative that exists scattered amongst the pile of unearthed stories. She not only reclaims a personal history, but she moves her narrative beyond the confines of a single family through her representations of Chinese Canadian history during a period of intense nation-building. This voicing of the hitherto unarticulated experiences of her grandparents stands as a counter narrative to the mainstream version of history that overlooks and elides the experiences of those who fall outside of its normative gaze. SKY Lee, talking about her novel *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, acknowledges her own reowning of history when she writes that “now that writers of colour are looking back at history, it becomes imperative for us to fill in the gaps” (“*Disappearing Moon*

Cafe"11). Referring to Friedrich Nietzsche's naming of "critical" (11) history, Lee argues that she writes history that engages in "breaking silences that haven't been broken" (10) as she performs "a radical revision of knowledge and history" "for claiming identity and place in Canada" (10). This need to break silences impels both Lee and Chong to depict the Chinese Canadian history that the normative gaze of the nation overlooks.

Both *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine's Children* aim to carve out a space for a Chinese Canadian past within Canadian national history. Lee and Chong argue that the struggles of their ancestors need to be told in order to claim an identity site that will give national legitimacy to Chinese Canadians. Like Lien Chao, they see this breaking of silence as a necessary part of a larger movement to reclaim Chinese Canadian experiences from a dominant national culture:

In different genres and forms, Chinese Canadian writings trace the historical contributions that the labourer generation made to Canada, voice a resistance against dominant cultural hegemony, and recognize individual men and women whose lives represent the collective struggle and survival of Chinese Canadians. ("Anthologizing"153).

Chao emphasizes the importance of Chinese Canadian writing that not only resists Canadian hegemony, but that also brings to voice hitherto untold Chinese Canadian stories. She focuses on "the 'epic struggles'" that "illustrate the difficult historical conditions under which the birth of a community-based Chinese Canadian literature in English occurred" (153). Consequently, texts like *The Concubine's Children* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe* serve an important function for Chinese Canadian history because they bring forth a hitherto denied cultural body into national space. Chong and Lee "birth" this Chinese Canadian body of history by using their disruptive

representations of the past to force the nation into ceding territory to resistant identity claims.

Chong and Lee attempt to claim a Chinese Canadian identity site by returning to a critical historical time when the new Canadian nation-state was attempting to forge its way economically and culturally into the twentieth century. They rewrite early Chinese Canadians into this early nation-building period by representing two families who struggle within the naturalized borders of domestic space.¹ Their characters are within Canada because they have succumbed to the efforts of the Canadian government to recruit them into its space for economic purposes.² However, the characters must deal with the difficulties of living within a nation-state that wishes to use their labour while still keeping its sacrosanct identity space free of transnational taint. In Lee's text, Gwei Chang reflects on the Chinese workers who "were still waiting as much as half a century after the ribbon-cutting ceremony by the whites at the end of the line, forgotten as chinamen generally are" (6). Chong, meanwhile, writes of Chan Sam who also contributes to the Canadian economy through his capital investment in a business and his labour within that store: "Chan Sam decided to open his own family-run business. He bought out his partners. He put a display of his best-selling dry goods and confectioneries in the window" (33). Both Gwei Chang and Chan Sam share a marginal status within the nation that positions them as "an outlaw band of men united by common bonds of helpless rage" (Lee 77). They are trapped within a state whose desire to address its economic needs coexists with its equally strong imagining of a "pure" domestic space.

The texts challenge the invisibility of their characters by focusing on the labouring roles that restrict the characters from claiming "Canadian" subjectivities. Gwei Chang and Chan Sam arrive on Canadian soil with "wonderful dreams of adventure and prosperity in a big land; maybe a smart-looking, pointy moustache and a

few other frivolities” (Lee 222) that are soon dispelled once they confront the reality of their labouring situations. They come to Canada desperate to make money only to discover that the meagre funds they receive from the exploitation of their labour keeps them within its borders. Instead of experiencing the liberation of a new identity space, they are reduced to their status as invisible workers who sacrifice themselves to the cultural and economic needs of the Canadian state. Chan Sam establishes a business that exists on the periphery of the Canadian economy, selling goods that keep the Canadian economy functioning while receiving little recognition from the nation-state in return. Meanwhile, Gwei Chang underlines the conflation of his body with labour when he recalls that “he too was once a hungry worker who sold his body for wages, who swallowed the bitterness of being cheated every day” (77). He feels deep anger that the government can capitalize on his contribution to its nation-building without a corresponding ceding of its cultural territory. Instead, in the prologue, “Search for Bones,” it falls to Gwei Chang to search for the bones of Chinese railway workers because the nation-state refuses to acknowledge the bodies that lie beneath its Canadian Pacific Railway tracks.³ Both texts search for the material traces of Chinese Canadian labouring history in order to draw attention to the ironic part that characters like Gwei Chang and Chan Sam play in constructing a coherent Canadian narrative.

Chong and Lee engage with this irony by depicting the naturalized borders that keep their characters stifled within regulated Canadian territory. Gwei Chang who initially comes to Canada with dreams of great success quickly finds himself battling against the transnational taint that keeps him apart from a “pure” national identity. He finds that his contribution is illegitimate in the eyes of a state that uses his transnational Otherness to consolidate its own normativity. This Otherness keeps the Wong family isolated from mainstream Canadian society within the ghettoized confines of Chinatown. The incident when young White⁴ men harass Choy Fuk with a derogatory

rhyme, “Chinkee, chinkee chinaman, eats dead rats. / Eats them up like gingersnaps” (97), is an example of an Othering that the government institutionally sanctions in its bid to cover up the close relationship between itself and its Chinese workers. These White ruffians see Choy Fuk through the lens of a state that represents him as an unwanted transnational body in order to justify the firm divide between itself and its chaotic “outside.”⁵ Similarly, in Chong’s text, May-ying and Chan Sam suffocate within “the claustrophobic existence of being excluded from the larger white society” (XII) because of the transnational stigma that the government and larger society attach to their continued presence within Canada. May-ying and Chan Sam are excluded from a Canadian community that denies their continued residence within the nation in order to naturalized its identity boundaries. This denial smoothes over the disjunctive beginnings of the nation by displacing the transnational onto the very individuals who have served invaluablely in constructing a Canadian identity space.

Lee and Chong represent characters who not only suffer from this discursive Othering, but who also struggle against state legislation that uses the transnational to justify a highly oppressive immigration policy. Lee introduces the character Mui Lan in 1924, one year after Canada closed its doors to any new Chinese men or women. Her great granddaughter Kae writes, “propelled by women who could only dream of such a reunion with their men, she landed in the Gold Mountains, full of warmth and hope. Little did she realize that people’s most fervent hope can turn into their worst nightmare” (26). Mui Lan is trapped within a nightmarish situation in which the Canadian government manages her difference through the erection of what David Palumbo-Liu calls a “racial frontier” (*Asian/American* 32) that uses the fear of the transnational to legitimate its borders. The repercussions of this legislated frontier are that Mui Lan lives isolated not only from White society, but also from the few Chinese community members around her. Mui Lan feels Other because of her connections to

China and “a faraway home in her heart that had disintegrated over the years” (25) that disrupt the attempts of the state to consolidate its identity borders. More disturbingly, Mui Lan finds her situation worsening as the government increases the restrictions it places on the level and nature of Chinese immigration. In Chong’s text, Chan Sam also suffers from a delegitimizing in national space that is realized through a head tax of \$50 in 1885 that is later increased to \$100 in 1901 and to \$500 in 1903⁶:

In 1923, the Canadian Chinese Benevolent Association’s worst nightmare came true. That year, the Canadian Parliament went the way of the American Congress and passed its own exclusionary law. The date the Chinese Immigration Act went into effect – July 1, the day the nation’s birthday is celebrated – the Chinese marked as “Humiliation Day.” (15)⁷

Chan Sam and Mui Lan live within communities reeling from a “Humiliation Day” that the state uses to cover over the role that they and other Chinese Canadians have played and continue to play in constructing the nation celebrated on July 1st.

While the national space that these characters inhabit appears fixed, Chong and Lee show that this fixity is the product of a state that denies transnational connections. The continued presence of these characters within Canada signals that the restriction and eventual exclusion of Chinese immigrants was much more complex than a complete purging of the transnational from Canadian space. In her work on the Chinese Head Tax, Lily Cho asserts that “my investigations reveal that the contributions of Chinese immigrants were recognized from the beginning, suggesting that the head tax might have been more ambivalent in its intention than one of simple and outright exclusion” (64). In other words, the head tax provided a means of covering up the ambivalent relationship that the state had with the Chinese Canadian labouring population. The families in both texts continue to see themselves as *temporary* labouring presences because the government enacts legislation that leaves them with

little other alternative. Chan Sam “never saw himself joining the larger white society” (61) and his concubine “held their life in Canada as temporary” (31) because the state makes no effort to dissuade them otherwise. Rather, it makes them acutely aware of their despatialized positions by removing their abilities to root themselves in Canadian soil. Chong writes that one of the consequences of the harsh government immigration policy coupled with Chinese patriarchal preference was that “the birth rate remained low, as in later years sponsoring fathers preferred to bring their sons rather than their daughters” (157). As a result, May-ying lives in an “unnatural” community whose makeup of almost exclusively male bodies prevents it from growing into a vibrant part of the larger national reproductive body. Both texts depict a situation of “ungrounded women, living with displaced chinamen, and everyone trapped by circumstances” (Lee 145) that the nation-state claims is a necessary product of using temporary transnational labour to meet short term labour demands.

The texts challenge the placelessness of early Chinese Canadians by writing of the consequences of restrictive state immigration policies. They capture the Wong and Chan families as they fight against a debilitating demographic reality that weakens their already faltering borders. These families suffer such debilitation because of a government policy that uses the female body as a means of managing the growth of its Chinese Canadian population and its unwanted transnational associations. This conflation of the gendered body and domestic space aligns itself with many other colonial projects that, according to Anne McClintock, plant “female figures” “like fetishes at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the contact zone” (*Imperial Leather* 24). Chong writes that Chan Sam must go to great measures to find a suitable female companion after the state makes it incredibly difficult for Chinese women to enter the country: “in short order [Chan Sam] was put in touch with an agent who dealt in ‘paper families.’ The agent bought and sold birth certificates of

people already dead, of people who had left Canada with no intention to return or who, for a price, could be convinced to stay away” (22). While Chan Sam manages to bring May-ying into Canada, others are not so fortunate. May-ying is one of the few women in a community that suffers under the “almost two decades of exclusion” that “had warped the male-female ratio” (124).⁸ Lee writes of Mui Lan who also laments the warped male-female ratio: “she looked around for women to tell her what was happening, but there were none. By herself, she lacked the means to know what to do next. Without her society of women, Mui Lan lost substance. Over the years, she became bodiless, or was it soulless” (26). Both Mui Lan and May-ying are unable to claim a material presence outside of their ever diminishing ethnic enclaves because their bodies have become a scarce commodity in a community intent upon generating beyond its claustrophobic bounds.

These characters respond to these hostile reproductive conditions by becoming intensely preoccupied with the female body. The two families resort to complex stratagems that maintain reproductive normalcy by desperately acquiring and policing female bodies. These female bodies assume the crucial function of reproducing the family “normalcy” that the state has thrown off kilter with its repressive immigration policies. May-ying faces great pressures to birth a son because of the monetary investment that Chan Sam expends to acquire her reproductive body. The cost he incurs to bring about his own passage spirals out of control as the nation-state tightens its borders. Chong writes that “a decade earlier, Chan Sam’s traffic fee had been seven hundred dollars. To acquire a concubine, the price was more than triple that” (23). Chan Sam incurs multiple expenses to bring May-ying into his and the nation’s domestic space. Similarly, Lee writes that Mui Lan pays exorbitantly for a fertile womb in an environment devoid of “legitimate” female bodies:

We received her in our home in the most flamboyant style. With the costs of hiring the go-betweens and the negotiators; with the costs of her passage and the bribes, never mind the gifts; and of course the cost of the wedding itself – never mind the risks we took with our Wong name and livelihood in a government investigation to secure HER immigration status ... (58)

The Wong women are hyperbolically reduced to their procreative function because the stakes are much higher in a context in which female bodies are a rarity. The families trap their female members within ever more restrictive domestic spaces in escalating efforts to keep their traditional regulatory divisions in place. They know that sealing the orifices of these reproductive bodies will uphold the system that keeps their lives orderly and above all, contained within specific domestic boundaries.

Thus, the border management that the government enacts has profound consequences for these early Chinese Canadians characters. It is within this claustrophobic context that the female characters in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine's Children* must locate and leverage agency. Chong and Lee expose families that create intense environments for these female characters by holding onto the pretence of stable identities in the face of their materially dwindling positions within Canada. As Mui Lan declares, “here, we are living on the frontier with barbarians. We stick together” (61). Chong writes also of the containment of these female bodies when she reports that “‘decent’ women – the merchants’ wives – rarely ventured beyond the walls of their family home” (20). She underlines this containment through May-ying who, upon first arriving in Vancouver, witnesses the spatial disjuncture between White and Yellow. May-ying notes that “on the other side of the tram lines that ran between New Westminster and Vancouver, the western architecture suddenly gave way to a dense conglomeration of two- and three-story brick buildings bedecked with an assortment of awnings” (23). The tram lines track the border that closes up the contact

zone between the Chinese Canadian community and the rest of the Vancouver populace. Both narratives take place almost exclusively within small Chinatown households because, as Kae Anderson writes, “the idea of a Chinese race became objectified in space [...], and through that nexus it was given a local referent in the minds of Europeans, became a social fact, and aided its own reproduction” (31). In other words, Chinatown literalized the efforts of the nation-state to hem Chinese Canadians into a space apart from larger society where they would see little possibility of generating dissent.

Denaturalizing Borders

Chong and Lee at first explore the national and the familial borders that seemingly leave the racialized body little room to move beyond their containing impositions. However, the texts next denaturalize these borders by directing their gazes *into* the claustrophobic domestic spheres that house these bodies. Chong begins her challenge of domestic borders by deconstructing the carefully controlled appearance that May-ying creates: “May-ying traced a part down the back of her head, bound the hair on each side with a filament of black wire and twisted it into a chignon above each ear” (5). Although May-ying binds her hair into a tight chignon, this hair will become progressively more unruly as the narrative continues. By highlighting the constructed nature of domestic control, Chong challenges the power of patriarchy and the nation to contain the female body. Lee similarly questions surface appearance with Kae who opens her narration with the words, “I’ve been brought up to believe in kinship, or those with whom we share. I thought that by applying attention to all the important events such as the births and the deaths, the intricate complexities of a family with chinese roots could be massaged into a suant, digestible unit” (19). Kae disrupts the

decontextualizing effects of this suant unit by placing her grandmother in a specific labouring location: “The story began, I guess, with my great-grandmother, Lee Mui Lan, sometime in June 1924, as she stood behind the cash register at the front of the even-now famous Disappearing Moon Cafe, 50 East Pender Street, Vancouver, British Columbia.” (23). Both Lee and Chong apply their present gazes to unzip artificially sealed walls and bring forth the hidden machinations within these contained domestic spaces.

These hidden machinations show that the seeming omnipotence of state legislated racism and patriarchal controls masks the hysteria that lies beneath their carefully orchestrated surfaces. May-ying worries that “the absence of a male heir would break the family lineage” (36) and rob her of the prestige that would have been rightfully hers in the village in China. May-ying is intent on neutralizing the destabilizing effects of immigration by continuing to construct the family lineage that relies on a succession of male heirs. Meanwhile, Lee focuses on the multiple machinations to birth “a little boy who came from her son, who came from her husband, who also came lineally from that golden chain of male to male” (31). Kae questions, “would could be more natural, more ecologically pure?” (31), as she draws attention to the wish for unbroken lineage in an environment that is anything but natural or pure. Kae highlights the fundamental irony of a family that claims “purity” while it meanwhile covers up the relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora Chen, a “chinaman” and a “wild injun” (3), that marked the family’s initial moments in Canada. Once Chong and Lee direct their gazes into the domestic sphere, they reveal two families that go to great and absurd lengths to mask their intricate complexities with digestible appearances.

The female characters in both texts superficially conform to these appearances because they are unable to see the constructed nature of their claustrophobic

existences. These women reinscribe containing boundaries in the hopes of maintaining the patriarchal positions that keep their domestic roles stable. As Leslie Bow writes, “accusations of disloyalty clearly serve to regulate female sexuality but, as significantly, they police and uphold the identifications necessary for affiliation and connection” (8). In Lee’s text, Mui Lan threatens Fong Mei with illegitimacy because she knows “full well that a spurned daughter-in-law would rather commit suicide than go back to her parents’ home, for all the ten generations of everlasting shame that she would cost her family, in fact her whole village” (59). Mui Lan knows that the illegitimacy she threatens will disempower her daughter-in-law as well as any children produced from excessive sexual activities. She consequently relegates Fong Mei to the private sphere in order to assert control over the legitimate impregnation of the Wong family womb. Meanwhile, Chan Sam is uncomfortable with May-ying circulating on the open market because “he did not like having to share the company of his concubine with the regular customers of the Peking tea house” (31-2) who could potentially disrupt the exclusivity of their sexual relationship. Chan Sam worries that the wavering public and private boundaries that characterize their new home could give May-ying free reign to act on her excessive desires. However, while at first, May-ying acquiesces and rejects “the advances of her customers” (83), she is less willing to conform once the domestic sphere begins to collapse and release her from its artificial bounds. Chong and Lee depict women who initially hold themselves back from shattering familial reproductive controls. However, the desperation of this holding back attests to a domestic whose constructed limits are on the verge of breaking down.

Chong and Lee focus on this vulnerability by showing that these artificial limits are only as strong as the women who blind themselves into seeing the domestic as “natural.” The texts probe a blindness that makes these women complicit in the very system that keeps them contained, repressed, and desperate to break free. The female

characters in both texts reinscribe patriarchal reproduction because they believe that they can combat their disconnection from both China and Canada by returning to the village traditions that once regulated their lives. Mui Lan believes that a male child will naturalize her presence in Canada where “she was simply the mother of Gwei Chang’s only son. Stamped on her entry papers: ‘A merchant’s wife.’ A wife in name only, she relied heavily on him for her identity in this land” (28). The naturalization of the familial lineage causes Mui Lan to hunger for a grandson in order to consolidate her unstable position in the community. Kae questions the complicity of her female ancestors through Mui Lan who uses the “natural” to keep the “unnatural” at bay: “Was she referring to the substance we as women have to barter away in order to live? In order to live with men? In the male order? Then, what was I referring to? How we turn on ourselves, squabbling desperately among ourselves about our common debasement?” (63). Similarly, May-ying consolidates her role within patriarchy by using her pregnancy to bargain for power with her husband. Chong writes that “admittedly, May-ying was disappointed that the firstborn was not a son. But a girl, one strong enough to survive her first month, was at least proof of her fecundity” (34). Because May-ying believes that her survival depends on her fecundity, she refuses to consider what repeatedly beckons outside the domestic sphere. Instead, the naturalization of domestic limits causes her to suppress slippages when construction fails to coincide with reality.

However, the texts persistently probe internal domestic dynamics in order to draw attention to the agency that escapes these most closely regulated familial environments. The hysteria that appears like a loss of control actually signals the vulnerability of domestic structures that ineffectually contain dissonance. Moments of dissonance create so much tension for these characters that their escalating emotions spill over the constructed limits of the domestic and over the precious familial kinship

web. If, as Judith Butler writes, the body acts in “excess” (*Excitable Speech* 11), the womb in these narratives leaks in excess of a rigid patriarchal system. In each narrative, the private sphere swells with the monstrous impulses that fight for release as these women unsuccessfully reconcile competing realities. The characters in both texts buckle under the pressures to conform to simultaneous identity affiliations that trap them in ever decreasing domestic spaces. They resort to clawing at each other and at the domestic walls that attempt to conceal their porosity. For instance, Fong Mei keeps her reputation intact by throwing herself “totally into the same malicious meddling that oppressed women excelled in” (189). While she differs from Suzanne who expresses the need to move beyond domestic space with the words, “I want out! Out! For God’s Sake, let me out!” (177), Fong Mei still engages in behaviour that has excessive consequences. Meanwhile, May-ying spirals out of control as she “outs” herself from Chan Sam’s household and “began to behave during her husband’s absence in ways that were at odds with the proper and decorous conduct expected of a Chinese wife” (79). These women labour to create value that is tied to the ideological workings that keep them disempowered; nonetheless, this process of smoothing over moments of disruption is far from easy. Their hysteria evidences the suppressed resistance that resides within supposedly impermeable domestic spaces.

Chong and Lee delve into this hysteria by unmasking the domestic as a borderspace of interactive fragments that operate under the constructed cloak of the nation and the family. The texts locate agency when they pull back this cloak and call attention to incidents when desire breaches and reconfigures previously static relationships. While initially May-ying labours sexually and economically for her husband, his trips to China force her to roam outside of the household as she seeks financial relief: “as she became more desperate, May-ying finally went the way of many

waitresses – when her shift was over, she no longer refused all the advances of her customers” (83). May-ying implicitly challenges the impermeability of household borders when she engages in “outside” sexual and economic transactions. Similarly, Fong Mei enters into a sexual relationship with Ting An that defies Mui Lan who believes that she can patrol the Wong family borders. Mui Lan underestimates the ability of her daughter-in-law to exceed her watchful gaze. Fong Mei illustrates what Emily Martin speaks of “this porous, hybrid, leaky, disorderly female self” that is continually “leaking fluids through ducts and membranes (which simultaneously allows penetration of the foreign into the body) or permitting the body to turn against itself” (“The Fetus as Intruder” 135). Fong Mei plants mutant seeds that will bear subversive fruit on the Wong family tree. She makes a mockery of “the integrity, the sacred legitimacy of my family origins” (85) that Kae mistakenly reads as natural as she launches into her familial explorations. These women threaten hegemonic forces with “leaky” incidents that prove potent enough to disrupt their stable façades.

These “leaky” incidents not only transform these Chinese Canadian families into borderspaces, but they also deconstruct the larger national family as well. Just as the texts expose the unruly potential of the Wong and Chan families, they also expose the equally fraught attempts of the nation-state at transnational suppression. As Rachel Lee argues, “reading in terms of the nation frequently leads to a reduction of the role of the family to that of a resistance ethnic enclave vis-à-vis dominant U.S. culture. However, if one scrutinizes the dynamics internal to the family itself, one perceives rifts within the household” (*The Americas* 13). Lee reveals the rifted separation between White Canada and Chinese Canada by detailing the specific internal dynamics of the Janet Smith case. The furor surrounding the case stems from the fear of Yellow and White miscegenation and more specifically, the production of mixed offspring through this

miscegenation. Kae writes of the response of larger society to the case when she writes that “the idea of a young, lone, yellow-skinned male standing over the inert body of a white-skinned female would send them into a bloodthirsty frenzy” (70). This passage underlines what Kay Anderson describes as the “conceptions of the ‘lascivious Oriental’” that play out the “lurking fears and fantasies about the wickedness of ‘inter-racial’ sexual union” (159) that culminated in the proposal of a Janet Smith bill. Lee writes that “already, the law forbade Chinese men from certain kinds of employment if it meant that white women would have to work in close proximity to them” (224). Lee focuses on the fear of miscegenation in order to critique legislation that superficially denied the intimate relations that existed between the Canadian nation and Chinese Canadians.

The texts argue that both the Canadian nation and Chinese patriarchy delude themselves into believing that their origins are irrelevant concerns as long as they maintain superficially whole domestic spaces. Peter Ward argues that the desire for a “White” Canadian domestic space fuelled “west coast racialism”:

The multiracial nature of the west coast province stirred a profound psychological impulse within the white community to strengthen its collective identity by striving for a homogeneous society. The unremitting hostility evidenced by the Chinese image was one manifestation of this drive. Social pluralism was unacceptable to nativists in British Columbia. John Chinaman seemed unassimilable and therefore he thwarted the drive toward the goal of homogeneity. To many whites he was nothing but an unfortunate wen on the face of their community; his very presence marred its fair appearance. At the bottom of west coast racialism lay the frustrated vision of a “white” British Columbia. (22)

In other words, the White community fought for a White British Columbia because of the multiracial nature of the province that it wished to deny.⁹ Incidents like the imagined coupling of Janet Smith and the houseboy show that White Canada is a sham that covers over the heterogeneity that rises to its surface. Both authors expose these “pure” domestic spaces so thoroughly that they shift from being oppressive forces into wilful, if not foolhardy, systems of denial. In the scene in which the men of Chinatown interrogate the houseboy, Lee captures men who are intent upon containing the complicated interconnections that make up domestic space: ““Someone should stand guard! Make sure no one is loitering about,’ a voice said. ‘It is essential that this kind of tricky business doesn’t go beyond the four walls’” (81). While Chinese patriarchy and the nation stand guard, the tricky business of the transnational continues to exceed their carefully patrolled domestic walls. Meanwhile, in Chong’s text, the patriarchal ideal is so engrained in May-ying that she reconciles the dissonance between her erratic behaviour and her traditional gendered role. Chong writes of “a period when [May-ying] was having affairs with men, drinking and gambling, while still trying to prove she could be a good mother” (219). May-ying engages in disruptive behaviour but is still averse to letting go of the predetermined role that smoothes her rough edges. Her behaviour is symptomatic of a family structure that creates the conditions for its own dismantling by refusing to recognize the excess born out of imperfectly regulated reproduction.

Consequently, as the texts progress, these domestic spaces find it more difficult to hide the multiplicity of disruptions within their stable walls. Desire takes extreme forms in domestic spaces buckling under the pressures of two inflexible identity constructions. Chong writes that Chan Sam desperately tries to control the disobedient ways of his concubine and succeeds in looking more foolish as May-ying pushes the household bounds: “Chan Sam agreed that they should separate, but he made no

mention of 'outing' May-ying from his household. As far as he was concerned, she was still his concubine; the only difference was that they were living apart" (101). Despite Chan Sam's dogged claims to his concubine, he is powerless to stop her from exiting his household and behaving in ways outside of his control. Meanwhile, in Lee's text, the indiscretions that occur reveal the Wong offspring to be more monstrous than any of its members had ever imagined. Its claustrophobic reproductive conditions cause the internalization of desire that has a disturbing and unexpected consequence: incest. The family accepts its children as legitimate based on their superficial appearances and only very reluctantly admits that something is wrong when Suzanne gives birth to an openly "deformed" (203) baby. This incest is the product of a family that is guilty of an exaggerated uniformity that overlooks the complex and messy relationships that demand negotiation. Donna Haraway writes of what she calls "corporeal fetishism" that "is about mistaking *heterogeneous* relationality for a fixed, seemingly objective thing" (*Modest_Witness* 142). The Wongs are similarly wedded to the superficiality of a family that mistakes its complicated relations for a smoothly functioning whole. Nonetheless, this domestic space can suppress its heterogeneous relations for only so long before the family turns in on itself.

The family and the nation-state attempt to separate inside and outside but slowly but surely the divisions between "family" and "not family" become hopelessly entangled. In short, the façades of both eventually give way. In Chong's text, May-ying "outs" herself from the household when she has sexual contact with multiple partners and spirals out of patriarchal control. As Chong witnesses the proliferating rifts in her family history she realizes "in real life that the family had never been together, and that the two halves, one in Canada, one in China, had never been one" (220). The once united family fragments into many monstrous pieces that straddle bodies, places, and domestic allegiances. In Lee's text, Morgan declares to Kae that "no matter where you

turn, we're all related in the end" (69), underlining the extent to which the family and its outside are thoroughly confused. The Wong family gives incest free and unruly rein by denying the conditions that make it "ripe for incest" (147). The family instead fixates on a pretense of legitimacy that overlooks the complex relationships that actually compose their familial relationships. The consequence of this denial is that Suzanne has sex with Morgan who she later learns is a disowned but integral part of her family. The product of this relationship is a "deformed monster" (206) with "a massive medicine-ball bruise" (207-8) who symbolizes the secret interrelationships that keep "growing and growing" (199) out of the family's control. Suzanne's child challenges the stability of the family because its body brandishes the fragments that the family has hitherto suppressed. Its monstrous cyborg form is a mocking reminder of the impurity that is generated within supposedly impermeable domestic walls.

These narratives show that the domestic surface bears little relation to the convoluted reproductive transactions that actually occur. As Chong and Lee go deeper into hidden domestic activities, formerly claustrophobic spaces dissolve into transnational disorder. Chan Sam tries to cover up his family breakdown but eventually cannot prevent his concubine from "no longer acting as if she was his" (101) and from removing their child from his household. Kae refers to her nanny Chi as her "(trans)parent" (127), a term that applies to texts that themselves have become transparent as they witness the interactions within suddenly unstable domestic spaces. Kae discovers that her exposure of hidden domestic machinations destroys the constructed borders of the family. She writes that "their insular little world – an ivory sphere, protected by layer upon layer of filigreed lies, all revolving independently of each other, finally collapsed like a decomposing melon" (163). This previously "whole" world is now a rotten assemblage whose insides threaten to spill out into the

open. Kae discovers that the family secrets are “fraying the tapestry” of the “righteous inheritance to a pure bloodline” (66) that she has subscribed to all her life: “All my life I saw double. All I ever wanted was authenticity; meanwhile, the people around me wore two-faced masks, and they played their lifelong roles to artistic perfection” (128). While Kae struggles with a denaturalized family myth, she nevertheless commits herself to making visible the fissures that lie at the heart of her familial claims to authenticity. She finally realizes that the familial drive toward purity is an empty, crumbling pursuit that she has blindly subscribed to all her life.

Responding to a Leaky Womb

Lee is left with the aftermath of disintegrated familial borders: the cyborg children who claim material location in the transnational interpenetrations that the family refuses to acknowledge. Ting An, Morgan, Suzanne’s dead baby, and Kelora haunt the text. Meanwhile, in Chong’s narrative, the rifts in the family make it difficult for its members to pretend that they are a united domestic unit. Instead, the visibility of all of these characters mocks the supposed coherence of the family structures. The families in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine’s Children* have expended so much energy rejecting transnational elements that are actually deeply imbedded within the makeup of the domestic. These individuals have suffered from what Leslie Bow describes as the alienation of those who are tied to the domestic and yet disowned for the sake of its superficial integrity:

While the term ‘alienation’ implies the subordination of human life to its capacity to labor intrinsic to Marxist philosophy, it takes on a more specific resonance in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, where the state of being an orphan not only refers to children left parentless by death, but to concepts of legitimacy and

illegitimacy, as well as to groups of people systematically excluded from larger collectivities. (101)

Bow underlines the plight of those designated illegitimate but fails to examine the ability of the orphans to return and overturn the very legitimacy that keeps them excluded. The haunting cyborg children in both texts threaten the family with the suppressed truths that will splinter its constructed calm. In Chong's text, the lingering questions over the children in China frustrate Chong as she attempts to ground herself completely in Canadian soil. Meanwhile, in Lee's text, even a lifetime of obscurity ineffectually erases the connection Gwei Chang has to a mixed race woman who he admits has "been haunting me all my life" (236). In the end, the patriarch himself concedes the leaky nature of his domestic world.

By their conclusions, the two texts lie in disarray as familial order slips from their narrative grasps. The porosity and fragmentation of both the national and personal families complicate the desire of both Chong and Lee to claim a definable space for these early Chinese Canadians within national history. Kae struggles with her incestuous and miscegenated origins that make her feel "just as vulnerable as Suzie to having my first real creative expression thwarted. Aborted" (215). Her family is an unmanageable transnational body that threatens to unbalance both the narrative and the familial coherence. Kae discovers that her familial past hides a union that crossed national, cultural, and "racial" boundaries. The family began and continues to produce through a blurring of boundaries that, at first instinct, Kae wishes to "abort" before it disrupts her narrative linearity. Similarly, Chong grapples with the splits in the family that leave irreconcilable disjuncture: "two daughters stood on Chinese soil; one on Canadian" (100). The competing narratives of May-ying's degeneration into excess and the hardship of the family members in China make any attempt at a coherent family representation a constructed exercise. Chong desperately wants to restore order

to the family tree but she realizes that this pruning will do violence to its unruly elements. The admission that the voice of the narrator will “bring another shading of truth” to “a landscape of many layers in an ever-changing light” (XIII) emphasizes that she is conscious of the power of the narrative gaze. Not only have each of the narratives unpacked their respective domestic worlds, but they have also both uncovered the denied instability of the national social and historical body. Chong and Lee have so thoroughly exposed the complex border collisions of their personal, cultural, and national families that they are at a loss as to how to locate a clear identity space within these now visible fragments.

Chong and Lee remain committed to their claiming of a Chinese Canadian identity space that the transnational spillage within their texts makes increasingly more difficult to achieve. However, the two texts take markedly different approaches to resolving this transnational disorder. Chong chooses to halt cyborg possibility by covering over messy familial relationships with a stable national façade. As Eleanor Ty remarks, “Chong is faced with the demanding task of handling a delicate and potentially transgressive subject” (*The Politics of the Visible* 33) that, I argue, she responds to by imposing constructed linearity onto the familial history. Ty concludes that Chong negotiates May-ying “by recontextualizing the conditions of May-ying’s life” (37). However, she flounders as she faces the now recontextualized fragments of May-ying’s destructive behaviour. The text ends with a trip to China to pierce the mystery that surrounds the Chinese side of the family. The discoveries there further complicate the familial façade as the stories from the family members in China contest the divisions between China and Canada, truth and reality. Chong revealed “in a public lecture, she felt then that her past was like the tea spilling out from an overturned teacup” (Ty *The Politics of the Visible* 34). The destabilization of the

delicate balance that keeps the family intact forces an engagement with disruptive and often uncooperative narrative spillage.

The reinstatement of the divisions between the national and the transnational keeps the two sides orderly and most importantly, apart. Winnie emphatically says that “death is final, and easier to accept” (240), a statement that echoes the narrator’s own desire for narrative closure. The return to China performs a closing of the domestic space that uses time, geography, and national upbringing to place the two sides of the family in disconnected domestic spaces. While Winnie and Ping admit their shared origins when Ping states that “you and I drank the same mother’s milk” (244), the narrator views the Chinese side of the family as the Other that she can capture without allowing its intricacies to invade the Canadian side. The division is enforced with the words, “it would take a powerful sense of family to bridge the time and distance since traveled” (265). The description of the journey into China’s Other space is another example of the narrative distancing technique: “The paved road wound along the estuary of the Pearl River. We rolled through scenes of timeless China. Women, their pant legs rolled up, babies tied to their backs, labored knee-deep in rice paddies; their men worked ploughs drawn by water buffalo” (242). The text briefly references “the chaotic construction of the new China” (242) but dwells instead on the elements that ease the nostalgic return to the Motherland. The chaos that the deconstruction of the family has unleashed disappears in the alignment with a single familial and national space. In other words, the dissonant sides of the family identity recede to the background as the privileging of the Canadian side over the other avoids an uncomfortable transnational position.

The text claims a space within the Canadian nation by imposing “progress” that distances Canada from China. As Roy Miki writes, “Chinese” and “the historical and cultural distances it opens in Canadian contexts allows the narrator to claim a

Canadianness against which it can be measured – and finally transcended” (“Can Asian Adian?” 64). Reified national borders position Canada as the space that abounds with the freedom and potentiality that are lacking in backward Chinese space: “for Mother, who had lived her childhood in a shadow of sacrifice for the Chinese side of the family, her parents’ act of immigration to the new world and her mother’s determination in pregnancy to chance the journey by sea had been her liberation, the best gift of all” (259). This stress on Canada being the “best gift of all” resolves the familial ambiguities by using Canadian progress to splice apart the Chinese and Canadian sides. The transnational elements of the family fade away as the text ends with the “liberating differences” (265) that separate the Chinese and Canadian portions of the narrative. By contrasting the lives of those in Canada with those of the family members left behind in China, the text reinforces the hierarchical relationship between the two sides of the family. Winnie’s “five children were university-educated and living their own lives. Ping and Yuen could expect to die in Chang Gar Bin, the birth and burial place of generations of the family. They could nurture only faint hopes that their children or their children’s children might escape a peasant’s lot” (260). The letter from uncle Yuen in which he writes of his “hope to get my children out of China to take root in Canada” (260) also performs this reification of Canadian space. The privileging of Canada over China naturalizes Canadian borders that oppose Chinese foreign intrusions. The transnational is displaced outside of domestic space where its location in pre-modern time justifies the rootedness of the Chong family and the text in exclusively Canadian soil.

The closure of the narrative, the family, and the Canadian nation is an attempt at denying the cyborg possibility that haunts the text. This containment emerges in the text as a necessary first step in achieving a coherent national subjectivity that has

eluded the family for so long. Mari Peepre agrees with this necessity, arguing in her article on Chong and Lee that “the narrating third-generation daughter can synthesize her family history into a meaningful narrative and in the process create a new identity which combines all the identities of all the women who preceded her” (86). Peepre reinscribes the assumption that a familial history must be synthesized in order for its members to become “fully integrated individuals” (87). In other words, Peepre argues that Canadian subjects face self-destruction if they leave the dissonant aspects of their familial history in disarray. Chong similarly believes that it is the responsibility of the third-generation narrator to use her position in Canada to give meaning to May-ying’s life through the lens of “a more modern world of choice” (265). Peepre asserts that “hidden stories and unspoken truths emerge and can finally be set aside” (88) as the third-generation narrator moves to claim full and unimpeded national membership. The narrative achieves the closure and exclusively national belonging that the narrator and Peepre seek but at the price of recontaining the transnational within an artificial textual space.

The proverbial return to China massages the narrative and its characters back into a coherent form. The last chapter of the text recounts a second trip to China and a visit to “Mother’s beginnings,” the house “where Chan Sam took the pregnant May-ying after stepping off the boat from China” (262). The return to the familial beginnings reseals the body of the narrative and May-ying in a holistic circle. The text restores the concubine by finding “some nobility of purpose to the hard lives that Chan Sam and May-ying led” (265) and by reducing May-ying’s life to a linear movement in time, space, and progress from China to Canada. The transgressive subject finishes as a coherent, labouring body who sacrifices herself for the solidity of Canadian national space. The narrator writes that “the lost history that Mother and I recovered gave the past new meaning, perhaps enough to be a compass to provide some bearings when her

grandchildren chart their own course” (266). The erasure of the fragmented elements of May-ying’s body permits the construction of a textual body that emerges whole from the wreckage of the past. The text ends with words that stabilize the narrative by burying the familial ghosts in the past where they pose little concern to the family, nation, and narrative that is reconstructed. The narrator writes, “If they could hear from the grave, I would tell my grandfather and my grandmother that I have seen, for their dead eyes, the fruits of their labors. I would tell them they can now close their eyes in sleep” (266). These soothing instructions to the dead lay the concubine and the transnational to rest. The transnational elements that manifest themselves throughout the text are lost as it disconnects itself from China and reinscribes a place within a static Canadian nation.

However, Lee declares a counter-intention to confront and most importantly, engage with the ambiguities of transnational space. Lee claims the nation for her characters but she also strives for a different conception of the place and form of Chinese Canadian history. While *Disappearing Moon Cafe* acknowledges the strength of naturalized national borders, it differs from *The Concubine’s Children* in its willingness to question the pressures to produce a coherent reading of the past. Kae first arrives at a mock realization of her narrative responsibility when she declares that “I am the resolution to this story” (209) who must assume the responsibility of drawing together the dissonant fragments of her ancestral history. Kae envisions the form that this drawing together will take as she writes, “I am standing at the counter beside her, staring hard into the woodgrain of my mother’s cabinets, trying to imagine an enticing movie poster with a title like *Temple of Womged Women*, in romantic script: ‘They were full of ornament, devoid of truth!’” (209). However, while on the surface Kae seems to subscribe to this imagined conclusion, beneath its smooth delivery, her emphasis on romance and ornamentation is a critique of a superficial packaging of domestic

disorder. She asserts that “after three generations of struggle, the daughters are free!” (209) in a perfect replication of narrative coherence that draws attention to its constructed nature. She makes this declaration to the character Chi who herself blurs the rules governing family membership, thereby reinforcing the irony of statements that she will later adapt according to her representational agenda. Kae understands that there is an expectation for her to reconsolidate the domestic boundaries but undermines this expectation through a hyper-performance that enacts closure while acknowledging the constructed nature of the resulting textual and national limits.

Lee is located within what she describes as “the cultural politics of writing in Canada” (“*Disappearing Moon Café*”) that demands the recovery of “a sense of history and place” (13) within a nation that has hitherto denied Chinese Canadians a space of legitimacy. Lee draws attention to the constructedness of national space but is also aware that its naturalized borders still have the power to suppress transnational disruption. Ultimately, the still naturalized borders of the nation keep her text disconnected from its transnational potential and the promise of cyborg subjectivity. Lee satisfies herself with a transnational borderspace that must still exist “outside” of national territory. Leslie Bow examines Kae’s voyage to Hong Kong to reconnect with Hermia Chow and argues that “*Disappearing Moon Café* inscribes an alternative feminist genealogy precisely in its lesbian resolution” (101). Lee reconfigures the conventional return to the Motherland that sees promise in a new union with Hermia that challenges the desires of patriarchy and the nation-state for a passive labouring female body. Lee hints at the possibility of agency that exists in excess of current constraints when Kae plans to remove her son and her own body from both heteronormative and Canadian space. This decision is transgressive because Kae refuses to remain within constructed limits, and in addition, claims a position within a space of fluctuating borders. Throughout the narrative, characters like Gwei Chang,

Fong Mei, and Suzanne smother their desires within domestic space; however, Kae exposes domestic space as fiction and predicts her future creative agency as both a writer and a generative physical body. Her words, “Anyway, sweetie, see you at the Kai Tak airport twenty-one hundred sharp, Hong Kong time, Tuesday, March fifth” (216), stake out a new identity location that thrives on the productivity of boundary-crossing interconnections and interdependencies.

Unfortunately, Kae must disconnect herself from Canadian space in order to perform this enabling boundary-crossing. This future identity space reenergizes the domestic transnational connections that eluded Kae when she remained trapped within the still naturalized constraints of the nation-state. Kae wishes to reject the confining role of “the token, pregnant, ethnic woman” (123) and go instead “on a voyage to you at long last” (216) where she can confront the transnational connections that are denied her present national narrative gaze. Throughout the text, Hermia offers other disruptive possibilities that Kae misses because of her weddedness to the authenticity claims of her family. Hermia lingers outside the borders of a narrative that excludes her because she questions the very tenets of its legitimacy, as when Kae writes that “legitimate, traditional and conventional were the adjectives to wear in those days, especially when I suspected my own identity might be as defective. Worse still, I thought that they were the ones illegitimizing Hermia; not I” (41). Kae eventually sees her family as a façade that delegitimizes *her* and *not* Hermia and runs off to chase the productive transnational possibilities that are still covered over in Canadian space. She declares to Hermia that she would rather “LIVE A GREAT NOVEL” (216) than allow the conventions of autoethnography, the nation, and patriarchy to constrain her. Lee recognizes the continued ability of the nation-state to contain Kae within its domestic space while she simultaneously voices the possibilities of future transnational connection. Kae travels to Hong Kong to claim the alternative creativity that is not yet

possible within the confines of a naturalized national space. Her flight to Hong Kong and to Hermia is an escape out of the impositions of the nation that at least offers the possibility of an alternative to the containing “HAPPILY EVER AFTER” (216) to which Chong and Lee succumb.

This conventional “romantic” ending pays heed to the continuance of the naturalized borders of the nation while it simultaneously foreshadows the potential for cyborg subjectivity in a transnational borderspace. As the text claims a place of national legitimacy for the Wong family, the transnational fragments of Kae’s familial and national history stand “outside” of the textual borders in the lingering space that remains after the narrative ends. Kae reunites with Hermia in a constructed ending that permits the haunting cyborg offspring to be the final bodies that emerge after the moment of narrative closure. The novel continues past its closing frames with two of these unwanted reminders of porous national and patriarchal borders: the Janet Smith case and the relationship between Gwei Chang and Kelora Chen. The Epilogue is the borderspace that first depicts the Canadian government unsuccessfully attempting to pass the Janet Smith bill and then, Chinese patriarchy ineffectual uniting during the Janet Smith crisis. The unsettling of the border between Yellow and White that the case incites persists as the bill to reinstate the racial divide fails. Lee writes that “the Janet Smith bill flopped and became Chinatown’s first real success story” (227) at forcing the state to concede its vulnerability. Similarly, the case forces Chinese patriarchy to concede its own fractured structures when Gwei Chang witnesses the weakening of the old community leaders and finds that he has “lost a lifelong friend, a brotherhood, an entire way of life” (227). The community and the government attempt to construct the “truths” of the case in order to reinstate their borders; however, the haunting legacy of the case keeps both groups in the shifting and unstable terrain of the transnational borderspace. The incident evidences boundary transgression as well as the ineffectual

attempts that patriarchy and the state make to suppress its destabilizing repercussions. The unanswered questions surrounding the Janet Smith Case claim a location in this borderspace where they draw attention to the mutual vulnerability of these two forces.

The second scene of the Epilogue returns to the borderspace that set the narrative in motion: the wilderness contact zone where Gwei Chang once surrendered to transnational possibility. The text deals a blow to domestic borders by granting admittance to the son who Gwei Chang has spent a lifetime disowning for the sake of his familial coherence. In this scene, Ting An rejects his outsider status as a disinterested employee and claims his belonging within the Wong family by forcing Gwei Chang to acknowledge their up until now secret connection. Ting An scorns his father for adhering to authenticity when he confronts Gwei Chang for abandoning Kelora: “Like your real wife from China?” he asked. “Not a dirty half-breed, buried somewhere in the bush?” (233). Ting An compels Gwei Chang to revisit the mixed origins that lurk beneath his familial façade and, more importantly, the woman whom he abandoned in the contact zone.

Lee then revives the spirit of Kelora Chen in order to give her the recognition that Gwei Chang has denied her within the frames of his domestic world. Gwei Chang says, “You’ve been haunting me all my life. Now, I need someone to talk to. So talk to me!” (236), calling on Kelora to speak and claim her connectivity to the familial, national, and textual bodies that have dematerialized her thus far. Because Kelora returns in an Epilogue that occurs “outside” the narrative borders, she functions as a haunting reminder of the cyborg possibility that the textual and national borders exclude. The final words in the text speak from the contact zone of the transnational borderspace where Gwei and Kelora rematerialize and reenergize their past connection: “The steady rhythm of feet thumping in his head. The smell of snow; their burning hearts. They huddled together, legs a slippery tangle. Pure and naked, their

juices still swift-flowing currents. The earth seemed to drift” (236-7). This concluding contact between Gwei Chang and Kelora stands in opposition to a fixed domestic façade with the swift-flowing currents of their transnational bodies that clamour to break down the walls that keep them apart. Kelora is damaged from transnational repression but she emerges in broken fragments nonetheless after Lee seemingly shuts her out of narrative space.

This final meeting of Gwei Chang and Kelora signals the haunting possibilities that continue well past the supposed closure of the familial, national, and textual frames. Although *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine’s Children* both treat early Chinese Canadian history, Lee’s parting treatment of the haunting racialized female body contrasts against the buried fate of the transnational connections that Chong depicts. The texts chart a period in Chinese Canadian history when the nation-state and patriarchy consolidated their identities by containing the racialized female reproductive body within a claustrophobic domestic space. While Chong reseals the familial womb by recontaining May-ying in her reproductive role, Lee suggests the return of the cyborg body that promises a future site that breaks free of current domestic containment. However, Lee stops short of launching her narrative into this transnational borderspace because of her residual containment within naturalized national space. She acknowledges the power of domestic walls to exclude the transnational as she places her cyborg offspring “outside” of the narrative frames. She constructs excessive endings that give the gendered and textual bodies productive potential by pointing her narrative towards the yet unrealized possibility of a borderspace that is uncertain, permeable, and renegotiable. The creations that emerge from this envisioned transnational future declare their fragmentation and “illegitimacy” within a reconfigured identity space. Meanwhile, they must remain

outside of domestic borders where they serve as reminders of the transnational possibility that the nation-state and the family so anxiously foreclose.

Lee and Chong depict a period in Canadian history when the nation-state denied its transnational connections by regulating the flow of bodies entering its “pure” identity space. This nation-state exercised its legislative authority to exclude the unwanted transnational elements that disrupted its naturalized boundaries. The violent treatment of transnational possibility that appears in the next chapter on Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* and Kerri Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field* demonstrates that the Canadian state continued to police its borders well beyond its initial nation-building days. Kogawa and Sakamoto explore a wartime and post-war nation that finds a new use for the transnational as a shaming tool to demarcate and then later, to assimilate away difference. Like Lee and Chong, Kogawa and Sakamoto are still tied to the naturalized borders of the nation that grant them contingent belonging while still marginalizing them as Others. In the end, the figure of the cyborg mother emerges to represent the ambivalence of Japanese Canadian creativity that simultaneously makes visible and disowns its transnational connections.

CHAPTER THREE

The Absent Mother:

Resuturing the Nation in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*

Cleansing the National of the Transnational

Previous critics have largely treated Japanese Canadian internment and its literary representations as reflective of a national crisis that defined Japanese Canadians almost exclusively through their relationship to the nation-state. Scott McFarlane argues that “for Japanese Canadians then, Canadian cultural identity continually signifies their own *alieNation*” (“Covering *Obasan*” 408); Mason Harris explores the relationship that Naomi in *Obasan* has to Canadian soil when he writes, in her painful sense of growing from Canadian soil she affirms Emily’s assertion that “We are the country” (55); Donald Goellnicht reads *Obasan* as the triumph of the new Canadian ‘father land’ over the old Japanese ‘mother tongue/culture’ (“Father Land” 122); and, finally, Roy Miki argues that “social invisibility set the boundaries for a subjectivity positioned on the precarious edge of nation-state identity” (*Broken Entries* 195). While these selected critical examples validly critique the alienation Japanese Canadians experienced from Canada, they operate within a national framework that focuses on the relationship that Japanese Canadians had with the nation. These critics have understandably neglected the events, people, and discourses outside of the nation in their bid to claim domestic space for Japanese Canadians. The danger is that this positioning of internment as a national crisis overlooks the fundamental role that the

transnational has played in shaping the position of Japanese Canadians vis-à-vis the nation. Characters like Kogawa's Naomi and Sakamoto's Asako exist within a transnational borderspace that both the nation and critics have denied in their adherence to national borders.

This chapter departs from these earlier critical readings by examining the fears that the nation-state harboured against the "outside" that fuelled the violent positioning and eventual displacement of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Events overseas, the connections Japanese Canadians and the Canadian-state had to Japan, as well as Canada's own transnational affiliations all played a part in the internment of Japanese Canadians. Both *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* treat characters whose marginalized status is very much contingent on the desire of the Canadian state to suppress the transnational within its borders. Their characters inhabit a borderspace where the foreign and the domestic collide. In Kogawa's text, Naomi speaks of this borderspace as she explains, "it is a riddle, Stephen tells me. We are both the enemy and not the enemy" (76). While Naomi views herself as a victimized national subject, her victimization is due to a nation that fears her ability to see that this riddle applies to its own identity as well. Naomi remains locked in this riddle and within the confines of naturalized national space because of a state that persistently denies the influences that shape the policing of its borders.

Obasan and *The Electrical Field* depict characters who struggle against the constructed national borders that lock them within the void of transnational shame. The texts open with characters who are in the midst of dealing with the legacy of a state policy that punished them for their perceived transnational associations. In *Obasan*, Naomi and her relatives lie trapped in the silence of unarticulated past trauma, while in *The Electrical Field*, Asako and her family stay in a small Ontario town where they are isolated from both the Japanese Canadian and the larger White community. The two

novels are haunted with the emptiness of families that lack the body and the voice to speak back to the nation-state that deemed them Other. For example, Kogawa introduces her text with the words, “*I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. I hate the staring into the night. The questions thinning into space. The sky swallowing echoes.*” Her words battle against the debilitating silence of living within a national space that refuses to recognise the legitimacy of internment experiences. *Obasan* disrupts this culture of amnesia by voicing the harsh realities of the war that the state has covered over with silence. This sense of stillness also pervades Sakamoto’s text as when her narrator, Asako, laments that “the field was silence. Children should have been out by now, on their way home for lunch, calling to one another, baby birds weeping to be fed. Something was wrong. Come out, come out, I wanted to call” (15). Asako recognizes her powerlessness to voice what is silent but fails to probe the power of the one performing the silencing: the nation-state. However, by the very act of speaking out, she initiates the process of deconstructing the nation-state that renders her invisible and static within its borders.

Kogawa and Sakamoto begin by deconstructing the naturalized walls that contain Japanese Canadians by turning to the nation-state and its wartime desires for identity control. Their texts reread the past by questioning the motives of the nation-state that claimed to “evacuate” Japanese Canadians for the safety of both themselves and the larger normative Canadian populace. Naomi and Asako live in present non-existence due to the treatment that they received from a nation that desired a coherent façade in the face of transnational disruption. As Andrew Parker et al argue, because “nations are forever haunted by their various definitional others,” they not only “need to administer difference through violent acts of segregation, censorship, economic coercion, physical torture, policy brutality,” but also have the “insatiable need for representational labor to supplement its founding ambivalence, the lack of self-

presence in its origin or in its essence” (5). In this case, both Naomi and Asako inhabit a nation that covers over its founding ambivalence by monitoring, regulating, and frequently, suppressing difference. In her school classroom in Slocan, Naomi sings the national anthem that rationalizes the need for an impermeable nation that is “free” of transnational taint:

*O Canada, our home and native land
True patriot love in all thy sons command
With glowing hearts we see thee rise
The true north, strong and free ... (170)*

The anthem highlights the clear territorial definitions that Canada requires in order to maintain the “true patriot love” that polices its identity space. Similarly, Asako makes a comment about the “Japanese” Chisako – “seeing her that time, I thought to myself that she didn’t belong here at all” (25) – that mimics a nation-state intent upon constructing naturalized rules of inclusion and exclusion. This mimicry underlines the insistent desire of the state for a coherent nation that came under threat in a wartime situation that highlighted the transnational elements within its midst.

The texts therefore spotlight a time of transnational disruption when the nation-state targeted Japanese Canadians in its bid to restabilize its identity borders. While mainstream society resented Japanese Canadians prior to the war, most especially for their economic success, the state could not act on a massive scale against this transnational threat because of its relationship with Japan.¹ However, with the escalation of the war, Canada found a means of displacing its anxieties over the transnational onto a community that it had already deemed “foreign.” In *The Electrical Field*, Yano explains to Asako that “we were doing too well, so they had to set us back, didn’t they?” (122)², and that “they were hoping we’d all commit hara-kiri in the camps, don’t you think, Saito-san?” (258), as he criticises a wartime state that wished

to rid itself of the messy bodies that drew attention to its own transnational associations. As Kandice Chuh argues, “the historic deployment of the ‘transnation’ as a means for justifying internment points to ways that transnationalism may be used to reify specifically *national* boundaries through a reaffirmation of the identity of the ‘true’ national subject” (*Imagine Otherwise* 14). In other words, in order to strengthen its wartime boundaries, the Canadian government held out a “true” national subject that was opposed to an imagined transnational Other. The characters in *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* are suddenly thrown into a situation in which the simmering treatment of Japanese Canadians as Other boiled over as the nation sought to resolve its own ambivalent relationship to the transnational. Kogawa’s Aunt Emily speaks of the desire of the state for a fixed Other when she declares, “over here, they say ‘Once a Jap always a Jap,’ and that means us. We’re the enemy” (89). Aunt Emily understands that she is subject to the whim of a state that wants to have a definable enemy to make its wartime machinery as efficient and impermeable as possible.³

Consequently, the wartime state purged itself of transnational disorder by first of all discursively positioning Japanese Canadians as “enemy aliens,” and then leveraging this construction to excuse its increasingly violent treatment of this “enemy” presence. As David Palumbo-Liu asserts, the history of the nation reveals a repeated assertion of “a transhistorical, absolute racial separateness between Asia and America” (*Asian/American* 222) in order to preserve a fixed national space. While Palumbo Liu speaks of the American nation, his comments apply equally to a Canadian context in which Japanese Canadians faced similar treatment for their supposed “racial separateness.” This process of racialization used the transnational to mark Japanese Canadians as bodies that circulated apart from normative Canadian society. Aunt Emily notes the easy establishment of Japanese Canadian transnational difference when she remarks, “strange how these protesters are so much more vehement about Canadian-

born Japanese than they are about German-born Germans. I guess it's because we look different" (88). The visual difference that Emily notes became a means for the Canadian state to represent Japanese Canadians as a threat to a supposedly unblemished national body. Japanese Canadians were told they were "undesirable" and "illegitimate" in contrast to the "true north strong" and "not free" (39) nation that claimed a monopoly over representational agency. Naomi uses these terms as she writes of the imagined response of the Custodian who stresses the delegitimized status of her family in the eyes of the state. Meanwhile, in Sakamoto's text, Stum repeats the labelling that positions both Yano and himself as foreign subjects when he labels his friend a "kamikaze Jap" (21) who is the volatile Other to the stable, and seemingly "benign" national Self. The characters in both novels must deal with discursive positioning that uses the undesirability and illegitimacy of Japanese Canadians in order to strengthen the fiction of a "pure" Canadian identity space.

This discursive positioning not only contained Japanese Canadians within a fixed representation, but it also allowed the nation-state to rationalize its more literal efforts to rid itself of its transnational connections. Chisako complains to Asako about this ability of the state to use the transnational to justify violence when she complains that "just because we're nihonjin, they think they can do anything to us" (213). The state leveraged the spectre of the transnational in order to silence opposition to its decision to send Japanese Canadians to remote internment camps where they would cease to draw attention to the fractured wartime nation. Internment was an act of imposed despatialization that ripped Japanese Canadians from their homes and relegated them to a limbo space of transnationality that existed on the margins of the nation. Roy Miki speaks of this despatialization of Japanese Canadian communities:

What these details of history say nothing of, though, is the interior place, the ravaged heart, the tearing away of everything that had been associated with

‘home,’ the family, the community, all the nuanced network of the social, cultural and spiritual life built by the issei and the nisei for over fifty years.

(Broken Entries 16-17)

Miki voices the devastating consequences of a state policy that deployed the transnational in order to justify the expulsion of a perceived enemy presence. As Aunt Emily declares, “it was an evacuation all right,” “just plopped here in the wilderness. Flushed out of Vancouver. Like dung drops. Maggot bait” (126). Emily makes comments that cut past the “evacuation” excuse and expose a state that legislated the rootlessness that it wanted its Japanese Canadian citizens to feel. Emily describes a profound sense of loss as she writes that “the men at the first camps all crowd down to the station every time a train passes with a new batch of men. They hang from the windows and ask about their families. Sam said he wept” (109). Emily weeps with the men who feel powerless to stop a wartime state that tears away their right to exist, interact, and most of all, reproduce within its national borders.

The Absent Mother

This regulation of Japanese Canadian “difference” had specific repercussions for one particular body that acted as a site for both the nation and the community to negotiate the transnational: the racialized female reproductive body. The texts explore the *process* and *repercussions* of transnational expulsion by focusing their narratives on the mother whose absence is symbolic of appropriated Japanese Canadian reproduction. This focus on the Japanese Canadian reproductive body was a bid on the part of the state to achieve what Donna Haraway refers to as “evolutionary stable strategies” (*Simians* 61) that would consolidate and more importantly, replicate its wartime identity space. Ken Adachi argues that internment represented the

culmination of a long standing fear of Japanese Canadians swamping a White space and not the “aberration” that Guy Beauregard (“After *Obasan*” 9) notes many critics use to excuse internment. Adachi writes, “adding supposedly ‘irrefutable’ evidence which seemed, for anti-Japanese observers, to substantiate the horrors of the image of Japanese immigrants swamping the province and becoming the dominant race, was their ‘power of fecundity’” (154). The fecundity of the Japanese Canadian female was unsettling because it demographically threatened the power hierarchy between the nation and the transnational and more importantly, because it unmasked national purity as a myth. In short, the mother represented undesired transnational growth. The Canadian government turned to reproduction and the female body as a way of combating its transnational worries.

The texts consequently centre on the disappearance of the maternal body that marks the beginning of the disintegration of the Japanese Canadian familial unit and the ascendancy of the violently regulated national family. *The Electrical Field* begins at the time of the Yano family disappearance in which both Chisako and her children are “missing” (15), apparently swallowed up by the Japanese and Canadian patriarchy that claim their bodies as their own. Asako’s own family is also missing a mother whose absence Asako bewails with the words, “for Mama had taught me nothing, nothing at all” (295). Meanwhile, Naomi returns continually to the disappearance of her mother that occurred shortly after Gower abused her in his house when she was away from the protective presences of both her mother and her grandmother. She recounts that “it is around this time that Mother disappears. I hardly dare to think, let alone ask, why she has to leave. Questions are meaningless” (71). The text describes the departure of the maternal body from domestic space as Naomi stands at the harbour and watches her mother and grandmother set off on a journey that will take them far from the house in Marpole.⁴ She writes, “the boat pulls away and I cannot see my mother’s face, though

Father keeps pointing and waves” (72). In both texts, the disappearance of maternal bodies marks the hollowing out of the families as they brace themselves for impending state violence.

The disappearance of the protective presence of the mother marks the moment of violation when the state acted on the Japanese Canadian community and rid it of its ability to generate beyond its claustrophobic boundaries. Andrew Parker et al. argue that the “idealization of motherhood by the virile fraternity would seem to entail the exclusion of all nonreproductively-oriented sexualities from the discourse of the nation” (6). In this case, the Japanese Canadian mothers in these texts must suddenly leave the domestic space because their sexualities are nonreproductively-oriented against the unitary nationalist cause. Instead, it is the power of the virile fraternity that supplants the mother from her position of generative agency. Kogawa captures this unwanted abuse of the Japanese Canadian body through her depiction of the molestation of Naomi at the hands of Old Man Gower in which “he stands me on the bathroom toilet and opens the medicine cabinet. He begins to undress me. I do not resist. One does not resist adults” (68). Akin to the nation that appropriates the Japanese Canadian reproductive body, Gower overtakes Naomi’s body and contains her within his manipulative sexual agenda. The sense of powerlessness that Naomi feels with her abuser parallels the experiences of Japanese Canadians who submitted to a state that treated them as marginalized children. As Christina Tourino asserts, “Kogawa connects Naomi’s abuse by Gower to the abuse of the Japanese Canadians by white Canada in that both interrupt Japanese Canadian procreation” (146). Meanwhile, Sakamoto represents the violation of Japanese Canadian procreation with the slow but steady decline of Asako’s mother in the years following internment. Asako writes of her familial crippling as she describes “nine years of watching Mama’s bowed legs climb those crooked steps and seeing her arrive breathless at the top; of smelling another

family's smells drift up through the floor" (56). Mrs. Saito's legs are "bowed" from surviving the loss of her home and the containment of the family to the cramped "dark upstairs" (56) of another family's home. It is not long before Asako's mother disappears entirely, effaced from the nation that took away her ability to locate herself within its privileged identity space.

The decline and disappearance of the maternal body lead to a pervasive sterility that keeps the characters within claustrophobic domestic limits. For both of these texts, the disrupted reproduction of the community translates into a population that is devoid of bodies that can reproduce the next generation. The abundance of barren, surrogate, adoptive, and neglectful mothers in the novels draws attention to the effects of an internment policy that restricted the growth of the Japanese Canadian community. Asako looks at the neglected child Sachi and asks, "where was Keiko, her own mother?" (8), later writing that "anyone spotting us would have taken me for a neglectful mother, crazy even, leading my daughter out in the rain without a coat or umbrella. Yet I had done more for her than Keiko would have, I knew that" (81). Women like Asako safeguard a dwindling population as they tend the children who are starving for the attention of their mothers, but they themselves are unable to catalyze generative growth. As Christino Tourino argues, "for an *ethnic* community, disrupted reproduction – whether enforced, chosen, or beyond any human control – is a genuine threat to physical, and therefore cultural, survival and is in a kind of dangerous compliance with the hegemonic culture that is trying to extinguish the Other" (136). Thus, *Obasan* deals with the disrupted reproduction in the Nakane family that sees Obasan, the substitute mother, take care of Naomi and Stephen while she is unable to bear any living children herself. Naomi writes that her aunt had two miscarriages that mark a void within the family that she is reduced to filling with the "springer spaniel pup" (19) that Aunt Emily gives to Obasan to ease her pain. The presence of Obasan in

the face of maternal absence reminds Naomi of the inability of the family to create children who can break out of its claustrophobic existence. Instead, the family holds onto the few maternal presences that remain after internment.

Moreover, the loss of reproductive agency leaves many of the substitute mothers in a childlike state that inhibits them from progressing sexually. These characters are locked within their wartime childhood as the nation “progresses” past its own wartime experiences. Their barrenness is so debilitating because it robs these characters of the creative energy that will allow them to re-form new subjectivities that will move them beyond their current passive identity positions. Asako speaks of this infantilization of her body when she comments that “the last time I bled was just after he died. It didn’t surprise me that it stopped” (151). The cessation of her menstrual cycle evidences the fate of Japanese Canadian reproduction in the hands of a nation-state that effectively checked the growth of its transnational Others. Asako laments not only the loss of her brother, the heir to the Saito family line, but also the loss of her own productive capacity that reduces her to using the girl, Sachi, to play out her unrealized longings for a child. Meanwhile, Naomi laments a similar fate to Asako when she calls herself “spinster? Old maid? Bachelor lady? The terms certainly apply. At thirty-six, I’m no bargain in the marriage market” (8). Naomi expresses a bitter awareness of her “underdeveloped sexuality and identity” (Ty “Struggling” 122) that is a consequence of internment experiences that prevent her from forming functional relationships outside of the family. The invasive move of the nation-state to deny Japanese Canadians fully-formed, adult bodies translates into characters like these who are obsessed with their own generative shortcomings. Asako and Naomi feel so disconnected from their reproductive capacities that these capacities become imaginary, haunting them as they strive to move beyond the “sterility” of the past.

The disconnection that Asako and Naomi experience leads to a profound loss of bodily agency. These characters strive to relocate a place for themselves within the nation but are handicapped by the fact that they lack the material presence to ground themselves in a renewed sense of self. After her molestation, Naomi experiences a debilitating sense of bodily alienation that impedes her attempts to move beyond the space of trauma. Her cry, “I am not permitted to move, to dress, or to cry out” (69), highlights a loss of bodily agency that prevents her from acting against her aggressor. As King-Kok Cheung states, “after the molestation Naomi feels truncated” (*Articulate* 134) as she grapples with the consequences of ceding her body to the invasive priority of Old Man Gower’s desires. Similarly, Asako also expresses great difficulties in owning her fragmented body as she roams the electrical field in search of a new way to ground herself in a sense of “home.” The disconnection that pervades the text is symptomatic of a character who is unable to free herself of the memories of loss and displacement that haunt her after the war. In one scene, Asako examines a protruding vein that “seemed to vibrate grotesquely” (127) and that she refuses to recognize as her own. Asako is incredulous that the “bluish worm” (127) belongs to her body because her internment experiences have successfully disassembled her body into Othered pieces. Characters like Asako find it impossible to reclaim their bodies from the appropriative hands of the nation because they suffer from bodily alienation that lingers on well past their internment experiences.

This alienation transforms the “motherland” into a connection that defines the characters in both texts, but one that they must deny if they wish to retain a residual claim to the nation. The barrenness of the Japanese Canadian womb is not only the loss of reproductive agency, but also a product of the disrupted transmission of culture and genetic material from one generation to another that has resulted from the mother’s absence. Naomi yearns for the intimacy that she once shared with her mother but feels

that she must listen to Gower who insists that she must now attach herself to his invasive body. He commands her, “don’t tell your mother,” as her question, “where in the darkness has my mother gone?” (69), goes unanswered as she experiences abuse. King-Kok Cheung writes of this disconnection, arguing that “before Naomi’s encounter with Gower, she felt at one with Mother” (*Articulate* 134) but that afterwards, Naomi feels an increasingly widening gap between herself and the mother with whom she previously enjoyed an interconnected, positively interdependent relationship. This gap emerges as Naomi gives in to the pressure to repress her transnational ties to the “motherland” and adheres instead, to the smothering embrace of Gower. Asako similarly loses the closeness with her mother that she mourns when she writes that “Mama barely came near me. She pushed me away with the repulsion you can only have for one you are obligated to love and care for” (150-1). As time passes, Asako’s mother exists only in memories and photographs, “smiling the meagre smile” (192) that testifies to her neglectful care of her children and her own waning ability to connect with the rest of the family. Asako desperately wishes to reforge a link with her mother and her “motherland” but is so stymied by shame that she refuses to move beyond her self-destructive domestic isolation.

Consequently, the most devastating consequence of the disrupted maternal connection is the transnational shame that causes both Naomi and Asako to accept blame for the crimes perpetrated against their reproductive bodies. Naomi details her perceived complicity in her abuse when she says that “the secret is this: I go seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway. I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable. In the centre of my body is a rift” (69). Naomi invokes the idea of shame twice, writing that she feels “ashamed,” and that she is filled with “shame” (69), to emphasize the intense ambivalence that she feels about the molestation and her detachment from her mother. Shame works to make Naomi feel

that there is something inside of her that deserves the abuse that prevents her from speaking out against the past. Yano echoes these sentiments when he tells Asako that his wife “doesn’t know what it feels like to be ashamed to be nihonjin” (94), a comment that Asako dismisses in her refusal to acknowledge the “connection that was beyond words” (94) that exists between Yano and herself. Instead, she wallows in the shame that creates an irreconcilable disjuncture between her desire for national belonging and her simultaneous reaching for her transnational ties. Asako demonstrates that “shame on the other hand, is in part generated by the recognition of having been too close, where proximity to the other has been terminated” (Probyn *Carnal Appetites* 131). As Elspeth Probyn argues, “in shame there is always the hope that communication has only been momentarily broken, and that it will be restored” (139). Probyn explores shame in a way that is highly relevant to characters who must grapple with a tie that lingers on despite its seeming breakage. By the end of the war, these characters are ambivalent about what lies “outside,” desirous of these shadowy connections to the “motherland” while outwardly needing to cache them in shame as they prepare to renegotiate their relationship to a postwar nation.

Haunting Mothers within the Nation

After the war, the supposedly severed connections to the “motherland” continue to haunt the characters and the larger Canadian domestic space. Despite the efforts of the Canadian state to expel Japanese Canadians from the womb space, the characters and the transnational they represent are still *within* its borders. Internment has imperfectly rid the nation of the mother’s transnational body and of the foreign elements that are a part of its Self. The characters in both texts reside as unrecognized but palpable national presences after surviving internment and the loss of their

mothers. The displacement of the Nakane family to Slocan permits the Canadian state to pretend that they are “gone,” when in actuality the family never leaves the confines of national space. They have simply accepted their invisibility as they follow the lead of the children in the Slocan school who “scuttle into place like insects under the floorboards” (170). The Nakanes exist below the nation’s floorboards in order to allow the Canadian government to pretend that it has cleansed itself of its unwanted foreign elements. Asako recounts her own displacement that ironically still keeps her within the nation: “they made us leave Port Dover, leave Vancouver Island; it was because they sent us to the camps in the mountains and we’d had to leave the ocean behind” (55-6). Despite their enforced moves and postwar residence in Ontario, the Saito family members are no further from Canada than before. These characters continue to linger within the nation, underlining that national unity is a construct that has naturalized the containment of destabilizing transnational elements.

Rather, as the mothers in these texts haunt domestic space after their supposed ejection from it, they draw attention to the intimate relationship that exists between the national and the transnational. Aunt Emily pinpoints this ambivalent relationship between nation and Other when she writes that “in one breath we are damned for being ‘inassimilable’ and the next there’s fear that we’ll assimilate” (94). The Canadian state performs a mix of rejection and cloaked interaction as it emerges from the war in pieces that mock its smoothly functioning pretence. Asako expresses revulsion for her connection to Yano that mirrors the feelings the nation-state has towards its remnant transnational citizens: “[Yano’s odour] was alive and pungent, insistent, a man’s odour probing you all over. How I wanted to shake it off, shake both him and Papa off me, but I couldn’t” (5). Asako rejects Yano because he reminds her of the Japaneseness that she desperately wishes to deny in order to claim national legitimacy. Similarly, Canada rejects Japanese Canadians because they are proximate to the nation and not because

they are disconnected to it as the wartime policy of the government purported them to be. Asako subscribes to a state policy that must diffuse transnational threats before the many fragments of the domestic compromise a postwar, post-internment future.

The maternal body and the violent memories of the war continue to haunt the characters as they seek belonging within a resutured national body. The characters in *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* engage in an elaborate form of denial as the nation-state reconstructs a new postwar reproductive body that leaves the community little room to grow itself. The result are “orphaned” characters who aid in the creation of a postwar national presence as they seek a replacement womb for their now ghostly “motherland.” Asako looks at the neglected child, Sachi, and thinks of another “orphaned child” who she passed as she was leaving the internment camp: “she made me think of a scraggly urchin we’d passed on the road leaving the internment camp after the war, Papa and me, long ago. I was unhappy that day as I recall, because we were not going to the sea, I would not see Japan; we were staying in Canada” (2-3). Asako recalls that internment not only ended her connection to Japan, but that it also restricted her gaze to Canadian space. She feels sadness that stems from the shame of being one of many Japanese Canadians whose subjectivity is irrevocably rifted. On the one hand, characters like Asako have connections to people, places, and cultures “outside” of the nation but on the other hand, they exist within a domestic space that has proven its intolerance of the transnational. Thus, the characters in *Obasan* insist on their unequivocal Canadianness with an assertion, “*I am Canadian*” (41), that challenges the discriminatory policies of the state, but that also betrays a need to position Japanese Canadian as an exclusively domestic category within the reconstituted nation. Identity reduces to a choice between two binary labels, “that’s why I married him. He is Canadian, not nihonjin” (Sakamoto 118-19), that traps these characters into denying the Japanese part of their identities.

Because these characters wish to claim exclusive Canadian membership, they play a pivotal role in reconstructing a Canadian nation that forgets that the body of the transnational mother ever existed. They reclaim their place within the nation by reifying the very borders that had earlier justified the ejection of the mother from domestic space. When Naomi states, “I was born here” (7), to those who mistake her for a “foreigner” (7), she reveals the barriers to full acceptance and also her desire to claim solely national membership. Naomi is complicit in the rebuilding of national boundaries that uses the “dance to the multi-cultural piper’s tune” (248) to erase the violence of internment. This violent disruption of the national façade has to be hastily covered over before the nation’s fragments spill out into the open. However, in helping to cover over this violence, these characters further distance themselves from the maternal body by refusing to voice past injustices. Roy Miki speaks of the ambiguous position of being “the model (still racialized) minority, more ‘Canadian’ than the norm, and as ‘Japanese Canadian,’ the victim of injustices that had never been ‘acknowledged’” (*Broken Entries* 194). Asako falls prey to this model minority impetus as she cleanses herself of her mother tongue by obsessively trying to complete the newspaper crossword every day. She writes that this exercise of trying to prove her mastery of the English language stems from an impetus “to better myself. I was petrified, in spite of the progress I was making, of sliding back” (69). However, as Asako makes progress in these attempts to lose all traces of linguistic Japaneseness, she must simultaneously stifle the memories of her mother’s disappearance within the newly minted domestic sphere.

The characters construct this newly minted domestic space by playing by national reproductive rules that keep the haunting presence of the mother at bay. Their self-orientalizing permits the nation-state to overlook the fact that its postwar identity still contains residual transnational elements. Naomi writes that “some families grow

on and on through the centuries, hardy and visible and procreative. Others disappear from the earth without a whimper” (21). The Nakanes sacrifice their own growth for the visibility and procreativity of the nation. Sheng-mei Ma speaks of the complicity of those who “acquiesce to the Orientalist perspective, thus following the paradigm of Orientalism in terms of the binary opposition of Self and Other, of subjectivity and objectivity, and, most of all, of the power structure inherent in such a dichotomy” (*Immigrant Subjectivities* 17). In the case of these two narratives, this self-orientalization assumes the form of a distorted reproductive body that replicates national power structures. Chisako, who initially disturbs the community with her overt Japaneseness, later orientalizes herself in her relations with her boss, Mr. Spears. Chisako allows her White boss to appropriate her body for his sexual purposes as she becomes “a middle-aged woman, a mother, pretending to be a girl, playing the exotic temptress” (207). As “her skin grew paler, her eyes more slanted and round, her hair a lacquered black” (25), Chisako produces for Mr. Spears a Japanese body that is contained, submissive, and sexualized for his pleasure alone. Her metamorphosis particularly distresses Asako because of the deviation from being a mother to a sexual plaything that keeps a discursive distance between her body and that of her white lover. Just as Japanese Canadians keep private their interactive relationship with the nation, Chisako guards the knowledge of the physical contact with her White master as a shared illicit secret.

The characters practise this denial that covers over their alienness in order to reestablish a space within the nation. Sakamoto writes of this cloaking tendency when she writes that Asako’s father is shocked at the arrival of the Yano family in the neighbourhood: “Nihonjin?” he exclaimed. For what were the chances of three Japanese families settling in one small neighbourhood?” (68). The chances are so slim because the families in the text shun visibility lest they become targets once again of a

nation-state that fears the transnational. For example, confronted by the “Japanese” Chisako, Asako obsesses over the difference in their respective homes. She writes that “even now I was judging her, in my desperation; assuring myself that I kept my home better than she ever could have” (95), and returning over and over again to “that stain on Chisako’s carpet” that “preoccupied me, inexplicably. My stain, my clumsy presence, marked there for ever” (97). Asako’s obsession with the cleanliness of the domestic sphere is emblematic of a community that works hard to rid its homes of the transnational traces that could reactivate the nation’s violence. Asako fixates on the minute space of the local in whose confined quarters she feels she can exert control over unruly transnational traces. Similarly, Naomi mourns the loss of her home “on West 64th Avenue in Vancouver” where “the living-room is the darkest room, the walls of dark wood lit with dim lights” (54). Both *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* are set almost exclusively in homes that are rapidly shrinking under the darkness of transnational repression. Their characters limit their gazes to the newly sanitized domestic surface to prevent the nation from remembering their association with Japan’s Othered space. This constant negotiation between invisibility and visibility leaves the mother in no-man’s land as the characters purport to transcend past violence through wholehearted national acceptance.

Moreover, this negotiation becomes a futile obsession as the characters repeatedly cleanse national space from transnational incursions. For instance, Naomi’s brother, Stephen, purifies the domestic of anything that is “too Japanese” (238) in the hopes that he can rid himself of the internment experiences that mark his racialized body. Similarly, Yano unsettles the invisibility of a Japanese Canadian community in a small Ontario town by displaying the woman who he married in Japan, and for insisting on talking about wartime experience when the rest of the community wishes to deny that they ever occurred. Asako is drawn to the Yanos but at the same time says

that “I suppose I’d felt intimidated, knowing she was from Japan” (92) and that “I had no interest in that kind of discussion, of things I’d long ago left behind and made my peace with. But Yano kept on with them” (71). The Yanos are such a threat to Asako and her equanimity because their overt Japaneseness and desire for redress remind Asako of the falsity of her supposed reintegration into Canadian society. Together, they function as what Sau-ling Wong speaks of as “the racial shadow” who “draws out mixed feelings of revulsion and sympathy from the protagonist, usually compelling a painful reassessment of the behavioral code which has thus far appeared to augur full acceptance into American society” (*Reading* 92). Asako responds with deep ambivalence to the Yanos because they represent the disruptive transnational connections that she has repressed thus far. She rejects them because she feels pressured to accelerate her reentry into mainstream Canada by ridding herself of transnational connections.

The community also destructively turns inwards as it censures those like Yano or Aunt Emily who openly try to rematerialize the haunting transnational body and its pain. Those around both of these characters fear the renewed consequences of drawing undue attention to the transnational in the nation’s midst. Naomi refuses to talk to Aunt Emily about her internment experiences out of a reluctance to redress the past: “I handed the pamphlet back to her and started the car. The very last thing in the world I was interested in talking about was our experiences during and after World War II” (35). Emily and Yano invite the silencing label of “monstrous” as they persist in telling national and community secrets to outsiders. For instance, other Japanese Canadians designate Yano a “kamikaze Jap” (21) or a “monster” (282) because of his marriage to a Japanese woman and his refusal to accept his shame silently. His efforts at redress frighten other characters like Asako who cling to superficial national unity as they strive to keep the monstrous transnational at bay. Rosi Braidotti’s comment that “the

peculiarity of the organic monster is that s/he is both Same and Other” (“Signs of Wonder” 292) are particularly relevant to Asako as she negotiates Yano’s “monstrosity.” Yano is the monstrous Other to Asako because his strident assertions of Japaneseness and of the need for redress uncomfortably connect his body to her own. She expresses disgust over his decision “to air [his personal troubles] to the world and expect it to pay attention” (123) but continues to seek him out nonetheless. This inability to admit her attraction to Yano is symptomatic of a community that ambivalently deals with its transnational memories.

However, this ignoring of the transnational is imperfect as past violence festers at the heart of both the nation and these Japanese Canadian characters. Like the molestation Naomi experiences, Japanese Canadians nurse a private “secret” (Kogawa 69) that links them to their national “abuser” while simultaneously separating them from their transnational origins. What David Palumbo-Liu identifies as “the particular fear of the American state regarding the *interpenetrability* of groups from different races and ethnicities” (*Asian/American* 41) necessitates that this interpenetrability be deeply closeted within the domestic sphere. The texts demonstrate the lengths to which the characters will go to uphold this blameless and pure national space. When Yano voices anger, Asako silently disagrees, asserting that “my bitterness belonged to no one but myself. I did not share it with strangers; I did not hold them accountable. For these were private matters; family matters” (110). Asako holds her bitterness close to her private body, proud that she does not trouble the nation with blame for the atrocities it has committed. Instead, she shields the nation from its own past until this shielding develops into an obsession that traps her within its suffocating constructs. Kogawa also explores these efforts to keep memories of state brutality a secret. Obasan repeatedly says, “kodomo no tame,” “for the sake of the children” (240), as a protective justification for not telling the children of the past. However, by disconnecting the

children from their mother's experiences in Japan, Obasan encloses them in an artificially benign domestic sphere and in doing so, protects the nation's quietude from the past as well.

The result are characters that focus almost exclusively on domestic struggles out of a response to the imposed unacceptability of transnational associations. Their characters are obsessed with the minutia of the domestic that keeps their gazes firmly in a national space that has distanced itself from the violence that occurred both at home and overseas. Chisako speaks of the claustrophobia of a domestic environment that erects barriers against a menacing exterior space when she asks Asako, "I should put up drapes, shouldn't I?" and "keep our secrets to ourselves, ne?" (26). Amy Kaplan also underlines what the domestic keeps out when she argues that "foregrounding imperialism in the study of American cultures shows how putatively domestic conflicts are not simply contained at home but how they both emerge in response to international struggles and spill over national boundaries to be reenacted, challenged, or transformed" (16). In this case, internment suppressed the fact that Canada was as connected to Japan and as much an enemy as the Japanese Canadians it was displacing. This suppression forces Naomi to avoid thinking about what occurs outside of domestic territory because these incidents are inappropriately Japanese in a distinctly Canadian space. Naomi is reluctant to see beyond the domestic into transnational space where "all around her people one after another collapsed and died, crying for water. One old man no longer able to keep moving lay on the ground holding up a dead baby and crying, 'Save the children. Leave the old'" (261). These images are so unsettling because they draw attention to the death and chaos that brought Canada and Japan into undeniable intimacy. Instead, Naomi fixates on the resutured national façade that

covers over the transnational connections that have and continue to inflect her “home and native land.”

This refusal to acknowledge the transnational forestalls the return of the mother’s body that will allow these characters to relocate themselves within Canada’s reconfigured domestic space. Asako and the “orphaned” Sachi search for evidence of Chisako’s body by combing the ravine for “her blood” (43) that will reconfirm her material presence. However, they are unable to locate this particular mother’s missing body. Because, as Di Brandt asserts, “the politics of place and the politics of family, of human reproduction, are similarly and inextricably grounded in the maternal body” (111), the necessity of finding the maternal body becomes urgent if the characters wish to reground themselves in context. Asako and Sachi scour the woods for Chisako’s body because they believe that they will be able to resituate themselves through the reappropriation of this maternal body. Rosalind Petchesky writes that “in a social and historical context [...] in which women’s bodies have been so systematically expropriated that they have become inured to picturing their bodies as the property of others, in which reproductive bodies are signs of racist values, it seems vital that a process of reappropriation, reowning, take place” (“The Body as Property” 402-3). Unfortunately for these characters, this reowning of the body is frustrated by the inability to locate this reproductive body. Patriarchy and the nation have expropriated the mother’s body so effectively that the material traces that would provide a residual link are gone. This urgency to forge a material link with the absent mother echoes in Kogawa’s text when Emily writes to her sister, demanding to know, “is it true, Nesan, that you were pregnant just before you left?” (108). Emily seeks reassurance that generation is still possible despite the brutal severing of the mother’s body from the domestic world. However, groundedness seems like an impossibility because her sister and her potential offspring are located outside of domestic space.

The characters in both novels feel a profound disempowerment that they believe the returned body of the mother can reverse. Naomi exclaims that “if my mother were back, she would move aside all the darkness with her hands and we would be safe and at home in our home” (75). In yearning for the mother’s body, Naomi nostalgically looks back to a whole body that has yet to endure the ravages of internment. Internment has breached the protected womb of her childhood in which she remembers a perfect union between mother and daughter. However, while Naomi focuses on her mother’s absent body, she fails to see that her own body is vulnerable to the appropriative purposes of the nation-state. Instead, the violence done to the gendered body appears in dreams in which “three beautiful oriental women lay naked in the muddy road, flat on their backs, their faces turned to the sky” (66) as “soldiers lifted their rifles, aiming across the bodies of the women. This was sport. A game to play with animals in the forest. Power” (66). The repressed nature of this vision highlights that Naomi refuses to move past national limits into its chaotic and ghostly power dynamics. The fear of interacting with the nation under her own terms keeps her within its artificial space. The characters in both novels reveal their subscription to a pure domestic space as Naomi worries that “if I speak, I will split open and spill out” (68), and Asako expresses her discomfort that “the whole world was leaking and we were a part of it, and so were Tam and Kimi and Yano, wherever they were” (76). These characters must split open and spill out if they wish to see the nation for the construction that it is. They live with the knowledge that they can deny the transnational for only so long.

The Return of the Cyborg Mother

The spillage into the transnational finally occurs at the end of both narratives as their characters are suddenly jolted into seeing an interpenetrated domestic space. Up until these jolting moments, these characters sense but continue to push away the haunting transnational dimensions of their history. They are fixated instead on achieving equality within the Canadian nation. As Augusto Espirito writes, “the casualty has been an international dimension to Asian American political culture that has always existed side by side with legal and labor struggles for inclusion, emancipation, and equality within the American nation” (188). For instance, because Naomi adopts a nation-bound approach to her personal history, she believes that her mother’s travels outside of Canada sever the connection between mother and daughter and between Canadian and Japanese contexts. She continually poses the question, “why did my mother not return? After all these years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response” (26), but she is hesitant to recognize the response that lies buried in her mother’s Japanese wartime history. Meanwhile, Asako uses her Canadian location to distance herself from the transnational:

It could only be a picture in his head, as it was in mine: a newspaper cartoon of hideous flying insect-men plummeting in flames. Photographs of Japanese soldiers in magazines, squashed faces, hundreds and hundreds of them, all the same. Not one recognizable. Not on Yano. In spite of all I now knew him to be.
(256)

The characters refuse to allow their connections to Japan to focus into specificity. Instead, the bodies of the kamikaze pilots and Naomi’s mother circulate outside of domestic space where they haunt the mental borders that the characters carefully erect.

However, these transnational questions begin to pierce their cloaks of invisibility the longer the characters leave them unanswered.

Although the transnational lies discursively outside of national space, it still continues to exist within and affect the shape of the domestic spaces in these texts. As Rachel Lee argues, “in the Asian American cultural texts I examine, the imagining of America is simultaneously the imagining of Asia, and vice versa, with the two sometimes posed in opposition and at other times as overlapping” (*The Americas* 6). Naomi has been so determinedly avoiding reading the overlaps between the maternal body and her own that she fails to see her mother is much closer than she initially believed. Numerous times in the narrative, Naomi senses that there is a “connection to Mother and Grandma Kato I did not know existed” (49-50), yet each time she pushes away the bloody spectre of her mother’s body. She simultaneously sees and closes her eyes to this other part of her familial history because she is afraid of what she will discover amongst the secrets that are “lurking, too old for mould and past putrefaction” (48). Asako also spends most of the narrative quelling the secrets that disrupt the elaborate system of denial that keeps her family intact. Her comment that “the sky was suffocating; its thick clouds would neither move nor dissipate” (235) are the words of a woman who suffers from the clouds that blanket her identity. Asako strains to hold together the pieces of her family but these efforts come at the price of the escalating guilt of refusing to confront the bodies that have withstood violence: “I was violently seized: I sobbed and sobbed. What had I done? A monster, that was what I was, what I’d always been” (239). Asako has internalized her complicit role within past violence for so long that this violence has begun to manifest itself within her. After a lifetime of reading their lives through a domestic lens, both Naomi and Asako fall apart under the burden of maintaining constructed domestic stories.

As a result, the texts struggle against the fragmentation that arises as the mother's body and her transnational associations demand recognition. In *The Electrical Field*, the secrets that the domestic has contained spill out into the open and challenge what the characters once took for granted. When Asako admits to herself, "I know what I did and I will say it. For you I will. Sachi. I didn't save him" (279), she moves one step closer to releasing her guilt from its closeted space within the domestic. Asako has remained trapped within suffocating borders because of an unwillingness to turn her gaze outwards; however, in the end, she confronts the outside connections that have been shaping her domestic world. Asako admits that "*there are things you don't know*, she'd told me, long ago it seemed. I was drowning in the darkness and I wanted to let go, to push off for ever" (275). Despite her desire to move away from the darkness that fills Chisako's absence, Asako looks at the damage caused from her subscription to constructed borders. Asako engages with the mystery of Chisako's disappearance as she moves towards seeing the domestic as an interpenetrated borderspace. She questions the detective, "Where is she? All this time ...how did they –" and receives the response, "her body's been kept in facilities downtown" (286), that reveals that Chisako has been within the domestic space all along. The location of Chisako's body initiates for Asako a recontextualizing that recognizes the multiplicity of components that compose the "truth." She begins to perceive multiplicity when she answers the detective's query about the mental state of Yano with the words, "No, no. Yes. Maybe" (282). Once she locates Chisako's body, Asako gains a place from which to confront the fragments that make closure a productive impossibility.

The characters in both texts discover the chaos that the surface masks once they come to terms with the proximity of the reproductive body. Sakamoto's characters grapple with the newly discovered intricacies of the borderspace; Kogawa's characters

must also rework their bodily relationship to a suddenly permeable domestic space as their relatives give them entrance to their mother's wartime story. Smaro Kamboureli writes of the permeability of Naomi's body in relation to the history that has marked it as Other:

The fact that the body becomes part of a network of forces that dismember and warp it, that it dissolves under the weight of history, is exactly what I mean by saying that the body is permeable. Naomi's body, because it is permeable, already bears the stain of the socio-political history that determines *her own* history's script. (187)

The revelation of the network of forces both within and outside the nation that compose the weight of history destabilizes Naomi's domestic borders. After a lifetime of subscribing to the impregnability of the nation, Naomi contextualizes her mother's wartime history by engaging with her once denied transnational connections. She sees that the older generation has permitted the nation to deny the presence of her family within domestic space because of their willingness to deny the whereabouts of her mother. However, Naomi asserts the permeability of her personal and national family when she reads the letters that Grandmother Kato wrote and unearths her mother's experiences in Japan. Sensei commands Naomi and Stephen, "your mother is speaking. Listen carefully to her voice" (256), to ensure that the children establish a strong connection to their mother's narrative. The voice that emerges reconnects Naomi to Japan, to her mother, and to the suffering that took place in both Japan and Canada. Naomi sees the interrelatedness of these two marked domestic spaces as she negotiates newfound domestic permeability.

The intermingling of Japan and Canada brings the violence of internment in jarring contact with the horrors of the Japanese wartime experience. The texts use the ruined body of the mother to position the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

as another transnational memory that Japanese Canadians have repressed alongside the memories of internment. When Chisako raises the spectre of Hiroshima, Asako disconnects herself from this memory by picturing “those patches of matsutake deep in the forest, away from the camp, when they said ‘mushroom cloud’” (212). Asako demonstrates a distancing mechanism that keeps the atomic bomb far away from her camp experiences. She is hesitant to make the connection between these two wartime atrocities because like the nation-state, she prefers to use amnesia to smooth out the past. Donald Pease argues that the American state similarly refused to recognize Hiroshima and Nagasaki, writing that “because Hiroshima involved the near total annihilation of a civilian population, it was unassimilable to the assumptions underwriting a national narrative” (562). However, the mother’s body resurrects the past violence that these characters have thus far denied. The texts re-establish this transnational connection with images of the bomb and its aftermath. In *Obasan*, Grandma Kato speaks of the unspeakable as she describes in her letters the dropping of the atomic bomb that causes “a sudden white flash, brighter than a bolt of lightning. She had no idea what could have exploded. It was as if the entire sky were swallowed up” (260). She records the Japanese body literally disintegrating under the force of the military might of the West as when she writes of “the writhing body of her niece, her head bent back, hair singed, both her eye sockets blown out” (261). The bodies writhing amidst the destruction of the bomb fill the void that haunts the familial body and require Naomi to face her intimate and material connections to Japan. These images of internment and the atomic bomb relocate the materiality of the characters through their intense and violent physicality.

The maternal bodies that reemerge testify in their brokenness to the phallic instrument that has violated and then discarded their once generative bodies. Chisako lies interned in a morgue and will later be interred in a grave alongside her also

deceased husband and children. The detective's words, "when there's no family –" (286), remind Asako of the cessation of the Yano family line and the barrenness of her own family circle. Japanese and White patriarchy have cut short Chisako's ability to create additional offspring and also murdered the ones she has already produced. Her body and its violent extinguishment symbolically reflects the plight of the Japanese and Japanese Canadian bodies at the hands of the nation. While Sakamoto uses Chisako's corpse to rematerialize past violence, Kogawa explores the violation of the racialized gendered body with images of Naomi's mother in bodily collapse. The text replaces her nostalgically holistic body with a body that "vomited yellow fluid and passed a great deal of blood" (263) after the dropping of the bomb. Naomi is forced to view the destruction that has taken the generative powers that her mother once possessed and turned them inside out. This maternal body in its mangled pieces bears witness to its violent contact with the ideological and material ire of the nation-state.

The reproductive body reassumes materiality through its production of the memories of internment and of the atomic bombing that these characters have strived to contain. Asako admits that she broke the silence of Chisako's affair: "I bit my lip until it bled. But in the final moment I couldn't help myself. When he was almost gone I stopped him, there at the foot of my stairs, in Stum's plaid shirt I'd lent him to cover himself. I called down with the words on my lips to tell him he'd been made a fool of" (301-2). With these words, Asako concedes the interpenetrability of both herself and Chisako. The mother reappears in the narratives so fundamentally altered that her body is now an explicit site for the intersections between the technologies, bodies, nations, and discourses that are imbedded in local space. The act of violation has stripped her body of its superficial coherence to reveal the recombinant nature of her physicality. As N. Katherine Hayles writes, "the dependence or interdependence of

bodies on the material and discursive networks through which they operate means that the umbilical cords that supply us (without which we would die) are always multiple” (17). In other words, the mother in her splintered form attests to her connections to other material and discursive networks. Despite the attempts of the nation and the community to control it, the mother’s body leaks through their constructed barriers. Naomi notes the futility of these borders when she writes that “I apply a thick bandage but nothing can soak up the seepage” (267) that is now present since she has reinstated her mother within the domestic. Naomi realizes the permeability of what she has up until this point seen as an inseparable divide between her body and the disfigured form of her mother. Her mother’s body therefore deconstructs the domestic body by brandishing its scars for all to see.

This maternal body reveals the transnational interconnectedness of patriarchy, Canada, and Japan; it also hints at a location amidst the chaos left behind after the dropping of the atomic bomb. The mothers in both texts reveal the nation to be an assemblage of many disparate components as they negotiate the multiple parts of their subjectivity. In short, the leaky maternal bodies in these texts are cyborgs. In *The Electrical Field*, Chisako claims body in the blurring of the boundaries between the Japanese Canadian community, Japan, and Canada. Similarly, in Naomi’s final vision of her mother, she declares, “the skin on your face bubbles like lava and melts from your bones. Mother, I see your face. Do not turn aside” (266). Naomi commands her mother to claim a space from which to direct her agency against those who have robbed her of bodily integrity and displaced their own fragmentation onto her body. Like Haraway’s cyborg, this racialized gendered body “reclaims a more complicated sense of locatedness that derives from a recognition of the impurity of all spaces” (Gedalof *Against Purity* 156). As the atomic bomb meshes flesh and technology and

reconfigures bodily makeup, it gives birth to a cyborg mother who mobilizes agency at this moment of exposure of the transnational within the nation.

More importantly, the mother overcomes the “sterilization” that the nation has imposed on her and the other characters in these texts through new reproduction that openly recombines, multiplies, and mutates its many connections. As Irene Gedalof writes, one of the strengths of Haraway’s “cyborg” is its argument “for a shift from paradigms of birth and reproduction to models of regeneration” (*Against Purity* 169). This cyborg mother, for so long denied and repressed, emerges from her long absence to demand her right to create offspring that defy national uniformity. Near the conclusion of Kogawa’s text, Naomi states that “this body of grief is not fit for human habitation. Let there be flesh” (270) as she calls for new vitality to break Naomi, her family, and her community out of the walls that have kept their creative production stagnant. Naomi sees “that for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child that I can know your presence though you are not here” (267). She also recognizes that “the letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still blooms with dormant blooms” (267). She asserts that creativity can come out of ambiguity and fragmentation. Naomi questions the reification of domestic borders with this new ability to recombine the many disparate pieces of her subjectivity. The cyborg mother posits generation that will supersede stable national reproductive myths and reclaim the mixed transnational bodies that she creates. This new perspective echoes Gedalof’s proposal that “a differently imagined body and birth might provide a different basis on which the birth-based identities of communities are imagined, one which places change and fluidity-fluency at its centre” (*Against Purity* 220). The interwoven threads of birth and the body are also present in the final scenes of *The Electrical Field* as Stum, Angel, and Asako listen to “the *pip pip* of newly hatched chicks” (305) whose union of “male and female in one” (304) openly proclaims their

cyborg, mixed nature. In the end, Kogawa and Sakamoto make visible the altered, yet generative possibilities that lie beyond constructed binary divisions.

Nonetheless, despite this apparent hope for the future, the conclusions of both texts remind these characters of the constant risk of reappropriation. The characters confront their denied ties to the mother but their wish to claim national space tempers the force of this newfound creativity body. The mother's cyborg form that was on the verge of speaking its fragmentation from a reconfigured domestic space suddenly falls silent as the texts recognize the potential return of the constructed borders of the nation. Sakamoto and Kogawa halt the full return of the mother as they write of the reinscription of national borders once the moment of breakage is over. For example, the soothing words of healing at the end of *Obasan* have the potential to cover over the jagged voicings from the violent past and rebuild the unity of the nation: "My loved ones, rest in your world of stone. Around you flows the underground stream. How bright in the darkness the brooding light. How gentle the colours of rain" (270). Many critics have lauded the conclusion of *Obasan* as marking the end of a holistic healing process in which Cheng Lok Chua argues, "Naomi gains a vision of human oneness with universal nature that surpasses societal categories" (101). However, Scott McFarlane warns against this lauding in his critique of the assuaging of guilt that reads Kogawa's text as the coming of age of girl and nation. He writes that "understanding *Obasan* as a national *bildungsroman* establishes the perspective of a redeemed present and alleviates the immediacy of guilt felt by anyone who feels responsible for the internment by suggesting the girl and nation will come of age by the end of the novel" ("Covering *Obasan*" 407). He underlines the ever-present danger of Canada reinscribing new but equally containing boundaries around Japanese Canadian subjectivity through the propagation of another stabilizing national myth. Although it

is tempting to accept the seamless reintegration of the characters into Canadian society, both texts indicate that the nation-state still retains the power to enact recontainment.

The texts indicate their awareness that the generative possibilities for Japanese Canadian subjectivity are contingent and still very much subject to a nation-state that cedes place to its resistant national subjects. Kogawa and Sakamoto voice internment narratives that must balance their desire to disrupt with their competing aim to relocate national legitimacy through the very state that took it away. Kogawa ends her text with “*the Memorandum sent by the Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians*” (272) that once again frames the characters within another’s, albeit “sympathetic,” representation. The Memorandum is evidence that Japanese Canadians continue to be spoken for by Others who contain them within the restrictive language of the nation.⁵ Meanwhile, Sakamoto draws attention to the violent potential for recontainment in the final scene when Stum and Angel sort chicks into binary, male/female categories. The statement, “girls here, boys there. It was simple, really” (305), that appears after Asako witnesses the violence of “the imaginary chick in her fist choke, saw a flutter of feathers” (304), is a shocking reminder of the material effects of naturalized boundaries. The return of the mother in cyborg form provides each of these characters with alternative generative power that nevertheless struggles against the binary requirements of their national belonging.

At the close of their narratives, Kogawa and Sakamoto produce textual cyborg offspring that affirm Haraway’s call “for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 292) but that still fight for agency within a national space that believes it can transcend and reorder the past. The texts confuse the boundaries of the national and the transnational, Japanese and Canadian, but do so while they also work to claim a space of affirmation for their Japanese Canadian subjects in the reified space of the nation. The texts remain in a

state of irreconcilable tension as they work towards the dual project of redressing injustice within national boundaries while at the same time exceeding these limitations. Kogawa and Sakamoto turn partly away from transnational possibility as they look towards the nation and its willingness to restore full national membership. The future of the cyborg mother is thus uncertain as the texts perform both an exposing and a covering over of the fractured space of the nation. Asako's comment, "but think of all the ones he lets get away" (305), underlines the state of two texts that simultaneously stay within and get away from the confines of constructed national territory.

Obasan and *The Electrical Field* thus waver between reinscribing and disrupting national borders. However, while *Obasan* and *The Electrical Field* create tension within national space with their ambivalent representations of the past, the texts in the next chapter gain a place within the nation by removing the destabilizing potential of the narratives they construct. *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* successfully claim the national belonging that the two previous texts strive for, but at the price of containing their characters within nostalgic "ethnic" representations that must stand apart from normative Canadian experience. Unlike Kogawa and Sakamoto who resituate the Japanese Canadian subject within national history, Wayson Choy and Anita Rau Badami decontextualize their narratives in order to transcend a disruptive past. They effectively manage both the nation's and their own textual borders by raising and then containing the possibility of transnational disruption. The texts give off an appearance of transparency that belies the reproduction of dominant "ethnic" paradigms that neutralize subversive transnational potential. *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* shy away from disruption and conclude instead, as coherent textual commodities that feed into the nation's desire for narratives of contained ethnic difference. These

commodities circulate within constructed Canadian borders where they rail against but ultimately, uphold the sanctity of national space.

CHAPTER FOUR

Transnational Nostalgia: Reproducing Dominant National Paradigms in Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* and Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem*

Establishing Binaries

In her critique of what she calls “Chop Suey Writing,” Maria Ng probes “the apparent stasis in the fictional representations of Chinese Canadians” (171) that fail to reflect the diversity within the Chinese Canadian population. She writes of narratives that relegate Chinese Canadians to a contained and constructed historicity:

The recurrent images of Chinamen working in the cleaning business or Chinese performing mysterious cooking rites in the back alleys of Chinatown are as alien to recent Chinese immigrants and Chinese Canadians as they might be exotic to Western readers. Yet, regardless of the many changes in contemporary Chinese immigrant experience, literary representations maintain a set of stereotypical images of Chinese Canadians that are grounded in Chinatown. (172)

Ng includes the Chinese Canadian author, Wayson Choy, in this group of “chop suey” writers whom she criticizes for their self-orientalizing representations. The textual representations in Anita Rau Badami's *Tamarind Mem* are similar to those in Choy's *The Jade Peony* in their presentation of an Asian Canadian immigrant experience that stands apart from normative Canadian society. This chapter moves beyond an outright

dismissal of these representations of Asian Canadian experience to an engagement with the specific textual poetics and politics that Badami and Choy use to manage transnational difference.

Anita Rau Badami and Wayson Choy are two authors who have enjoyed not only considerable market success but also much academic attention as representational Asian Canadian authors. Both *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* are national bestsellers¹ that appear frequently on university course syllabi that grant them a privileged position within a contemporary Canadian literary canon. This success masks the acceptance of these texts as Asian Canadian immigrant narratives that contribute their essentialized difference to the larger Canadian mosaic. The difference in these texts appears like recognition but is actually a reinscription of domestic limits. As Roy Miki asserts, “in the new commodification of identities, authorial signs are much more malleable and open to appropriation and invention, so that the so-called ‘repressed,’ from the era of nation-state stability, may emerge in the new faces of born-again ‘difference’ in the liberal culture of capitalism” (“Altered States” 58). Miki underlines the commodification of difference that satisfies the demands of a marketplace seeking to consume safely Othered textual experiences. The repressed memories of the transnational can circulate but as difference that is free of its jarring material contexts.

As examples of texts that practise this subscription to dominant paradigms, both *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* leave overall domestic borders intact through the use of seemingly transparent representations that stand in for the complexities and multiplicities of Asian Canadian experience. They accomplish their seeming transparency through a management of the transnational elements that threaten to destabilize the nation’s and their own textual borders. This management sees Badami and Choy reduce the transnational into an affect – nostalgia – that narrates Asian Canadian experience safely within the confines of national space. The end result is an

efficient packaging of difference that uses its containment of transnational disruption in order to demonstrate the disciplinary strength of the borders of both the texts and the nation. While the specifics of their stories are different, the strategies employed in these texts to effect this narrative packaging are similar. The two authors use content and form to naturalize the binary assumptions that govern the lives of their characters.

Both *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* begin with two well-defined and self-regulating domestic spaces. These two domestic spaces, one Asian and one North American, are geographically, nationally, and culturally different but share an ability to suppress any disruption to their naturalized identity borders. The texts take great pains to construct immigrant narratives in which the two domestic spaces that lay claim to the identities of their main characters stand in diametrical opposition to one another. Badami introduce her narrator, Kamini, who speaks from her cold basement apartment in Calgary where she cannot shake the memories of her childhood in India. She speculates on her mother's reaction to her homesickness for a motherland that lies miles away from her Calgary apartment: "*Did somebody tie your hands behind your back and say 'Go-go to that Calgary North Pole place?'*" (3). This switching back and forth between past and present, India and Canada, is an initial emphasis on the inherent incommensurability of Asian Canadian experience. Choy similarly stresses the separation between Canada and its "outside" as he launches his text with his character Liang who narrates her mother's passage from China to Canada. Liang writes that "Stepmother was a young woman when she came to Canada, barely twenty and a dozen years younger than Father. She came with no education, with a village dialect as poor as she was" (13). This opening tale establishes that Stepmother's voyage from China as well as her residual village dialect mark her as Other to her new Canadian family. Badami and Choy depict Asian Canadian subjectivity as an immigrant

experience that pits two stable national spaces against one another in a warring in-between subject position.

Both writers reinforce well-regulated national borders by transporting themselves to an imagined setting far from the conflicts of current Canadian space. They confront identity conflict but in settings that are safely Other. The texts temporally and geographically disconnect themselves from the present in order to create an elsewhere where binary identity assumptions still prevail. In this imagined elsewhere, immigrant characters struggle to acculturate in their new Canadian homes, while still holding onto the cultural baggage from their Asian pasts. Badami takes her narrative to an imagined elsewhere where she indirectly deals with the complexities of Kamini's current Canadian dilemmas: "*I called my mother every Sunday from the silence of my basement apartment, reluctant to tell her how I yearned to get away from this freezing cold city where even the traffic sounds were muffled by the snow*" (3). Kamini justifies her escape into the memories of her childhood in India whose people and places are remote from the freezing immediacy of her Canadian present. Meanwhile, Choy returns to Vancouver's Chinatown in the late 1930s and 1940s to focus on the struggles of a Chinese Canadian family dealing with the upheaval of their move to Canada. The narrative begins in 1933 as Liang expands on her narration of Stepmother's passage to Canada: "Found hiding between two trunks of clothes, she was taken to a Mission House, then taken away again, reclaimed by the village clan, and eventually sold into Father's Canton merchant family. For years they fed her, taught her house duties, and finally put her on a steamship to Canada" (13-14). Choy foregrounds the moment of contact between Asia and Canada as he transports Stepmother from "war-torn China" (13) to the family's house in Chinatown. Both texts create an imagined Asian homeland that they then juxtapose against an equally imagined Canadian national space.

Badami and Choy not only return their narratives to the past, but also to the realm of childhood where memories are muted of the immediacy of adult experience. Choy opts for three narrators, Liang, Jung, and Sekky, who each offer their childhood perspective on the events occurring in their Chinatown community.² The containment within the domestic is even more pronounced through the eyes of children whose entire world revolves around the microcosm of their Chinatown house. Choy's first narrator, "Jook-Liang, Only Sister" (11), talks about her recollections of her childhood in Vancouver in the early 1930s: "The old man first visited our house when I was five, in 1933. At that time, I had only two brothers to worry about. Kiam and Jung were then ten and seven years old. Sekky was not yet born, though he was on his way" (13). Liang, like the other children, derives comfort from her close familial networks that establish clear boundaries between the family and its outsiders. As her brother Jung later writes, "I wanted to see myself in the mirror at our house, in the familiar light of home" (103) because home is safe, secure, and above all, familiar. Similarly, Badami opens her narrative with Kamini who immerses herself in memories of another, now foreign cultural landscape. She speaks of her previous motherland when she writes, "the year that I turned six, I began to sense a strange movement deep inside Ma's body, a pulsing beneath the skin. Yes, certainly there was a difference. I, who was so sensitive to every nuance in my mother, could feel it every time I climbed into her lap" (5). Both texts explore the memories of children who struggle to deal with the pulsing movements that exist beneath the surface of their binary existences. Their desire for stability and the assurance of home makes them uneasy as they become aware of the complicated relationships that belie the clear cut divisions of their familial lives. The children sense these discrepancies but continually return to the binary assumptions that promise to keep them safe within their confining domestic walls.

The texts thus return to a time when constructed boundaries still operate as naturalized dividers between Self and Other, Asia and Canada. Shirley Lim's argument, "in a nation of immigrants, there must therefore always be already that straining against the grain, the self that is assimilated and the self that remains unassimilatable" ("The Ambivalent American" 18-19), is a constant refrain within narratives that depict characters who manoeuvre within two oppositional affiliations. The texts establish these two competing selves in each of their characters. While Kamini wrestles with her memories of India that impede her attempt to make a new life in Canada, she reminisces of her mother's own attempts to reconcile the pressures of a part British, part Indian existence. Through Kamini's childhood gaze, the text details the two separate worlds that regulate the daily lives of both mother and daughter. She writes that "for [Saroja] there were only two countries in the world, no matter what anyone else said. This side of the seven seas it was India and across it was *Angrez-land*" (23). Kamini reenters a childhood in which her mother divides the world up into two competing cultural territories. These sharp divisions between cultural spaces are echoed in Choy's text in which his child narrators overhear their father telling their grandmother that "your old ways are not the new ways. Your grandchildren have to live the new ways" (124). Meanwhile, their grandmother, Poh-Poh, declares that "'*You not Canada, Liang,*' she said, majestically, '*you China. Always war in China*'" (37). The repetition of the terms "old" and "new" throughout Choy's text serves as a reminder of the binary assumptions that lay claim to the identities of his characters. In both narratives, the characters conceive of their identities as two separate categories that resist the destabilization and blurring of their constructed boundaries.

Badami and Choy use not only the content, but also the form of their narratives to reinforce the strength of constructed borders. These authors structure their texts in ways that solidify their well-regulated, oppositional identity spaces. The division of

their texts into contained narrative sections ensures that disruptive narrative incidents will remain within manageable bounds. *The Jade Peony* is divided up into three parts that offer each child an exclusive opportunity to recount past events from their particular viewpoint. This structure relegates the other child narrators to marginal characters as their siblings assume the role of narrator. After Liang has her chance to speak, the narrative shifts to “Part Two: Jung-Sum, Second Brother” (69), and then ends with “Part Three: Sek-Lung, Third Brother” (127). These section breaks prevent cross-contamination and, more importantly, structure the text and its incidents into a logical sequencing of voices. Badami divides up her own text with an equally mathematical precision with the first part devoted to Kamini’s memories and the second to her mother Saroja’s. In this second half of the narrative, Kamini’s mother embarks on her own return to the past as she explains that “*I, depending on where my memories carry me, will tell them about my husband the builder of tracks, or Paul the Anglo mechanic, perhaps my widowed Aunt Chinna*” (172). Saroja tells her stories in a railway car far from the competing voices of her now adult daughters. She writes that “*now I travel alone, not even my daughters to watch me*” (171). Badami’s meticulous separation of the two parts of her narrative extends to even using italics to differentiate between the Canadian and Indian, and the past and present portions of her text. The italics and section breaks keep competing voices and contexts within prescribed textual bounds. In both texts, structural choices work with content in order to ready the narratives and their domestic spaces for impending transnational disruption.

Naturalized Domestic Borders and Transnational Threat

Content and form consequently work together to construct two well-defined and competing identity spaces that are positioned to respond to potential border

challenges. Badami and Choy cast themselves back to a time when constructed domestic spaces are able to maintain their transparent appearances. The narratives then carefully test these spaces by creating tension in characters who find themselves in the uncertain space in-between two naturalized domestic spaces. The characters in these texts live within the constructed worlds that regulate their lives because they are unable to see the fictional nature of binary divisions. Their inability to see borders as artifice creates tension as they suddenly find themselves having to choose between two seemingly contained identity sites. In Badami's text, Saroja sees little alternative outside of the constructed confines of her domestic life. Her impulse to break out of her duties as mother and wife leaves her feeling "*guilty at not having fulfilled the role that had been scripted for her, annoyed at being coerced into playing it*" (163). Saroja feels guilt over the behaviour that exceeds her scripted roles because she cannot see past the traditional expectations of mother and wife that she finds so oppressive. Kamini meanwhile is troubled as she struggles to reconcile her life in Canada with her competing memories of India. Similarly, Choy's Jung speaks of his adherence to the "familiar stories, familiar phrases" that "comforted the Elders of Chinatown" (103) that stand in opposition to Kiam's desire to see the world through a language of scientific superiority. Choy recounts Kiam's belief in Canadian progress: "But Father, those languages are *scientific*." Kiam jabbed his brush in the air for emphasis. "We are now in a scientific, logical world" (147). Kiam and the other children struggle to decide which story will determine the family's future sense of self. As Christopher Lee asserts, "in the context of this novel, the terms Chinese and Canadian are considered diametrically oppositional by both Chinese and non-Chinese" (23-24). The characters in the two narratives are torn between two cultural spaces because of their subscription to the sanctity of each identity.

The texts exacerbate the dilemmas of the characters by naturalizing each version of reality that competes for their total allegiance. These characters negotiate domestic spaces that have naturalized the divisions between Self and Other to such an extent that questions such as “Am I Chinese or Canadian?” (Choy 133) are normative. As Sheng-mei Ma writes, “these Asian American and Asian Diaspora writers somehow are drawing from the same cliched notion that Asian immigrants and Americans of Asian extraction have ‘split personality’ or ‘buried self’” (*Immigrant Subjectivities* 41). The pressure to end this split personality and give up Asianness in favour of Canadianness is overwhelming. The characters struggle against the repercussions of living in-between mutually exclusive spaces whose borders they view as constraining, static, and non-negotiable. Kamini grapples with Indian memories in which she engages with the collisions between two competing cultural systems. The child Kamini has difficulties reconciling her Indian surroundings with the British stories she reads. She writes that in the stories, “their mother, unlike mine, let them wander around without an *ayah* at their heels,” and later admits that “I liked Nora and Tilly but wished they had different names – Gauri and Geetha, perhaps, or Mini and Bani” (24). Kamini finds that her problems increase when her parents are also unable to deal with the unsettling in-between of living in British India. Saroja responds to Dadda’s comment that the children “will be true Indians” with the words, “Yes, yes, you are a fine one to talk, you and your smoking jacket and pipe and British ways” (42). Meanwhile, Choy’s characters subscribe to the constructed superiority of their new Canadian homes. Kiam mimics the nation’s discrediting of Chineseness: “First Brother Kiam always argued that Poh-Poh’s stories were just *stories*, nothing more, like the stories about the blonde Jesus Miss Bigley told us” (28). Kiam dismisses Poh-Poh’s stories as construct in order to position Canadianness as the transparently real subjectivity that demands the children’s full allegiance. These characters experience the competing pull of their Canadian and

Asian connections because they fail to see that the two identities are fictional spaces that hide a fundamental interrelationality.

The primary conflict within these texts therefore relies on characters who find themselves straddling two seemingly dichotomous identity spaces. Choy and Badami portray characters who are convinced that they must alleviate the tension of their in-between positions by choosing a single identity affiliation. Sheng-mei Ma argues that in many Asian immigrant narratives “immigrants are constantly separated, in space, from their loved ones and, in time, from their memories of the past (self). The present strange world as well as their former existence lay a siege against immigrants in Asian Diapora literature, resulting in their schizophrenic tendency” (*Immigrant Subjectivities* 44). In Choy’s text, each of the children desperately wishes to be accepted into normative Canadian society where their transnational connections will disappear within its enveloping White façade. In the first section, Liang has dreams of becoming the blonde Shirley Temple; in the second, Jung works to become a part of his newly adopted family; and finally, in the third, Sekky imagines himself literally purging his body of its Chinese qualities:

English words seemed more forthright to me, blunt, like road signs. Chinese words were awkward and messy, like quicksand. I preferred English, but there were no English words to match the Chinese perplexities. I sometimes wished that my skin would turn white, my hair go brown, my eyes widen and turn blue, and Mr. And Mrs. O’Connor next door would adopt me and I would be Jack O’Connor’s little brother. (134)

Sekky desires to morph into Jack O’Connor’s little brother because he resides in a nation that maintains an unequivocal divide between itself and its transnational Others. Sekky, like the other children, drowns in the quicksand of cultural ambiguity.

Meanwhile, Kamini finds it difficult to embrace her new Canadian home because her

memories of India continue to haunt her with their unsettling questions. She writes, “*Linda Ayah had told us longlong ago that everybody had ghosts trailing behind. The problem started when you looked over your shoulder at them?*” (82). Her ghosts prevent full Canadian membership with their reminders of times in India when she and her mother felt pressured to align with the demands of a regulated domestic space. Saroja complains that “after marriage there are new rules to follow, fresh boundaries. There is always someone in the house, the *peon*, the gardener, the maid, the *dhobhi*, and Linda Ayah with her terrible glasses” (247). The gaze of the household parallels the gaze of the nation and the community that look with disfavour on those who straddle their domestic boundaries.

Choy and Badami then use the straddling of domestic boundaries in order to build the disruptive potential of the in-between space. The narratives focus on in-between subjectivities that draw attention to the artificiality of domestic space. In other words, Choy and Badami raise the spectre of transnational disruption that will potentially call into question the domestic’s initial unquestioned state. In Badami’s text, her characters are fearful of the mixed bodies that make explicit the permeable division between the Indian and British portions of their national identity. The adults around Kamini inform her that “if you touch an Anglo you become an *acchooth*” and that “the Anglos were half-and-half people who hated Indians” (106) because of their discomfort with openly transnational bodies. Kamini is troubled by her mother’s relationship with the Anglo, Paul da Costa, because she has been trained to stay away from the transnational taint attached to Anglo bodies. The contact between Saroja and Paul da Costa is particular distressing because of Kamini’s adherence to the essential inseparability of Anglo and Indian bodies: “Ma had touched Paul’s hand but she was still the same, wasn’t she? Wasn’t she?” (106). This question haunts Kamini as she struggles to reconcile this contact moment with the naturalized boundaries that declare

it to be an impossibility. In Choy's text, the children themselves represent a threat to both the Canadian nation's and the Chinese community's claims to purity. Sekky writes that "all the Chinatown adults were worried over those of us recently born in Canada, born 'neither this nor that,' neither Chinese nor Canadian, born without understanding the boundaries, born *mo no* – no brain" (135). Stepmother is worried that Sekky and the other *mo no* children will reveal the transnational connections that the family must keep masked if it wishes to stay within the exclusively Canadian nation. Each text raises the potential for transnational disorder through in-between subjectivities that fail to conform to the domestic's binary identity assumptions.

The characters sense the fragmentation and interconnections that their identity categories hide but still cling to their belief in sanctified domestic space. In short, they are reluctant to face the possibilities of a transnational borderspace. Choy and Badami establish their texts' primary conflict and then offer each of their characters two options for relieving the tension of the in-between space. The characters can opt either to explore the yet unknown possibilities of a transnational life beyond binaries or to reenclose themselves within borders that, although constraining, are familiar in their transparent simplicity. In Choy's text, Poh-Poh who supposedly upholds the Old Ways is the one who tells the children about transnational possibility. Jung recounts that Poh-Poh "said the moon was the sign of the dark storyteller. In Old China, this was the one who told of hidden things not seen in the glare of daylight. Moon people *felt* things, as she did, things that others did not name" (123). Poh-Poh explains the potent darkness that lies beneath a story's surface and offers the children an alternative to the glaring binaries of their day-to-day lives. The children are drawn to Poh-Poh's hidden world of ambiguity but feel the even stronger pull of the clear separations between light and dark. In each section, the children attempt to read their worlds through the binary lenses of "old" and "new" that keep these hidden, dark things at bay. In Badami's text,

Kamini senses as well that the ordinary is a façade that, once deconstructed, offers her the chance to create her own subjectivity beyond the naturalized “reality” set out before her. She writes that “as we grew older, I stopped trying to show Roopa the hidden worlds that seethed beneath the surface of the ordinary” (136). Kamini intuits the conflicts and inconsistencies that her sister ignores because of her capacity to pierce below the surface of the ordinary. Both texts build the conflict of the in-between space by hinting at the unknown potential that lies beyond the safety of binaries. Badami and Choy raise the spectre of transnational disruption as they temporarily toy with both their textual and national borders. The children become aware of disorder that threatens to destabilize these borders and to send the texts into the unexplored territory of the transnational borderspace. However, these borders face their greatest threat from a potential cyborg birth that brings the narratives to a strategic and decisive climactic resolution.

The Creation and Abortion of Cyborg Offspring

The narratives bring the tension of the in-between space to a climactic resolution as the child narrators witness other characters who dare to transgress borders in a material way. Badami and Choy allow their narratives to briefly entertain border transgression that challenges the contained domestic spaces that they set up at the beginning of their narratives. The texts depict disruptive sexual contact that crosses taboo social, national, and cultural barriers. Saroja in Badami’s text has relations with an Anglo-Indian, Paul da Costa, and Meiyong in *The Jade Peony* involves herself with a Japanese Canadian boy, Kazuo. For a mere moment, Choy and Badami cast their narratives into a borderspace where the divisions between Self and Other suddenly become uncertain and subject to miscegenation. Choy devotes the last section of the

text to Sekky who struggles the most with his in-between identity. Sekky witnesses his own and the text's movement into this borderspace as he walks with Meiyong out of Chinatown and into the unknown space "outside" of its borders:

Instead of turning south on Jackson, over the cobblestone roadway towards MacLean Park, Meiyong turned north and walked even faster. The mountains in the far distance were already topped with snow, but flowers were still blooming in Vancouver yards. We were walking away from familiar territory, away from the boundaries of Chinatown. I tried to catch her attention. What was she doing? (208)

Sekky and Meiyong walk out of familiar territory into a new space where Sekky discovers that formerly forbidden contact is now possible. Meiyong, who appears to embody the purity of Chineseness, reveals to Sekky her comfort with transnational ambiguity. Kamini also discovers a world beyond her closeted life when her mother makes her promise to keep "secret" (93) her taxi rides to places outside of the domestic space. Kamini writes of her entry into uncertainty when she overhears shadowy voices in the night: "Sometimes I woke to the sound of his keys in the front door and the low angry murmur of Ma's voice. Sometimes I thought that the angry voice was Dadda's, but in my half-sleep I was never sure" (95). Cast into the transnational borderspace, both Kamini and Sekky are suddenly unsure of the many things that they once took for granted. They associate with other characters whose willingness to cross policed borders in material, potentially devastating ways calls into question the supposed impermeability of these children's domestic worlds.

Badami and Choy use contact moments between characters who transgress national and "racial" boundaries in order to temporarily destabilize their narratives. Saroja who has been raised to follow the tightly scripted roles of Indian femininity is disconcerted when she encounters the Anglo Paul da Costa who fails to subscribe to the

boundaries that closet her within her household roles. She is unsettled when she comes into contact with him: “I don’t know how to respond to this half-breed man who sits in my veranda and tells me about the latest films, about his cousins in Australia, about everything and everything. I smile timidly, afraid of what the servants will think if I join in his full-bodied laughter” (233). Saroja is unable to negotiate his uncategorizable body and begins to engage herself in behaviour that bridges the divide that is meant to keep them apart. They converse in ways that challenge the formal rules and regulations that label Saroja the “memsahib” and Paul the “half-breed” (233) mechanic. Instead, Paul schools Saroja in the possibilities of the hyphen, what Fred Wah describes as “the operable tool that both compounds difference and underlines sameness” (“Half-Bred” 73), as they make contact in a borderspace where both their sameness and their difference collide. While Badami uses the exchange of words to imply the potential for physical contact, Choy uses the momentary physical contact that Sekky witnesses between Meiyong and Kazuo in order to explore border transgression. Sekky watches with disgust and then increasing discomfort as Meiyong reveals her intimacy with the enemy “Jap.” Sekky recounts that “his fingers reached for hers, the tips brushed against hers; hers moved slowly between his” (211). The intertwining of their fingers creates a frisson of tension within the narrative as Sekky reacts with horror to such seemingly innocent contact. Badami and Choy provide a glimpse of the contact between characters who recognize the possibility of negotiating seemingly asymmetrical and conflicting subject positions.

Although at first glance Choy and Badami seem to release transnational disorder into their textual spaces, in fact, these moments of disruption are well orchestrated and controlled narrative incidents. This control leaves national borders untouched as these two authors manipulate the borders *within* the nation. Although these female characters seize moments of slippage within a naturalized domestic space, they do so in

contained contact moments whose disturbance fails to spread to the larger national space. Because Badami and Choy keep the sexual contact between two Othered communities, they can confront border transgression while still leaving the overall national boundaries intact. Meiyong violates the boundary separating the Chinese community with the “enemy” (209) Japanese, and Saroja has an affair with one of the “pretend English people – they were the Anglo-Indians of Ratnapura, half Indian and half English” (20). Absent from both narratives is an exploration of the sexual relationships between their characters and larger White society. By representing transgression between two groups whom the nation has already marginalized, Badami and Choy leave national borders unquestioned while they still leverage the shock value of a taboo relationship between two groups who are supposed to stand categorically apart. This shock value leaves unsaid the larger crime of contesting the domestic space that overarches the relationships within and among these minority communities. In other words, Badami and Choy uphold a national space in which, as Smaro Kamboureli argues, “diversity is respected and supported only insofar as it is presumed to articulate subjects rehearsing collective identifications that are determined categorically and not relationally – precisely the point of the federal policy’s sedative politics” (112). In a domestic space that is clearly uneasy with the presence of difference, belonging becomes contingent on ensuring that difference remains categorical in order to prevent it from destabilizing the domestic’s parameters.

The texts further temper the destabilizing effects of these incidents by using their child narrators to provide limited, second-hand details of border transgression. These two narratives keep the transnational at bay by keeping their recognition of transgression to a minimum. They imply without fully delving into the potential repercussions of forbidden sexual relations. Choy never gives voice to Meiyong’s

thoughts, choosing instead to use Sekky's discomfort with their dealings with Kazuo to explore the unpredictability of the transnational. Sekky unknowingly describes Meiying's sexual relations with just enough detail to unsettle the narrative: "I would play cut-the-pie with my pocketknife while they held hands and walked away from me for a little while. They always disappeared inside the empty doorway of the Methodist Church building. Some days she came out rebuttoning her coat" (223). Badami contains these fears even further with Kamini who vaguely suspects the secret relationship her mother is having with Paul da Costa. Even when the second half of the narrative switches to Saroja's perspective, Badami provides minimal details of the affair with Paul da Costa, dwelling more on the fact that "I am, after all, a memsahib, and there is a distance to be maintained between us" (233) than on the actual moments of sexual contact. Saroja's border transgression remains an understood tension within the household and the two parts of the narrative. The few moments when they are together take place on the household property where the watchful eyes of the staff keep their interactions within strictly regulated bounds.

Moreover, the possibilities of transnational interconnection quickly fade as Choy and Badami turn their attention to the impending violence that awaits these transgressive characters. These authors depict characters who rail against the naturalized boundaries that constrain them but, in the end, Badami and Choy underline the power of the nation and the community to discipline its unruly subjects. Badami dooms the relationship between Paul and Saroja when Linda Ayah forbodingly reminds her mistress of the fatal consequences of ignoring the hierarchical and divisive society in which she lives: "Memsahib, tell me, if you sit in a mortar can you avoid being hit by the pestle?" she asks suddenly, her hands full of tamarind" (234). Saroja is forced to acknowledge her fate with her eventual response, "Yes *baba* yes! My head will be paste and my hand will be smashed by the wheel. Happy?" (235). Similarly, Meiying enjoys

the darkening autumn days with Kazuo but by winter, she and Kazuo must end their relationship as internment looms over their last moments together. Meiying who once gained strength from her explorations in transnational possibility becomes weak under the reinstatement of the unforgiving borders of the nation and the community. Sekky watches as “she buried her head on his shoulder and began to cry. It made me think how weak girls were, just like everyone said” (232). Choy lingers his gaze on this scene whose affect relies on the futility of Meiying’s desire to maintain connection with Kazuo even when she acknowledges her inevitable return to her own Chinese Canadian cultural space. Saroja and Meiying resist at first but eventually admit that they have deluded themselves into believing that they can overcome the violence of their identity spaces.

The characters realise that the impending end to their transgressive relationships is a sad but necessary part of the maintenance of domestic order. The disorder that their taboo sexual relationships creates is pleasurable precisely because of the expectation that it will be short lived. While the regulations that constrain these characters lives are intolerable, the characters still prefer known borders to the destabilization of the unknown. Saroja sends the controlled household environment into turmoil that must be restored through the removal of Paul da Costa’s disruptive presence. Saroja suffocates within her marriage but knows that she must sacrifice her lover if she wishes for domestic stability to prevail. Kamini contrasts Paul da Costa’s violation of “the rules of membership” (121) with her mother’s eventual acceptance of the demands of the club and the household: “Ma had learned the unspoken rules of the Railway colony very quickly, for she had Linda Ayah and Ganesh Peon guiding her from the day she came to this life as Dadda’s bride. Ma knew, for instance, that although the Inspector of Works was much lower than an officer, he wielded greater power, for he was in charge of maintenance” (121). Similarly, Meiying and Kazuo

sense that they are postponing the inevitable as they linger in the dimming light of transnational potential:

“Keep this scarf to remember us.”

“Don’t, May,” he said, “don’t make things hard for me.” (233)

This final scene between Kazuo and Meiyong relies on the affect of tragic inevitability in order to give it its particular narrative poignancy. Both characters realize that they must put an end to their relationship and submit to the fiction of well-regulated domestic space. Like Saroja, they realize that the return to the constrictions of their binary worlds is unavoidable.

The texts capture binary inevitability and then take steps to position themselves for a final decisive strike against transnational possibility. The objects of their violence are the mixed children who have been conceived from forbidden sexual activities. The renewed naturalization of national and community borders requires that Badami and Choy rid their narratives of these lingering transnational traces that may disrupt the ordered stability of their narratives. While the relationships in the texts are shocking in themselves, their potential to create material evidence of their transgression poses the biggest threat to the regulated textual boundaries. In short, Meiyong and Saroja could give birth to a cyborg. These transgressive relationships are so unsettling because of their potential to produce a cyborg body that materially threatens to reveal the domestic’s own porosity. Not only will these cyborg offspring violate familial and national borders, but they will also claim location across the “racial” borders that maintain the purity of the bloodlines of these characters. Donna Haraway underlines the threatening power of the cyborg to naturalized boundaries when she asserts that her “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 295). These potent fusions impede the construction of a

depoliticized and nostalgic textual package. The narratives move to defuse these possibilities before they derail the movement towards a contained narrative resolution.

Badami and Choy rid their texts of these disruptive cyborg threats by first of all stressing the horror of the cyborg body that circulates unimpeded within their domestic and textual spaces. Saroja and Meiying are so volatile within the narratives because they risk giving birth to children who claim a material location within transnational disorder. Paul da Costa's expulsion from the caste system and his uncategorizable "racial" identity provide Saroja with proof of the negative consequences of failing to adhere to established boundaries. When Linda Ayah senses that Saroja is attracted to the placeless Paul da Costa, she draws attention to the monstrosity of his mixed Anglo body. She asks "Why you look *tukur-tukur* at that three-fourth person?" and dismisses his body even further by labelling him as a "three parts low caste and one part pink-face" (236). Saroja is hesitant to pursue a relationship with Paul because she is loathe to deal with the repercussions of giving birth to her own mixed children. Choy also underlines the nightmare of the cyborg offspring through the warnings of the Chinese elders: "Mix blood,' many of the Chinese ladies told their children, quoting an old saying, 'mix trouble!'" (96). Jung concedes that "there were exceptions, of course. There were Yip Gong and his wife, Nellie, a white woman who had been educated in both China and the United States, lived in New York, and fluently spoke five Chinese dialects, spoke them better than those born into the language" (96). However, Choy juxtaposes the inclusion of Nelly in the community with Stepmother's miscarriage and the image of the dead baby "strangled by its cord" (97) as a reminder of the limits to Nellie's powers as midwife and destabilizing cultural outsider. Choy permits a certain degree of excess as long as it remains an exception to the otherwise fixed borders between the Chinese and non-Chinese identity categories. Nellie is thus absent as Meiying experiences the onset of her pregnancy and as she takes desperate measures to

rid herself of her transnational “flu” (233). The narratives keep disruptive incidents manageable in order to prevent “mix blood” from creating undue “mix trouble” for the community, the nation, and the narratives themselves.

The texts create horror for the cyborg body and then cut short this transnational growth through characters who abort their cyborg offspring for the sake of domestic order. Badami and Choy capture the cyborg’s inevitable and tragic death that forecloses its ability to unmask the constructed essentialism of “racial” categories. The texts rob the cyborg of the opportunity of claiming located subjectivity by dematerializing it. Saroja submits to Linda Ayah’s warning, “you be careful, Memsahib, careful-careful” (60), as she ends her inappropriate relationship with Paul da Costa. Saroja refuses to contemplate prolonged relations with a man with “two types blood in his body,” complaining that “I cannot destroy my life for a half-breed man, a caste-less soul” and that “I will not leave my children. I don’t want to cut myself off, become a pariah, have other children who will be bastards” (255). She denies future cyborg children, leading Paul da Costa to abort his own life by strangling himself with a cord attached to the ceiling of the billiards room in the club. Saroja is so wedded to constructed borders that she submits to the pressures to purge herself of the transnational traces attached to Paul’s Anglo body. Meiying is also unable to cope with her own cyborg pregnancy and, eventually, after being “really sick with flu” (233), uses knitting needles to rid herself of her child just as Kazuo and his family are legislated into internment camps (234). Choy’s characters are fated to sacrifice themselves and their offspring for binary categories that have regulated and given shape to their lives thus far. As Christopher Lee argues, “in the death of mother and unborn child, the symbolic order of Chineseness maintains itself through the cruel repression of dissent” (30). Their death also parallels the cruel repression of dissent that the Canadian nation-state practices on its Japanese Canadian citizens.

This abortion of the cyborg offspring represents the disciplinary power of binary categories and its willingness to resort to violence in order to prevent the threatening cyborg offspring from taking material form. The abortion of the cyborg offspring unsettles the smooth façade of these narratives, shattering the appearance of unity for an instant. The texts demonstrate brutal domestic disciplinary power in the violent repercussions of border transgression. Sekky witnesses the damage of the “two long knitting needles glinting between Meiyong’s legs” (237). He quickly learns the fate of those who are pregnant with destabilizing cyborg creations:

She lay curled up, head to knee, beside her cot, her hair disheveled like unraveled silk threads, her eyes shut tight against some paralyzing pain, her thin body angled across the peeling linoleum floor. One arm, caught between her legs, seemed to float on a spreading pool of blood. (237)

Choy momentarily spotlights the transgressive body and the violent fate of those who refuse to conform to domestic order. He depicts Meiyong’s disheveled hair and the spreading pool of blood around her as he highlights the transnational disorder that her death narrowly stopped from spreading to the rest of her community. She lies in a foetal position that serves as a reminder of both the child and the relationship whose lives were cut short because of Meiyong’s abortive act. Their deaths are shocking reminders of the violence needed to maintain an untroubled identity space. Kamini also learns of the fate of the transgressive body as she unexpectedly discovers Paul da Costa’s body: “‘There’s somebody hanging from the ceiling,’ I remarked, looking curiously at the limp legs. In the dim light, I thought that the collapsed face seemed oddly familiar” (117). Choy and Badami stress the inevitability of the transnational’s violent extinguishment that jars against the hopeful possibility of the brief transgressive romances of these characters. Just as Paul da Costa’s limp body serves to “defile our billiards room” (261), the blood in these texts marks a physicality that temporarily

cannot be ignored. For this one moment, the texts give place to the dangerous materiality of bodies that these characters aborted just in time.

Nostalgic Forgetting

Badami and Choy allow the transnational to titillate the reader with its subversive potential but do not permit the mixed creations of these characters to circulate in materialized form. The death of the cyborg offspring represents the death of a force that once threatened the status quo and, through its removal, the reassertion of the essentialized codes that bind. The two narratives seek a resolution that finds a means of masking the momentarily exposed fractures of the domestic. The texts ease the passage back to a naturalized domestic space by using nostalgia as a soothing narrative device to wipe away the traces of the both the cyborg's presence and its violent death. Badami and Choy realize the power of nostalgia to cover over subversive transnational implications and render their narratives into pleasurable, decontextualized textual experiences. The use of nostalgia restores the narratives to a world of naturalized domestic borders that permit their packaging as contained ethnic commodities.

The characters must move past their witnessing of the cyborg's violent death if they wish to claim a renewed space in familiar domestic territory. To do so, the texts enact a temporal distancing from the transnational that transforms the abortive death of the cyborg into a distant nostalgic memory. The transgressive nature of Saroja's relationship with Paul da Costa and his subsequent suicide become detached memories as Saroja admits years later that "I couldn't recollect why I was so unhappy those first years of marriage. Why I had liked a car mechanic so much. Was it because by wanting him I was defying the rules of conduct that defined me as a memsahib, a good

Brahmin wife? I cannot even remember” (295). This detachment from Saroja’s earlier identity struggles demonstrate her ability to sever ties with the transnational and restore the equilibrium of the stories she recounts. Nostalgic events are located in a past that is far from the current context in which Saroja now circulates. Similarly, Choy follows Meiying’s death with a scene in which Sekky recalls gentler memories of Meiying and his mother closeted within the domestic: “I thought of Meiying and her whispering together in that room, sitting before the dresser mirror, sharing Three Flowers perfume, easily chatting away, fluttering voices, like butterflies of palest amber, gossiping” (238). Choy reduces Meiying’s fragmented body to an ephemeral trace that is incapable of posing a material threat to his narrative façade. The startling image of Meiying and the bloody knitting needles fades away as these bittersweet memories of earlier, less dramatic times assume its place. Sekky is devastated by Meiying’s death but he chooses to dwell on this earlier memory because his last image of Meiying is too disturbing for him to bear. Meiying transforms into an indistinct presence within Sekky’s memories of happier times in his family home. Badami and Choy use memory to cover over violent incidents and replace them instead with a nostalgic version that locates them firmly in the past.

The texts cover over the remnants of the transnational with nostalgia that not only disconnects the characters from the violent death of the cyborg, but also transforms the past into a blurry representation of border transgression. Badami and Choy smooth over the fragments that impede their packaging efforts by relegating them to a nostalgic past. Choy ends his narrative with Stepmother sorrowfully seeking a past that is now permanently gone. Sekky writes that his mother “was looking in the dresser mirror, with an old silk shawl around her shoulders. It was the one with gold flowers that her girlhood friend in Old China had given her when she herself was just a girl, a shawl Meiying had once admired, as girls will” (238). Choy mutes the memories of

Meiying and her bloody knitting needles as Stepmother connects Meiying's death to her own nostalgic memories of her girlhood in Old China. Stepmother nostalgically dwells on the beauty of her shawl that deflects attention from the ugliness of Meiying's violent death. Kamini similarly softens the immediacy of the events in the text when she speaks of her mother's unreliable memory. She writes that her mother "*seemed to have forgotten so many things, she might not even remember. Or she might remember it all differently. Sometimes it seemed as if the past was a painting that she had dipped in water, allowing the colours to run and drip, merge and fade so that an entirely altered landscape remained*" (152). Badami uses nostalgia to neutralize and rewrite incidents of disturbance into ones of aesthetically pleasing loss. In the present context of the novel, Saroja travels through the flickering images of her past, admitting that "my memories have blurred and melded together, a bit like the landscape viewed through the windows of a speeding train" (19). Saroja transforms into a nostalgic storyteller who reports past events that lack their previous destabilizing impact because their endings have already been determined. Although Saroja and Stepmother regret the plight of the transnational, the texts detach these characters from its violent death as they move the cyborg body into a nostalgic past.

The texts accomplish this suppression of transnational potential through a skilful manipulation of nostalgia that neutralizes the violence that circulates within their borders. After a brief interlude of border transgression, the texts return once again to the contained domestic spaces that keep the narratives from spiralling into transnational disorder. The deployment of violence accompanied by nostalgia creates a progression from shock to comfort that provides the uneasy enjoyment of the transnational that the texts remove through their contained resolutions. The build-up of tension through the impending penetration of the transnational into the domestic is released through its violent suppression and its subsequent displacement into memory.

This release of tension pleurably reduces the past into a supervised journey into transnational disorder. For instance, Choy repeatedly dwells on the aesthetic qualities of the transnational's death that his ample use of nostalgia draws out. The Three Flowers perfume, the dresser mirror, the old silk shawl, and Grandmother's carved jade peony pendant all take the place of the violent deaths of Meiying and her offspring. Meanwhile, Badami reduces Saroja's memories of her battles with patriarchy and vestiges of colonialism, as well as the affair with Paul da Costa, into nostalgic indulgences rather than as pressing issues for the present. Saroja says that "*we have a long way to go and I have so many stories for this compartment full of strangers who smile at me kindly, nodding as they listen to the reminiscences of an old woman*" (172). Saroja rereads Paul da Costa's death into an incident that she can tell to divert her fellow passengers. These texts limit their disruptive elements by using nostalgia to erase traces of violence that impede their reinstatement of the transcending predictability of the present.

Badami and Choy not only make liberal use of nostalgia, but they also foreground this nostalgia in order to naturalize their repackaged narrative contents. Kamini explains that nostalgia drives her narrative, writing that she is "*hit by a wave of nostalgia so strong that I had called my mother at 11:00 a.m. Indian time*" (34), and that many of her returns to the past are "*just nostalgia really. Something to do when I am not working on stupid lab experiments*" (82). Saroja herself reduces her struggles to nostalgic comfort when she writes of their soothing, contained presences within the railway. She writes that "*Sohaila checks to see if the door is securely locked and turns off the lights. I stretch out in my berth and allow memories to cover me like a blanket*" (280). For Saroja, her feelings of nostalgia seem a natural by-product of her passage from girlhood to old age. Choy also makes nostalgia into a naturalized outcome when he contains ambiguity and the death of the transnational within Poh-Poh's jade peony

pendant. Sekky writes that “in the centre of this semitranslucent carving, no more than an inch wide, was a pool of pink light, its veins swirling out into the petals of the flower” (149). While the swirls of the peony hint at ambiguity, this ambiguity lies trapped within the carved jade of the pendant, just as the transgressive behaviour of the characters lies within the confines of a nostalgic past. Choy ends the novel with Sekky pressing the hard surface of the pendant into the palm of his mother’s hand (238) as a recognition of the hard fate of transnational ambiguity. The incidents of violence in these two texts cease to unsettle because they are located in a rose-coloured nostalgic past that soothes away the pain of cyborg extinguishment. This nostalgia transforms the past into a space that is able to regulate ambiguity with regrettable consequences. These narratives return to the domestic calm that, although constraining, provides the characters with the comfort and stability they lacked when they were located in unpredictable transnational space.

Consequently, this reassertion of domestic calm through nostalgia is part of a packaging of difference that suppresses transgressive behaviour in order to return to the binary status quo. The texts end by repositioning the characters and their struggles in a reconstructed nostalgic domestic space that wipes away the visceral pain of the transnational’s passing. At the close of his narrative, Choy stresses the inevitability of the renaturalization of constructed borders as he relegates his characters back to the family home and to the confines of their Chinatown existence. While Stepmother shows a glimmer of resistance when she questions her imposed household role, “*I chose? I was bought!*” (235), this subversive moment also recedes to the background after Meiyong’s tragic death. Instead, the novel finishes with a reassertion of the separation between the Chinatown community and White society as Mrs. Lim bitterly explains that “we are Chinese; they take their time” (237), and with the subsequent reenclosure of the characters in protective domestic space. Sekky recalls that

“Stepmother came down and took my hand and walked with me back into our house. Mrs. Lim, sobbing, came with us. Father held her hand. Kiam had taken Liang and Jung to Third Uncle’s place in Chinatown” (238). Choy’s text titillates with border transgression but, in the end, keeps its tensions internal as once challenged domestic borders resettle around the characters. Similarly, Badami enacts a final containment of the past as Saroja imposes closure on unruly past events:

In days of yore, aged parents left their worldly lives to retreat into the forest, where they shrugged off the manacles that bound them to their responsibilities and duties, and spent the days contemplating their histories. They shuffled their memories like a pack of cards, smiled at the joyous ones, shed a tear or two at others. They shook their heads over youthful follies and thought quietly about the journey, yet unknown, that stretched before their callused feet. I too have reached that stage in my life where I only turn the pages of a book already written, I do not write. (296-7)

In these final thoughts, Saroja positions her memories as nostalgic escapes that pose little threat to the borders of the domestic and the text itself. Her assertion that “I do not write” transforms the past into a contained text whose tragic ending is non-negotiable. Instead, its joys and sorrows are part of a collection of nostalgic memories whose pages she can either turn for her own pleasure or for the pleasure of her fellow travellers. Badami and Choy conclude their narratives with domestic spaces that remain untroubled by the events that have occurred within the naturalized borders of their texts.

Saroja’s reference to “the pages of a book already written” points to the final textual form that emerges after Choy and Badami successfully deploy and suppress transnational possibility. Their careful narrative manoeuvres result in two textual packages that cohere into contained explorations of border disruption whose nostalgic

affect primes them for mass consumption. They deploy nostalgia in order to make a once disruptive presence highly consumable. Badami suffuses her text with nostalgia that privileges the affect that memories create over the material substance of the stories themselves:

In real life, I reflected, you warmed yourself on cold winter days in a foreign land by pulling out a rag-bag collection of those memories. You wondered which ones to keep and which to throw away, paused over a fragment here, smiled at a scrap. You reached out to grasp people you knew and came up with a handful of air, for they were only chimeras, spun out of your own imagination. (67)

Badami dematerializes her “rag-bag collection of stories” by presenting them as chimeras out of the nostalgic remembrances of her character. The death of the cyborg and the reassertion of the codes that bind divert, entertain, and most of all, provide an escape from the cold realities of present Canadian space. Sekky describes the transformation of his memories into a commodified object as he opens the final gift Meiyong gives to him. He writes, “I looked at the small parcel in my hand and tore it open. The red paper separated and a hand-sized blue notebook emerged, the kind you can still buy in the Five and Dime” (233). Similar to Meiyong who parcels Sekky’s memories into a consumable volume, Choy draws together his various stories into a cohesive textual representation. Both texts capitalize on the ability of nostalgia to focus on the consumption of memory as a pleasurable experience that overshadows the specific contexts of the memories being consumed.

This final packaging of the narratives into contained nostalgic forms encourages the consumption of the myth of a well-regulated domestic space that effectively acts against border transgression. Both *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* follow similar narrative trajectories that test but eventually uphold the disciplinary power of domestic

space. Choy's characters accept the inevitable relegation of their transnational elements outside of their domestic space that Meiyong violently realizes at the end of the text: "'It's time,' Mrs. Lim whispered in my ear, 'for the family to let the Old One go.' But they had already let her go, I thought" (165). The characters see the severing of disruptive old connections as a natural goal in their adoption into their new Canadian nation. Similarly, Badami tells her Indian stories within Canadian space while still adhering to the divisions that keep the two places apart. Kamini ends her portion of the text with her move to Canada and her mother's bewildered response: "Canada, Canada, and where is *that* place? In the North Pole, that's where. Are you mad or what?" (165). Meanwhile, Saroja continues on her journey through India with little intention of extending her voyage across the ocean to Canada. Canada and India conclude as two separate, irreducible domestic spaces that keep Kamini and her mother, past and present, distant from one another. The texts frame themselves within national and textual borders that can entertain transnational possibility provided that it eventually submits to the violence of their disciplinary power. Choy and Badami opt against using textuality as a tool of disruption and choose instead to replicate the dominant paradigms that uphold the sanctity of domestic space. The transnational relationships that were such hopeful signs of existence beyond domestic borders are regrettably absent as the texts abort and then nostalgically contain the bodies of aborted cyborg offspring.

Choy and Badami end their narratives by leaving the transnational as a lingering possibility that must satisfy itself with haunting the constructed borders of the texts. The transnational concludes as a diffused threat that once had the potential to push both nation and text over the precipice of cultural uncertainty. The texts offer up a dematerialized cyborg body that exists in memory where it saddens without troubling the living with its fate. The living continue with their identity negotiations that are less

conflicted once this cyborg offspring no longer draws them into fluctuating transnational space. *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* portray characters who struggle under domestic identity reproduction and yearn for a solution to reconcile ambiguity but in the end, accept a place within the nation in lieu of the disruptive possibilities of transnational exploration. Badami and Choy suppress transnational possibility until it exists in the shadowy cracks and fissures of their narratives. Like Saroja, who declares that “*I shall slip away, leaving them with memories of an old story-teller, a weaver of myths*” (297), the transnational eludes these authors who keep Asian Canadian representations innocuous as they reproduce contained ethnic textual commodities. These texts refuse to seize textual agency, choosing instead to subdue the power of the transnational and its potential to reconfigure and recharge the local. The death of the transnational naturalizes domestic borders and returns the transnational to a nostalgic space where it will faintly threaten but not assume material cyborg form. It will take texts that break out of constructed borders into the possibilities of the transnational borderspace for Asian Canadian subjectivity to move to new, more agency-producing possibilities.

Hiromi Goto’s *The Kappa Child*, Ashok Mathur’s *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar*, and Kerri Sakamoto’s *One Hundred Million Hearts* take up this challenge as they recognize that the position of the nation vis-à-vis the global has shifted since the publication of earlier, more nation-bound Asian Canadian texts. Whereas the two previous literary texts replicate dominant paradigms in order to claim a place within the nation, the three texts in Chapter Five destabilize façades in order to break out of constructed national territory. Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto argue that at a time when the hyper mobility of capital, goods, and people are everyday occurrences, the local must fundamentally rethink its relationship to the global. The continued presence of

the foreign within the domestic transforms the nation from a “pure” identity space into a permeable site of contestation. While *The Jade Peony* and *Tamarind Mem* take a path of conformity, these texts mark a shift in Asian Canadian literature in their willingness to situate subjectivity amidst the many transnational elements that inflect a local space.

This resituating of Asian Canadian subjectivity permits the characters in these texts to literally leave the domestic to see what lies beyond its borders. Characters travel across national and cultural boundaries as they question the stability of their identities and the purity of particular local spaces. They cross previously static borders as they reenergize the texts and the body of Asian Canadian literature into new, more intersectional identity paths. The result are local spaces and narratives that are interconnected points of convergence that attest to the power of reworked textuality. Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto seize the ambivalent possibility of the transnational that transforms the local and their literary productions into performative and above all, generative sites for change.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rereading Terra Nullius: Transnational Voyages in Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*, Kerri Sakamoto's *One Hundred Million Hearts*, and Ashok Mathur's *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar*

In one of the opening scenes of Ashok Mathur's *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar*, Sita and her father sit in an airport, YVR, having a drink as those around them crisscross the terminal space on their way to an ever proliferating number of global destinations. Sita and her father are different from the blurred images and people that make up their surroundings because they pause, perceive, and discuss before taking their next line of flight. Airports, as “transitional places” with “so much opportunity for change, for redirection, for backtracking” (Mathur 19), are the metaphorical focal point for two other recently published Asian Canadian literary works, Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child* and Kerri Sakamoto's *One Hundred Million Hearts*, that also insert movement into once stable national identity conceptions. These three authors posit identities as transnational configurations that move amidst a shifting array of local and global connections. In short, the local transforms into a situated node where action can take place.

This emphasis on local and global interconnectivity distinguishes these texts from past and present Asian Canadian literary works that strive for a space of legitimacy within constructed national territory. Sakamoto, Goto, and Mathur choose instead to challenge borders by drawing attention to the conditions of characters who

are contained within bounded domestic spaces. Goto's narrator writes of this claustrophobia in her description of her family home: "The house had a face. There were two tiny windows peering malevolently and a door-nose right in between. A tiny porch in front of the door the gritting mouth" (127). The character is trapped within her childhood "little house on the prairie" whose depressive quarters prevent her from seizing present opportunities. Similarly, *One Hundred Million Hearts* opens in Toronto where Miyo lives with her father in a home whose walls house the suppressed memories of his Japanese wartime experiences. Miyo writes of the early morning times "when she'd heard the sounds through the wall, of her father with Setsuko – noises mingled with words she later realized were the Japanese her father never spoke by day, never in front of her" (40-41). She describes the barrier that her father erects between the two of them and other Japanese Canadians: "Once they came to the door, but he refused to answer. *I'm not one of them*, he said, and she peeked out the window after they'd left" (28). The sense of confinement that pervades Miyo's life is also present in the day-to-day routine of Mathur's Harry Kumar who is unable to break out of the monotony of his social life, his job at the credit union, and his own introversion. Mathur writes that "six years was a long time to serve as a teller. Most tellers were moved into managerial positions or at least supervisory positions by this time" (22). However, Harry, who refuses to move outside of the familiar, is stuck in the same entry level job where his feelings of inadequacy and marginality have become normative. These characters are contained within constructed local spaces that prevent them from seeing "outside" possibilities.

This inability to denaturalize local space results in a profound loss of agency for each of these characters. They have events happen to them but rarely initiate change themselves because they view the constraints around them as given. This reticence to blur the boundaries between inside and outside leaves the characters vulnerable to

other people who are quick to dictate the terms of their entrapment. The result is that they remain within an artificial local space that denies the many outside intrusions that impinge on their subjectivities. For example, Goto's narrator has cut herself off from outside forces until "the solitude bleeds into my body and instead of feeling lonely, a bubble of singleton glee swells inside my chest. My shopping carts cling, clang, clatter inside my van and the music of metal on metal is an urban orchestral production" (9). The character has constructed a bubble that leaves her with unsatisfied longings for new and more meaningful connections beyond the contained clatter of her shopping carts. In Sakamoto's text, Miyo and her father form an equally intense domestic unit that guards against the menacing outside. Miyo reveals their co-dependency when she considers the potential death of her father: "'Daddy,' I start to say, then stop myself, harness my breath. I wonder how I'll survive; if he goes away, leaves me, dies, I may too" (4). In Mathur's text, Harry exhibits a similar passivity when he accepts his new miniscule office in the credit union: "Daphne is standing in front of Harry who sits at a medium-sized pine desk that Mr. Peabody has stuffed into a closet of an office for Harry's express use. The room is exactly eight feet by six feet" (57). Harry gives up his right to self-definition because he chooses to work *within* and not *beyond* the limits his boss assigns to him. These characters reinforce their own invisibility by accepting constructed borders as natural and then enclosing themselves within the security of these limits. They may want to effect "cosmic change" (50) but are rooted in border constructions that leave them in spatial confusion.

However, after recognizing the borders that house their characters, the texts use contact moments to destabilize constructed local spaces. These contact moments involve incidents when the foreign penetrates and intermingles with the local. This blurring between local and global prompts them to question their constructed insularity, a process that detaches them from their naturalized assumptions and makes

it impossible for them to ignore the slippages that destabilize their static concept of place. Mathur's Harry Kumar finds his world spinning in a new direction after his friend Sita kisses him unexpectedly after one of her dates. Sakamoto's Miyo also feels doubt enter her previously static life after Setsuko reveals her "true" identity as Masao's wife. These unforeseen contact moments throw these characters into an altered local space where new possibilities suddenly replace once fixed assumptions. In Goto's text, her narrator must negotiate the intrusion of a kappa, a mythic Japanese creature, who jolts her life with the hope she has been secretly desiring. She writes, "like planets aligning, I was hoping for some lunar intervention in the daily dregs of my life. The cusp of a new century, *hope* such a small word in the face of global disintegration" (81). Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto employ these contact moments in order to open their characters up to the potential for active change. The texts place themselves on the cusp of a destabilized and productive local space.

Once the texts destabilize the sanctity of local space, the characters are able to review its once constraining borders in new and more permeable ways. The blurring of these borders enables the characters to reread the local as a site of multiple and dynamic interconnections. During his quest for Sita, Harry Kumar complains to his dog about the destabilization his life is undergoing:

"I feel like I'm not in control of my life," say Harry morosely.

"Hm. And what makes you feel that way?" asks Han in his best \$85-an-hour therapist voice.

"Well, you for one. You, Athnic, Director Merrick, and this Anna Varre character. You all seem so ...so unpredictable." (175)

What Harry perceives as a loss of control is actually an enabling dismantling of the predictability that has kept his life static. Harry is adjusting to his movement into a transnational borderspace where people and connections are contingent and

fluctuating. In Sakamoto's text, Miyo also initially resists the shifts of a transnational borderspace when she refuses to consider the connections her father has to Japan. She admits that she sees her father "not like the young man in the photograph smiling at his lovely friend, those weapons at his belt decorations to impress her. I realize then that I can't ever picture my father as a boy in a far-off land" (21). It is only later that she will detach her family history from its Canadian local space as she deals with its connections to a far-off land. Similarly, Goto's narrator has been raised to privilege her Canadian present over her past Japanese connections. She recounts that "my Okasan suggests that I should complain a little less. That we ought to be grateful that our family came to Canada. We should see what life is like in Japan before we complain about things here" (13). The kappa challenges this dismissal of Japan as it brings the gift of transnational connection to the Canadian prairies. Goto's narrator is so grateful for this transnational visitation that she sends "thanks to a questionable creature from a different clime. A creature much greener than Santa" (231). This entry of the outside into the lives of these characters results in significant alterations in their ability to read local contexts. Their new reading abilities make them more intimately connected with the local as they begin to negotiate its many heteroglossic relationships.

These heteroglossic relationships reveal the myth of pure space to be a fiction that denies the integral role of "outside" influences within the local. Through her kappa pregnancy, Goto's narrator undergoes her own acceptance of impurity that makes her question what determines Otherness. She complains to her sister Mice of her growing knowledge of the Otherness that lies within her: "But knowing there's someone in my body, this otherness, that's what really gets to me. And then I start wondering if I'm going crazy" (92). Mathur captures a similar questioning of purity when Harry meets Director Merrick who is the head of a "particular co-operative operation" (90) that is anxiously controlling the elements that enter the water filtration

plant. Merrick explains to Harry his grievance against those objects that taint the water supply. He explains his dismay “when my water gets polluted. You know, when foreign objects invade my water and change the entire character of the water. You see, as director of the ‘water filtration plant’ it is my duty to keep certain elements out – all the while keeping the water in” (90). The battle over the water filtration plant and the intrusion of the foreign symbolize the struggle to seize back control of constructed borders. In Sakamoto’s narrative, Miyo’s father senses his own tainted difference as he serves for a Japanese state that demands absolute belief in its wartime machinery. Hajimi writes that “[Masao] says he is not a pure Japanese. He feels he stands apart from the others, along with his impure thoughts” (264). Masao is unable to reconcile his presence within the Japanese air service against its claims of unquestionable purity. Each of the texts create local and global interpenetrations in order to unmask the impurity that lies at the heart of claims of impermeability. They demand that their characters move past constructed assumptions and into a transnational borderspace of change and contestation.

Transnational Travel

These three texts engage with the possibilities of a transnational borderspace by depicting characters who literally voyage beyond the borders of their local spaces. They fly from local spaces that have previously confined them within their naturalized assumptions. Augusto Espirito writes that “without the constant work of unburying transnational *relationships*, informed by a deeper historicization, Asian American cultural discourse always threatens to collapse into a nation-bound approach” (188). Espirito underlines the disadvantages of a nation-bound approach that fails to see the global and the local in a dynamic and interdependent relationship. These writers

respond to this imperative by transporting their characters out of bounded local space. Miyo travels to Japan in search of her half-sister and her earlier denied familial past, while Harry Kumar embarks on “one big vacation” (123) across the globe in search of Sita. Meanwhile, in Goto’s text, the entry of the kappa into the constructed world of the narrator inserts the foreign into the local space that she has been anxiously protecting against invasion. The characters set off on transnational and transfamilial journeys in which they confront ties that they have hitherto barred from their consciousnesses. The fact that these globe trotting characters were initially intent on protecting their insular existences underlines that even the most trapped individuals have the capacity to deconstruct borders.

Local constraints at first disappear as the characters mobilize the potential of transnational voyage. Their initial deconstruction of their local attachments sends them spinning into the disorientation of global space where they are seemingly free from local responsibility. The texts present scenes of air travel in order to underline the novelty of transnational travel to characters hitherto contained within constructed boundaries. The kappa in Goto’s text takes the narrator to an airport where it introduces her to the potential of transnational mobility: “I eased into the gravel parking area beside the Calgary International Airport. The stretch kept especially for people who want to watch planes landing and taking off” (120). In Mathur’s text, Harry experiences transnational mobility firsthand as he boards one plane after another in his search for Sita. Meanwhile, Miyo flies to Tokyo where she awakens from her transnational voyage disoriented from her first trip across the Pacific Ocean. Miyo writes that “she had to remind herself of where she was, the strange bed, why David wasn’t beside her; of the endless plane ride, her first; the strange sensation of being suspended impossibly high above the earth; the ghostly clouds at her window that she imagined walking on and falling through” (49). The characters are at first intoxicated

by the sensation of being suspended high above the earth where they are tempted to forget about local complications. This intoxication derives from the mobility usually reserved for individuals like Mathur's character Samuel who invested in a "dot-com business venture" (174) that rose astronomically in value, and who can now seamlessly move from one geographic local to another. Mathur writes that "eighteen months later, Samuel was a multi-millionaire and he quit his contracting business, took flying lessons, and bought himself a private jet" (174). These texts foreground mobility that enables their characters to take advantage of the porosity of local borders after years of entrapment.

Nevertheless, these transnational voyages are more than flights of privileged escape. Instead, these character engage in transnational performances that negotiate the multiplicity of connections within the local. Unlike Samuel, they resist taking their privilege for granted as they come to terms with a transnational borderspace that demands *conscious* mobility. In *The Kappa Child*, the kappa whispers words that underline the need to guard against superficially reading moments of contact: "“But I’ll tell you a secret,” whispered moistly in my ear, ‘appearances are deceiving and chance meetings might not be chance’" (122). The characters avoid losing themselves within the superficiality of global flows by critically engaging with the ground-level conditions that coexist with larger global movements. Sakamoto contrasts the Japan of the kamikaze pilots with the modern Japan that is a dislocating maze of economic and social flows. Despite her preparation before arriving, Miyo is still unable to comprehend a city "where the subways were a maze and each person was an atom, silent and untouchable. She did feel untouchable, alone with herself, and estranged from her father and everything new she was learning about him" (98). Miyo finds herself disoriented within the flows of global capital and bodies that move through Tokyo's local space. Harry Kumar also has the potential to become despatialized during

his global travels as he transforms into yet another global traveller on his way to a far-off destination. The text describes these travellers moving amongst “a vast array of images” that cohere into a single image on the airport video screen: “this one could be an incomplete nostril, that one a blurred antennae, and then there are strands of hair, a flash of a numerical keypad, an earlobe, a green slab of stone, several more green slabs in a row” (20). These characters feel tempted to join the rush of those global flows but they soon realize that they must forge a different relationship to space. They forgo the skating on the surface of a new global world by recognizing that each local piece has its own particular resonance that demands engagement.

The texts halt the allure of surface escapism by recognizing mobility as a privilege that necessitates continual negotiation. Their characters make mobility into an ambivalent critical performance by situating themselves within moments of local and global interconnectivity. This ongoing critical engagement is essential; as Mathur states, “but what matters is *that* Harry thinks, and you see, he isn’t going to ever stop thinking” (222). Harry must *think* because he circulates within a local/global interface that requires continual negotiation. The texts stress constant “thinking” to prevent their characters from lapsing into a complacent global stance vis-à-vis the local. Goto’s character cautiously accepts the foreign kappa into her personal space – “I don’t know anything about you. Maybe you’re not someone I should be having fun *with*” (122) – while Miyo discovers that her trip to Japan destabilizes her family tree in its creation of more questions than answers about her father’s participation in the war and about her own relationship to Japan and her half-sister Hana. Miyo struggles to reconcile the many competing fragments of truth that she uncovers: “what Miyo had seen inside that room flashed in her mind, the red yarn furiously stitched to their father’s young face. ‘Hana thinks our father committed some cruelty,’ she said” (109). Her entry into Japanese space fails to provide her with the answers that she was seeking

when she set off on her transnational voyage. She, like the other characters, straddles the borders between foreign and domestic, complicity and conformity, in a space of ongoing and unstable negotiation. These characters probe their alienation from multiple local spaces in order to shift their mobility from a normative addition to their lives into a demanding critical performance.

Once the characters accept mobility as a conscious act, their critical performance begins. The characters chart their global voyages with lines of flight that leave visible paths across transnational space. Because Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto foreground the specific crisscrossing of temporal, national and cultural spaces, the characters remain accountable for their global travels. The visibility of their movements constructs a transnational borderspace of accountability that is attuned to the complex relationships that underlie global practices. As Saskia Sassen argues, “by their enactment, global practices produce distinctive and complex spatialities that cannot simply be subsumed or measured under the national” (“Spatialities” 275). Miyo is very much aware of her own complex spatialities that arise as she travels to and within Japan. When she examines atomic bomb imagery with Hana, she grapples with her conflicting connections to what she sees: “She could not quite grasp, in this instant, that she was in this foreign place, that her father was dead and that the sickliness within her might be traced to the beauty she saw in this painting” (116). Meanwhile, Mathur meticulously logs Harry’s journey from Vancouver to Galiano Island, Toronto, Australia, New Zealand, and back to Vancouver again. Mathur takes pains to record his character’s journey in order to leave clear traces of his interventions into their local spaces. Like Han the dog who leaves a trail as he runs “amok among its molecules, dispersing them at an incredible and frenetic rate” (101), Harry travels in a self-conscious and highly visible way. Goto similarly stresses the importance of traceability when the kappa visits the family rice field and leaves its own singular marking in the

muddy ground. Goto writes of “a small footprint in the mud at my feet. Odd, not like any duck I’d seen before. The print was webbed, but not the wide-webbed indentation of an aquatic fowl, the shape was stretched longer, more foot-like” (228). By making their global movements explicit, these characters encourage others to hold them accountable for the changes that they effect.

Unearthing Local Layers

The texts then delve into the many hidden fragments that make up the whole. Rita Wong in her piece, “The ‘I’ in Migrant,” highlights the elements that lie beneath seemingly coherent surfaces when she writes that “from a distance, as those of you who’ve seen it know, the tree is beautiful. it is only when you’re close up that you see the milky resin dripping from the occasional wounds, feel the sharp spikes against your skin. the tree is still beautiful, but more dangerous than you initially realized” (106). These words resonate with texts that examine the sharp spikes whose violence have created wounds on the bodies of those who have suffered the brunt of the constructed beauty of the tree. Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto seize the porosity of current national, cultural, and economic borders in order to see beyond constructs and begin the process of recovery. The tree is indeed beautiful but these authors negotiate the history of specific local sites that this beauty deflects. As Elspeth Probyn argues, “this is not to give up on the local but rather to work more deeply in and against it. Instead of collapsing the local we have to open it up, to work at different levels” (“Travels in the Postmodern” 186). What emerges is a local space that is grounded in a sense of context that is composed of the many layers of history and violence that have suffered erasure. On Toronto’s Front Street, Harry learns from his friend Athnic of the need to pierce a reclaimed surface and see the layers that the city has displaced and made invisible.

Athnic explains, “everything from Front Street down to Queen’s Quay is reclaimed land,” “an enormous reclamation project to push the growing city into the harbour, or, more accurately, to push the limits of the city onto a landfill that occupies what used to be not waterfront territory, but pretty much straight water” (98). Harry sees that the surface projects a “*terra nullius*, a vacant lot, a no-strings-attached piece of real estate” (100), while simultaneously rendering illegitimate any competing textual claims. The label “*terra nullius*” assumes that land can be claimed without regard for the layers of history and people who have previously inhabited that particular space. Harry will take this lesson of *terra nullius* and apply it to his encounters with local spaces in Australia and New Zealand.

The characters see past the blankness of *terra nullius* into the layers of unwanted histories. They become adept at challenging surface appearances, as in the case of Harry who, after visiting Rottnest Island in Australia and One-Tree Hill in New Zealand, realizes that “*conquerors can build monuments on the remains of a conquered people’s bones and the vanquished can wait five centuries before exacting revenge*” (192). Meanwhile, as Mathur maps the bones of a conquered people, Goto’s character finally connects herself and her neighbour Gerald, who is “blood and Japanese Canadian” (188), to the constructed hegemony that dismisses competing claims to space. The motel man offers an apology that tritely attempts to move past the violence of internment: “I always thought it was terrible what was done to you people” (70). With these simple words, the man relegates Japanese Canadian history to a regrettable but transcended past. In Sakamoto’s text, Miyo searches for traces of dead wartime soldiers in the gleaming structures of the rebuilt Japanese metropolis. She remarks that “she’d hardly seen people in wheelchairs or with walkers on the streets here; maybe they were cloistered by their families, lonely shut-ins; maybe there were secret societies of them exiled to the city’s outskirts” (202). Her comment is indicative

of a post-war Japanese society that wants to rid itself of jarring traces. The characters discover that a coherent surface often masks the damaged bodies that disrupt its sanitized version of history. In other words, current myths justify the suppression of violent history for the sake of a cleansed and resutured present.

This return to history is a productive experience that moves from *ignoring* to *working with* complicity. As Donna Haraway asserts, “location is always partial, always finite, always a fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry. Above all, location is not self-evident or transparent” (*Modest_Witness* 37). These writers realize this commitment to seeing sites of partiality by mapping the body within the multiple discourses latent within the local. Goto’s narrator engages with her personal history and her connectivity to those around her after the kappa teaches her that “*there is a memory of the body, memory held within ancient cells, always ever-present. My cells tell me what has passed and what may pass before*” (105). She gradually recognizes that her connections to the past and the present linger on despite her efforts at denial. Harry explores his own ambivalent relationship to place as he travels from one locale to another. Anne Varre writes that, “others, yes, Harry, Athnic and that lot, don’t really know why they’re hithering to and fro as they are, just *that* they are, and I figure it’s my job to keep them going at a steady pace” (127). Harry hithers to and fro with the consciousness that his movements require continual engagement with his spatial location. Miyo also reaches outward to the connections from which she once recoiled: “That word he’d uttered: *hibakusha*, like a taint or taboo; the momentary recoil of his fingertips. Had that been her affliction all along, and she’d never been told? Was that what her mother had died of? All the mysteries of her life that she’d let lie; that she’d never prodded her father to tell. Now who would tell her?” (164). These characters change from recoiling from local entanglements to situating the domestic within the myriad paths that spiral outward

from their localized positions. They negotiate the multiple histories that overlap and collide in one specific location as they connect themselves to the specific texture of location.

The characters not only capture the arcs of their journeys, but also the nodes of intersection when multiple and competing fragments come together. These intersectional points are sites of contact between the local and the global. Miyo undergoes her own personal moment of contact when she collides with her half-sister and later, the ghost of her father in his disturbing kamikaze past. In the first meeting with Hana, the two sisters physically collide with one another: “Miyo heard, ‘sister!’ as arms were flung about her and held her so close she felt their bones touch; her heart, beating hard, or maybe it was Hana’s, seemed to rack them both” (67). The physical moment of contact between the two sisters symbolizes the collision between Canada and Japan that unsettles her stable identity conceptions. Characters like Miyo leave the comfort of the domestic and enter a fluctuating borderspace that is composed of many similar collision points. These interactive nodes are akin to Mary Louise Pratt’s contact zone which she defines as “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Within this contact zone, previously separated elements form new understandings of one another through fraught negotiation. The characters deal with the conflicts that arise when dissonant elements come into contact with one another in the fluctuating space between Self and Other.

The characters arrive at a new understanding of place each time that they enter the contact zone. Harry encounters the complexities of the contact zone when he walks into a Wollongong bar and is subject to the gaze of the locals there:

Chick looks at Harry inquisitively. Harry begins to respond by assuring the large gentleman that he really does not know what he is talking about. Chick does not like nor does he trust Harry's accent. Not broad enough for kurri, not strong enough for American, not recognizable to his trained ear as an Asian accent he is familiar with. Who is this strange man with a strange accent?
(132)

When Chick fails to categorize the other, the end result is that "Harry stares at Chick and Chick stares at Harry. A continental impasse" (132). These authors acknowledge the existence of this continental impasse and proceed to narrow it through these moments of contact. Their slippery grappling with other bodies in transnational space complicates the categories and places that these characters have previously kept apart. In *The Kappa Child*, the sumo wrestling with a kappa on the tarmac of the Calgary International Airport enacts the meeting of the foreign and the domestic that the narrator has previously avoided: "our bodies rotated, spun like solar creatures, time spreading in slow motion. Blood roaring in my heart, my eyes. And above our heads, even as we fell to the pull of earth, the throaty scream of DC-10 engines" (123-4). In this and similar contact moments, the foreign penetrates the domestic and the characters are suddenly pregnant with transnational possibility. The mixing of the familiar and unfamiliar forces the characters to do work in a contact zone of unpredictability and contestation.

These mapped nodes are sites not only for contact, but also for the complex repercussions of border transgression. Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto capture the aftermath of new interpenetrations between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Mathur intermingles the familiar with the unfamiliar when Harry fails to hail a taxi in Sydney and realizes that "he was in a part of the world he was unfamiliar with, but this very familiar act was enough to make him feel, curious as that may seem, at home" (116).

As Harry moves within specific local spaces, he experiences reverberations that call into question his notion of home. The characters at first reject their transnational affiliations but slowly accept their connectivity to sites “outside” of themselves. Miyo discovers what she has been missing from her earlier disconnection from her Japanese familial history: “if only [her father] had not hoarded his secrets. He could have told her things to make it less alien and more her home too” (55). This regret at her previous ignorance propels her to immerse herself in the history of her father and the other pilots in his World War II air division. Similarly, as Goto’s narrator witnesses the kappa child growing in her womb, she remembers other incidents when the foreign intruded into her enclosed home environment. These texts detach the local from its essentialized moorings and then map out the no longer secret interrelationships between the domestic and the foreign. These nodal points disconcert the characters with their ambiguous moments of contact but ultimately, force them into facing their repressed transnational connections.

Situating the Local within its Context

The maps in the texts take on new depth as the characters situate local spaces within the multi-facets of context. These new local interactions argue for a conception of place that is similar to Nicholas Bromley’s reading of the city as a layered site of effacements and productions. He writes that “the creation of the city requires active place making that relies upon certain forgettings of the past, as well as some creative reconstructions. This is a positive and negative project of effacement and of production” (114). These three authors retrieve these forgettings by depicting characters who perform active place making that examines the historical, social, economic, and political contexts of specific local spaces. Harry acquaints himself with

the racial climate in Australia when “the drivers didn’t pull over for him because the night was dark and Harry was dark” (116) and when Chick mistakes him for a “kurri” (132). These moments of racialization compel Harry to bridge the “continental impasse” (132) and see these local spaces in their particular fragmentation. Armed with these moments of connectivity, Harry engages in a deconstruction of the surface that uncovers and locates the suppressed layers of the past. Like the painting, *Rottnest Island*, Harry critiques the “happy smiling faces of tourists on the surface of Rottnest” who mask the “bottom four-fifths” that “depicts the archaeological layers of the island, the bodies and bodies and bodies of aboriginal prisoners now buried there” (167). Those bodies represent the history that Australia shields from the consuming gaze of its tourists. The tourists in turn, are happy to visit a foreign destination without having to engage with anything more than what their guidebooks tell them they should see. Anna Varre questions, “Isn’t that what you’ve been doing, Harry? Dropping in for a cultural visit and then going away with all this new-found knowledge, exciting, isn’t it, won’t it be, to impart news of this exotic wilderness back home at the credit union?” (198). Harry refrains from voyeuristically dropping in for a cultural visit because he is aware that history is still present despite its seeming invisibility.

While Mathur recontextualizes a variety of local spaces in their forgotten histories, Goto and Sakamoto perform a similar unearthing of the past in one specific location. In Sakamoto’s case, Hana amasses a history of the kamikaze pilots that stands in opposition to a nation that wants to forget its wartime past. She explains to Miyo that “silly Japanese girls want to look pure and white” because “you see, we don’t want to look how we look, we don’t want to be who we are. We don’t want to say what we’ve done” (72). Hana exposes a post-war Japan that effaces the memories that hinder its progress into global modernity. Yoshikuni Igarashi in his book, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, writes of this

forgetting, arguing that “as a nation, Japan survived its devastating defeat in 1945 by reinventing itself as a peaceful nation that attained economic prosperity in the following decades. Yet the process of recovery and the construction of a new Japan were not easy: memories of loss haunted postwar society” (11). In other words, the bodies of Masao and his friend, Buddy, have no place in the newly minted Japan that wants no part of the ambivalent traces of their wartime participation. Miyo enters a local space that is denying these haunting traces because they disrupt the sterile calm of the present. However, she perceives past a reinvented Japanese self by unearthing the buried wartime history that the surface so desperately hides.

During her stay in Japan, Miyo finds herself reestablishing not only her familial links, but also the links between modern Japan and its violent past. While Ryu tells her, “Kamikazes didn’t exist any longer,” “not today, not real ones; only the silent blue-suited salarymen who worked themselves to death” (134), Miyo insists on seeing the bodies that the blue-suited workers block from her view. The pilots who struggle to “endure the unendurable” (42), as well as the “tearful orphans; shabby sumo wrestlers hauling rubble from their bombed-out stadium; ravaged faces among the throngs after the surrender” (245) are located in memories that the new Japan strains to cover over with superficial unity. Sakamoto performs a detailed investigation of Japan’s relationship to its wartime history as Miyo records her evolving relationship with the history of the kamikazes and their widows. Together, the interactions between the dead pilots, Hana, the widows, Miyo, Japan, and Canada form a complicated web that stands in contrast to the binaries to which Miyo initially adhered. Whereas at first Miyo positioned Japan as a monolithic Other to Canada, she comes to see that both places are made of many overlapping fragments of truth. Her admission that “she was no longer certain where home was” (98) signals Miyo entering into the ambiguities that make up history and a particular local space.

While Mathur looks at multiple local contexts and Sakamoto probes the layers that compose a reforged Japanese nation, Goto explores an intensely personal encounter with the local. Her character recognizes coexistence through her kappa pregnancy that gives her “this sensation of not being alone in my body. This presence. And not only that, it kicks and prods and pushes from the *inside!*” (104). Although at first the narrator ignores her alien pregnancy, she comes to understand that her kappa child is prodding her to pay heed to the movements inside a seemingly stable body. She realizes that “the physical membranes of childhood are permeable” (222) and begins dealing with the past as a shifting, negotiable creature: “My childhood spills into my adult life despite all my attempts at otherwise and the saturation of the past with the present is an ongoing story” (215). The character detaches herself from the rigid divisions she has imposed upon her life and recognizes the productivity of the borderspace. This intermingling of borders occurs because the character finally grapples with the relationships that occur across these divides. She allows her siblings and her mother to move out of her fixed assumptions; she deconstructs the myth-making of both her father and the settler nation; and most of all, she accepts that her position in relation to these bodies and to their histories is dynamic. Goto’s narrator finally contextualizes a personal local space that is as conflicted and as layered as the sites that the characters in the other texts visit.

Consequently, the characters end their alienation from the foreign as they come to terms with the transnational elements that have and continue to shape their subjectivity. Miyo initially wants to deny the claims Setsuko and Hana have to her father but deep down she admits her knowledge of this transnational part of her family:

Setsuko slipped another picture out of the box and said, “This is Hanako. My Hanako. And your father’s.”

Maybe she had always known, because she felt no shock; she didn't know what she felt. (47)

Miyo loses the impulse to distance herself from her Japanese connections as she accepts their place within her subjectivity. Similarly, Harry, who has grown up under the weight of shame over what his father describes as “a pitiful haunting hint of your dusty and supercilious homeland” (43), suddenly discovers the wavering line between his Indian homeland and his Canadian “home.” As the characters map out local and global interpenetrations, they become increasingly more willing to embrace the transnational that inhabits their bodies. In *The Kappa Child*, the narrator questions alterity through her pregnancy and her mother's alien encounters. Goto writes that “a growing presence started to creep into my unextraordinary life. An unknowable sensation filled the edges of my awareness” (61) that catalyzes her into seeing her connectivity mapped out for the first time. The transnational within domestic space disrupts the domestic borders that divide the characters from their transnational ties. The mapping and situating of the local in context readies them for the important work of reclaiming materiality within this borderspace.

Claiming Materiality

The body matters in these texts. After opening up the local to its hidden fragments, the three texts claim the materiality of what they have uncovered. They make history matter by rematerializing the bodies that the surface hides. As Nicholas Bromley writes of the “postcolonial city” that effaces its surface, “unjust dispossessions may have occurred, in other words, but displacement is not complete. The city remains unsettled” (131). The rematerialization of displaced bodies in each of these texts asserts that *terra nullius* has a history and more importantly, is populated with bodies

whose materiality proves that displacement is not complete. Harry focuses on the “the bodies and bodies and bodies of aboriginal prisoners” (167) in order to transform the ghosts that haunt below the surface into materially significant presences. Sakamoto also casts her gaze to the ghosts of the past as she gives body to the silenced and disembodied pilots of World War II. She transforms them from ghostly spectres into bodies that are intimately connected with the Japanese body politic. The pilot Buddy recalls that “when someone in the ranks sniffed him out for his accent or bow or salute and called him *gaijin*, the worst name to be called: *not one of us*; a foreigner not fit to ride the roomy streetcars of Dairen” he told himself that “he was not a monster. No one was a monster. They were all *ningen*, all human beings” (147). Each of the characters embrace the monstrous bodies that make the domestic pregnant with transnational possibility. While the surface appearance of their lives declares the transnational to be imaginary, the characters claim it as an integral part of their subjectivities. The transnational is within the domestic body.

The intense physicality that appears in each of these texts ends the alienation the characters feel towards their bodies. These moments when the material demands recognition reveals the body in all its physicality and excess and forces the characters to forge a new relationship to their bodies. Miyo, who has spent a lifetime defeated by her handicapped condition, suddenly finds agency in her bodily difference. The text questions, “Why all these years did Miyo slough and bend? It was habit, lazy habit: nothing more, nothing less. *Get up!*” (170-171). By walking tall, Miyo opts henceforth to self-define her relationship to her body. In *The Kappa Child*, the narrator recovers her physicality as her pregnancy brings on a heightened physical awareness through “the smell” that “brought back a body-memory so sudden and intense my stomach fisted with longing” (85). She gains heightened understanding of her bodily connections as the kappa child within her impels her to move beyond her isolated

position. Her penchant for Japanese cucumbers is a physical articulation of her desire for transnational connectivity. Mathur also foregrounds the importance of materiality from the kiss that catalyzes Harry's travels, to his physical manoeuvres to exit the cell in Australia's Fremantle Prison (158). Mathur spotlights the physicality of his main character in order to keep transnational travel materially engaged. These physical moments illustrate that these characters are committed to exploring the groundedness of the body in local space.

Physical markers prod the characters to remember the material, but they also do further work by causing them to notice the specific materiality of violence that the surface conceals. The characters realize that these material traces have always been there, albeit hidden from view. Mathur depicts Harry as he gains awareness of the entrapment of both past and present violence, "mulling over refugees being treated like convicts in multinational prison complexes" (134). Each of the characters embarks on the necessary process of seeing the maimed bodies that lie beneath constructed surfaces. Goto's narrator finally looks directly at the damage the prairie settler myth has done to those bodies it marginalizes. She writes, "the child has fallen to the ground, curled in on herself, and the wind tugs the hem of her dress to expose the withered lengths of her legs. Her buttocks are fleshless, the bones of a residual tail jutting from the base of her spine" (265). Goto depicts the withered body of the kappa in prairie costume in order to make visible the violent consequences of prairie settlement. By deconstructing her little house on the prairie illusions, the character rematerializes the kappa's fleshless body and the history erased with the clearing of prairie space. The texts spotlight the violence of the past as their characters claim materially reinvigorated local spaces.

Goto and Mathur turn their gaze on hidden violence that Sakamoto also performs in her extended unearthing of the suppressed materiality of modern Japan.

Her text retrieves the physicality that Japan dematerializes with the gleam of modernity. Miyo sees first-hand the legacy of what Yoshikuni Igarashi explains as “the bright, sanitized space of 1960s” in which “Japan’s memories of the war lost their reference points” (165). Sakamoto inserts bodies reeling from wartime violence to startle her character and the Japanese nation out of its complacency. Sakamoto writes that “in Japan there were so many cases of children with stunted digits, twisted feet that couldn’t grow. Or things could look fine on the outside but be all wrong inside” (211). The “wrong” that is in the inside erupts into the narrative to attest to the maimed bodies that Japan has ignored in its rush to economic progress. Sakamoto makes the past viscerally present with not only the letters from the kamikaze pilots themselves, but also the thoughts of the widows who were left behind. The unavoidable materiality of these memories nauseates Miyo as she stands in Yasukuni Shrine “overwhelmed by the place: the smell of it, its bodily dankness, the hollow din of her own marching footsteps down its halls” (245). Her very physical response to the past is a challenge to the sanitized world of office buildings and corporate professionals who circulate in present Japanese society. Like Goto and Mathur, Sakamoto shatters the domestic façade with its forgotten material past.

The return of those who haunt the present underlines the importance of giving place to those bodies that lie contained within the local’s artificial borders. The physicality of these memories grounds the narratives in the local, emphasizing that mobility is a construction that creates an appearance that everything is moving. After his own confinement in prison, Harry concerns himself with the state of “*migrants who find themselves with nothing to look upon except four stone walls; water can take back the land and the land can liquefy itself*” (192). He is conscious of the bodies that are unable to participate in the flows of goods, people, and commodities that circulate around the globe. Because globalization appears to herald a new era of universal

prosperity, it is easy to forget what Pheng Cheah writes of as “*the unevenness of political and economic globalization*” (300) and, instead, focus exclusively on the mobility of the privileged. However, these texts are concerned with returning agency to those who are materially confined to local space. After Goto’s character recognizes the kappa within herself, she realizes that she has contained her family within constructed borders. Her mother, however, challenges this containment as she asserts that she is a “survivor of alien abductions” (239). Okasan breaks out of domestic space as she performs “a support survey, an outreach program to see how many other recent immigrants from non-European backgrounds have been abducted” (239) and claims the mobility she lacked when she was stuck in her prairie existence. Sakamoto effects another reenergizing of local space as Miyo immerses herself in Japan’s wartime past and confronts those who cannot partake in the new shiny Japan because of the repressed history that holds them prisoner. In short, Miyo realizes that forgotten history can still trap. She and the other characters restore bodily ownership to those whose movements are limited by their marginalization vis-à-vis the nation-state and global capital.

Reconfiguring Context

The characters are poised to seize opportunities for change. The texts reject exposure for its own sake by politicizing their transnational travels towards effecting alternate ways of being. In the beginning of his text, Mathur poses the question of what “would happen if Harry were to take up even one-tenth of the odd assortment of offers that came his way?” (18). The text answers this question by teaching Harry to see and then act on these offers. Miyo also actively engages with local context as she rereads Japanese wartime history through her compilation of the conflicting accounts of

Hajime, Kiku, and Masao. Similarly, in Goto's narrative, the character Jules who changes the local through his "personal city-beautification project" instructs the narrator on how to act, advising that "if you want to believe badly enough, you make your need real. A physical articulation. And live your life accordingly. The results of your choice will affect everyone you come into contact with" (186). His advice is so groundbreaking because it demands that the narrator not only read her local space more dynamically, but also that she assume "responsibility" (187) for her actions within it. Jules comments that "many people don't even think. They enact their lives without understanding the consequences of their choices" (187). In other words, physical articulation requires a consciousness of context, actions, and their repercussions. This consciousness ensures that these characters travel with a purpose: to interact with the textuality of their particular local spaces towards positive change.

"When will you stop sorting through life and just bloody well act?!" (Goto 235). In *The Kappa Child*, Midori calls on the narrator to act on the opportunities that lie before her. The character responds by creating her own contact moment for change: "I reach, clasp Midori's neck, and pull her toward me. My ugly lips on her surprised mouth. Our eyes open" (235). The meeting of lips represents the narrator finally coming to praxis as she opens her eyes to what Caren Kaplan calls the "borderlands" that "generate the complicated knowledges of nuanced identities, the micro-subjectivities that cannot be essentialized or overgeneralized" ("The Politics of Location" 150). Sakamoto weaves her own borderspace as she intertwines multiple wartime accounts within her narrative. These competing threads from the past aid Miyo and her sister Hana in realizing their next line of flight. Miyo writes that "at Yasukuni Shrine, Hana and I lingered inside the wooden gates. There were blossoms at our ankles, already brown and trampled – so many that it felt as though we were wading through them. When she looked at me, I knew that my heart is breakable but

also strong” (273). This moment of recognition occurs between two sisters who have moved from lingering within history to seizing the strength of mapped context. Mathur similarly seizes the power of the borderspace as he performs an extended reworking of the Indian Ramayana myths. Anna Varre affirms the power of context when she agrees, “*Yes. That’s the trick. To go over old ground in new ways*” (78). She teaches the other characters to see their potential to alter their relationships to place, history, and ultimately, themselves. Sita says to Harry, “I don’t mean, of course, a crazy individualist thing about being myself; you know I’d never run that game on you. But I mean seeing those archaic rules for what they are and doing something about them, running them backwards perhaps” (220). This complicated knowledge of borderlands positions the characters in such a way that they are poised to make a difference.

These three texts make this difference by acknowledging and then reworking borderland connections. The characters realize that they must engage with a power network that is an inextricable part of the local. N. Katherine Hayles argues that the body requires strategies for change that are as multiple and fragmented as itself. She asserts that “the partial re-configurability of needs means that our navels are multiple as well” (17). Her comments are relevant to characters who recognize their many links before they shift them to more enabling configurations. Miyo gains ownership over her personal history once she moves beyond denying Masao’s wartime past. The character discovers that she can be involved with her past without it constraining her. Similarly, in Mathur’s text, Sita discovers that the choice between imprisonment or freedom is hers to make: “I see no bars, no shackles, no guards or locks, all this is true. And there is no hate in my heart for you” (78). Sita reempowers herself by acknowledging that she has played a role in her own imprisonment. Goto’s narrator loses her fear of her pregnancy once she ceases to view it as an alien invasion of her body. When Midori asks her, ““You still pregnant?””, the narrator reveals her comfort with her own

ambiguity, “Maybe, but it’s okay” (271). As she kisses Genevieve on the cheek – “You’ve never kissed me before” (271) – she demonstrates that connection can be enabling and sometimes even pleasurable. The moment that these characters see that they are all “just players in the game” (Mathur 220), they can then use their positions within the game to break out of their old habits and create it anew. For each of the characters in these three texts, the acknowledgement of complicity transforms from a sign of defeat to a call to action.

Moreover, the texts increase the probability of effective change by making it dependent on the interactions within the borderspace. In Mathur’s text, Anna Varre highlights the interactive component of change when she lectures Sita that “history can change. It’s just that you can’t do it. Or can’t do it alone” (72), continuing that “you can’t make all these reclamations by yourself. No matter who you are. There are – other players. You see?” (72). Anne Varre stresses the need to take into account other players in order to locate resistance within a shifting web-like configuration. Carol Mason argues for a similar reading of history as a mixed, relational entity:

I’m suggesting that with a sense of history as something as contingent and constructed as a cyborg, we can situate political problems in relations between or among bodies instead of positing politics in the body “itself.” These relations can’t be contained in individual or singular bodies – regardless of their modern, medico-psychological depth or their postmodern, spectacular, schizophrenic depthlessness – because the discourses that (re)produce those bodies are historical. (235)

Mason critiques the isolated body and argues instead for a body of history that situates itself within the host of relationships that create context. In short, Mason argues for a cyborg reading of history. The history in Sakamoto’s narrative is cyborgian in its

bringing together of various fragments of information into the textual space of the narrative. It includes the voice of Hajime who writes of his decision to pilot the bomber instead of Masao: "This way he will have a chance to stay in this world a while longer. In case the war ends before it is his turn, I am entrusting these letters to him to give to you after I'm gone. I want you to read them intact" (265). Sakamoto reconfigures the body of Japanese and Canadian history through multiple voices that each contribute a layer to Miyo's understanding of her past. Similarly, Goto's narrator draws together her family and friends into a shifting galaxy of experiences as she struggles to redefine her personal history. The kappa child attests to its own generative connectivity from its position within a denaturalized womb-space: "*I swim, here, in this liquid home and listen to the poetry of galaxies twined into double-helix strands*" (105). Like the double-helix strands of genetic code, the code of history contains a multiplicity of components that depend on each other to generate meaning. An alteration in one of these codes, although seemingly insignificant, is enough to create a chain reaction of change.

The overall result for the local is an alternative reading of its relationship to the global. The local which once stood in binary opposition to a totalizing outside metamorphoses into a site of contestation, dynamism, and coexistence. The texts argue for the renewed importance of the local by reenergizing it. Their characters travel to foreign climes while remaining firmly attached to the material and discursive conditions of the local. They opt against transcending local space by returning to the ground-level homes that they left behind. Miyo returns to Canada, Harry goes back to his job at the credit union, and Goto's narrator revisits the family home. However, the local spaces they used to call home and their ability to read these spaces have changed. Harry resumes his old job but this time ready to reconfigure the workplace conditions that once constrained him. Mr. Peabody comments, "Well then, carry on, Mr Kumar.

And let's have no more thought about voice-recognition nonsense, shall we?" (214), little knowing that Harry has ceased to be the passive credit union employee. On the flight back to Canada, Miyo also announces her residence in a transnational borderspace when she writes her name in both English and Japanese. She expresses her changed perception of her Japanese connections when she admits that "for the first time, she imagined the beautiful night she'd been named for" (275). Meanwhile, the ending of *The Kappa Child* sees its narrator finally realizing the transnational potential that the kappa has been insisting on all along: "*when I choose to become a kappa child, I diverge from human choice. No longer a potential egg, I coalesce with an aching shudder. Cool, wet slideglide of membrane and water*" (40). The coalescing between the kappa and the human produces a local space that claims materiality and agency in the confusion between previous binary relationships. Like the contact between membrane and water, the collision between domestic and the transnational brings together material presence in order to actualize change. This reinvigorated local moves from reflecting outside impositions to producing its own representations.

The Creation of New Textual Bodies

"I want to reach back into history and reclaim it for myself in a different way. I want to do all this with you all over again but with a different end" (Mathur 71). These words of Mathur's Anna Varre encapsulates three texts that strive for the transformative potential of altered local space. These texts commit to positive creativity by forging new ways of reading and interacting in the world. As Donna Haraway argues, "I would, however, like to displace the terminology of reproduction with that of generation. Very rarely does anything really get *reproduced*; what's going on is much more polymorphous than that" ("The Promise of Monsters" 299). These writers

privilege generation over the reproduction of dominant paradigms as they reclaim body and agency from the polymorphous world of the nation-state and global capitalism. Goto's character realizes the many productive channels that lie outside the previously constructed bounds of her life when she comes to terms with her kappa pregnancy:

Sex, of course, is not the only way to find yourself pregnant. I'm confused and relieved that Mice sees what my doctor can't recognize. Even though I have moments of maternal doubt, nothing to show for this pregnancy but an internal feeling and cravings for cucumbers. Feelings aren't the most reliable of things. And a lot of people like cucumbers. (80)

The character voices her comfort not only with unreliability, but also with methods of creation that vary from those of medical discourse and heteronormativity. Miyo also claims the ability to produce change when she rereads her father and his wartime history. She writes to David, "I know now that he was a pilot in the Special Attack Forces of the Japanese Imperial Army. He survived, but another man died in his place" (274). With these words, she acknowledges her father as a pilot who avoided his fate as a kamikaze pilot by switching places with another man just before his scheduled flight. Miyo gains a more nuanced picture of her father that she lacked when she was tied to a constructed image of him. Similarly, Sita makes a plea for a breakage into the new when she tells Harry that "I was thinking of freedom, Harry. Of not having to explain myself by your rules, or abiding by rules that some great lord or master has created for me" (220). Sita stresses a politics that works towards creating something new and materially present that combats the despatializing rules around them.

The local emerges as a text that is generated from the productive interstices of local and global connections. Ultimately, these works produce *themselves* as they engage in their textual performances through a shifting and porous transnational borderspace. The resulting cyborg textual body is a moving and negotiated exploration

of the power of stories to effect change. As Mathur's Anna Varre explains, "the story has to change its setting if the outcome is to change" (78). Anna Varre argues for a narrative that represents a way of viewing and acting on the fictive quality of the past and the present. In the final section, "Anna concludes," Anna Varre explains that "something must give. Something must come down, and if it's not London bridge then it's another structure and if it's not a structure then it's a palace or kingdom or prison in someone's mind" (222). Harry returns from his travels still lost in ambiguity but, nevertheless, equipped with new strategies for disrupting the structures that have previously contained him. Goto's character also connects her body to the productivity of the transnational borderspace as she discovers that "the wind feels good, the stars glitter. And somewhere, planets align. Then, a raindrop falls. Full and round, as big as a muscat grape. I look up but there's not a cloud. Where has it come from? A perfect orb drops on my lips, seeps to my tongue. Sweet" (274). After years of rejecting the transnational, she commits to a new body that produces through its disparate and fragmentary connections. Meanwhile, Miyo ends the novel with a letter to her boyfriend David in which she speaks of her shifting conception of her identity, her past, and her relationship to place:

Setsuko and I sat in silence on the plane for the first hour of the flight. All that time, she stared out the window at the see-through clouds and I knew she was thinking of my father, and that she's forever imagined and wished him suspended up here, his spirit serene and proud. But instead we are bringing him back to be buried alongside my mother. We have both convinced ourselves that it would be his wish to be planted in the earth and not sent to drift into the wide open skies. (274)

Miyo plants her father in the earth as a tribute to the material connections that ground him even as he travels in the wide open skies. These authors move beyond a

celebratory depiction of mobility by planting themselves firmly in the earth of textuality itself. Their texts travel to far off places to destabilize the fixity of local spaces but in the end, effect purpose through their textual creations.

The depth and movement of these texts evidences the productivity and ambivalent potential of transnational travel. Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto demand that reading and writing be a performance that grounds itself in the movement, interstices, and creativity of textuality. In the final scene of Goto's text, the past and present, friends and family, converge to give birth to the "*kappa child*" (276) that has been gestating throughout the many twists and turns of the narrative. Goto writes that "new green shoots of life twine at our feet, rising leafy in the warm night air. And in the collage of green, the movements of our bodies, I can see kappa rising from the soil. Like creatures waking from enforced hibernation, they stretch their long, green limbs with gleeful abandon" (275). The fertility of these texts derives from narratives that evolve in the spaces in-between borders, peoples, and places. Instead of signalling closure, the endings open up the textual bodies to further productive possibilities. The rebirth of these characters and the texts themselves forges a future that carries inflections of both past and present. Donna Haraway declares that she is searching for "a kind of modest witness that insists on its situatedness, where location is itself always a complex construction as well as inheritance" (*Modest_Witness* 270). Goto, Mathur, and Sakamoto and the texts they write are these modest witnesses. While their characters were initially trapped within the artificial constraints of domestic space, by the end of the texts, they exert control over the direction and form that their stories will take. They gain this new control as they open themselves to the power of narrative that simultaneously contains and frees. As Sita comes to understand, "Maybe we made up Anna Varre, you know, Harry, made up Anna because we needed Anna. Maybe you are Anna Varre, I am Anna Varre, Han and Athnic and everyone we know is Anna Varre

and you and I, you and I, we're just players in the game" (220). The knowledge that Anna Varre is a web of connections produced through interaction means that Harry and Sita have the potential to run the old stories "backwards" (220) to produce a new self-owned myth. These authors pour their creative energies into producing texts that expose the interconnections that compose local space and then make them matter.

Consequently, it is in the creation of narratives that blend the discursive and the material, the imaginary and the real that these texts find body. The bodies of the nation, the individual subject, and the narratives themselves transform into texts that coexist, connect, and most importantly, bleed. Mathur plays with the borders between history and myth to generate a vibrant textual body while Goto makes explicit her own melding of myth and materiality when she writes a final manifesto for the future: "our myths will come alive, wander over the remnants of our uncivilization. Kappa, water dragons, yama-uba, oni. Selkie, golem, lorelei, xuan wu. The creatures we carry will be born from our demise and the world will dream a new existence" (233). These creatures that are a hybrid of the mythic and the material dream of a new existence because they are born from context. This rewriting of the mythic and the real is the product of a textual politics that looks towards alternative ways of being by mapping and then actively intervening into the local's many transnational interconnections. Each of these three texts moves itself beyond a constructed domestic and into a local space that offers the uncertainty and unpredictability of change. Goto's final words, "*I am a creature of the water. / I am a kappa child. / Come, embrace me*" (276), stress that change is possible by leveraging the fluidity and productivity of transnational connections.

Goto, Mathur, Sakamoto are examples of Asian Canadian writers who break out of naturalized national borders in order to claim location within the interstices of local

and global space. In *Salt Fish Girl* and *Hopeful Monsters*, Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto continue to explore the place of the Asian Canadian subject within destabilized identity conditions as they transport their narratives to a future present in which science, technology, and global capital have become pervasive realities. While the three previous texts mark a shift beyond constructed borders, Goto and Lai go one step further in the seizing of the contraining and enabling possibilities of destabilized identity contexts. Goto and Lai challenge Asian Canadian as a definable category within the nation as they take their narratives to sites well beyond naturalized “Canadian” borders. Goto and Lai reveal a society in which individuals are subject to new power forces beyond the nation-state that fragment and disperse the body on a global scale. The body is a cyborg, part techno-commodity and part human, whose implication in capitalist workings makes it difficult for it to locate a position from which to critique and act. Lai and Goto first question whether agency is possible for a body so entrapped in a system of commodification and consumption but ultimately determine that the body can break out of its passivity by claiming the local for itself. By reowning the body in all its ambivalence and impurity, Goto and Lai advocate creative work whose offspring will be faithful to a self-owned, embodied womb.

CHAPTER SIX

Mutant Bodies:

Immaculate Conception and Cyborgs in

Hiromi Goto's *Hopeful Monsters* and

Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*

Masking Fragmentation

Donna Haraway contends that “we *are all* in chiasmatic borderlands, liminal areas where new shapes, new kinds of action and responsibility, are gestating in the world” (“The Promise of Monsters” 314). In the twenty-first century, new kinds of action are gestating in a world of global capitalism and the now exposed porosity of political, social, and physical borders. Hiromi Goto's *Hopeful Monsters* and Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* are two texts that incorporate this new porosity into the content and form of their textual bodies in order to map the body out of its current disarray. Goto and Lai challenge the alienating effects of late capitalism through textuality that claims new generative powers within the shifts and chaos of twenty-first century power flows.

From the outset, both authors deploy textuality as a medium for making visible the fractures that lie beneath a coherent façade. They disrupt the unity of their textual packages with narratives that openly play with the fragmented and fluctuating quality of meaning construction. For example, *Hopeful Monsters* challenges textual stability with eleven short stories that present characters grappling with the shifts of destabilized local spaces. The stories are disconnected yet share a desire to confront the

ambiguities and possibilities of twenty-first century subjectivities. The overall work functions as a web-like configuration that maps out the subjectivities of the “hopeful monsters” that populate the text. Similarly, Lai understands that it is through exposing the borderspace where things come together and collide that agency and hope will emerge. Therefore, her text also exhibits a fracturing of form as her bifurcated narrative shifts between the story of Nu Wa in pre-Shang dynasty China and the struggles of Miranda in the dystopic *Serendipity of 2044*. Nu Wa and Miranda are like the characters in Goto’s short stories who lead alienated lives, yet yearn to reinstate the connections that currently lie hidden. Both writers commence with textual creations that exhibit the fissuring of a late capitalist context and then proceed to make meaning out of disparate and often competing textual elements.

As a result, the form of the texts reflects a willingness to catapult out of a static domestic space into a fluid and permeable borderspace. Goto and Lai turn to a specific local space that they argue has become a crucial intersectional point for the many technologies, capital flows, and social and political dynamics of the twenty-first century: the individual body. The body is the “home” that Lai and Goto have lost but must return to in their search for agency. Lai begins her text with “the softest skin, warm and quivering. And below? Forget modesty. Here comes the tail, a thick cord of muscle undulating, silvery slippery in the early morning light” (2). She launches her narrative with Nu Wa and her fluid physicality in order to underline the intertwined creativity of both the physical and textual body. Nu Wa appears at the beginning of the text but also throughout the narrative as a lingering reminder of the productive potential of her ambiguous and shape shifting body. Similarly, Goto creates stories that speak to one another in an evolving conversation that demands connections between the stories themselves and the contexts in which they circulate. This stress on interconnectivity launches two textual explorations of the repercussions for a body

embedded within what Donna Haraway describes as the “cybernetic systems” (*Simians* 45) of science and capital. The texts offer up the creativity of the fluid and intersectionally grounded body in the face of global despatialization. Goto and Lai negotiate the new and complex relationships of the twenty-first century body in order to posit the body as an intersectional local space.

However, before Goto and Lai can reclaim an intersectional body, they must first recognize the body in its current state of disarray. Both authors realize that power moves differently under late capitalism and that their primary challenge will involve understanding the relationship that the body has to these new power configurations. They begin by recognizing the profound shift in power distribution away from the nation-state. In Lai’s text, the fictional community Serendipity is a new type of society powered by the agendas of transnational corporations like “Saturna” and Nextcorp” that are extensions of the “Toys ‘R’ Us” (*Hopeful Monsters* 45) of the mall culture Goto depicts in her piece “Stinky Girl.” Nearly fifteen years have passed since Fredric Jameson commented on “our spatial as well as our social confusion” (*Postmodernism* 54) but, Goto and Lai demonstrate that the body is still prey to the disorienting global movements that Jameson critiques in his seminal work. In the twenty-first century, the body is becoming increasingly despatialized as capital, goods, and people move at hyper-speed around the globe. The “time-space compression” and “flexible accumulation” (147) that David Harvey cited as the primary drivers of a post-Fordist world have become pervasive realities in a global economy in which neither time nor borders impede capitalist influence. In writing of places that are part myth, part reality, Goto and Lai capture a time in which the abstract power of the market and the lived realities of individual lives have become so intermeshed that the market has literally become reality. The characters in these texts inhabit worlds in which “the absolute power of the Big Six” (Lai 14) is an established fact and in which “gross

material consumerism” (Goto 36) drives virtually every human action from the most significant to the most banal. Lai and Goto confront the multiple facets of power that make it difficult for individual subjects to locate themselves within these power structures.

These writers recognize a body inhabiting a domestic space whose interdependency with the movements of capital, goods, and people is becoming ever more apparent. Lai highlights the decentring of the nation-state as an ordering construct through her character Miranda who lives “on the west coast of North America” (11) where corporate and scientific powers are her dominating realities. Miranda underlines the declining influence of the nation-state when she writes of the fate of national currencies: “A few U.S. and Canadian dollars still circulated, although the national banks were so enfeebled and so at the mercy of corporate whim that few people trusted those currencies” (81-2). What Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake speak of as the “fast imploding heteroglossic interface of the global with the local: what we would here diversely theorize as the *global/local* nexus” (3) has profoundly altered the power of the nation-state vis-à-vis these global forces. The nation-state has shifted from a naturalized space to a node in a larger global network. Consequently, in Goto’s text, there is a movement away from the nation as a dominant ordering construct as characters travel from one part of the globe to another, “from Tokyo to Korea to Vancouver to Calgary” (22), without mention of national border impediments. “Stinky Girl” is set in a mall because global capitalism has supplanted the nation-state in the everyday lives of most consumers. The characters in both texts inhabit local spaces that are connected to global capital that does not face the limitations of physical or discursive geography.

Goto and Lai argue that the domestic takes on a reconfigured, ambivalent role within the borderless world. They differ from critics like Masao Miyoshi who, in the

essay entitled “Borderless World: From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” predicted with anticipation the demise of the nation with “the abandonment of the expectations and responsibilities of the politicoeconomic national projects” (92). Goto and Lai recognize that the altered position of the nation-state has created new apparatuses for control. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Serendipity is relatively free from national constraints but is subject to corporations that manipulate and contain its local space in order to ensure the efficient movement of their flows. Miranda admits, “I was frightened. I had never left Serendipity before and had no idea what to expect” (37), because the infiltration of the global into Serendipity has reduced her life into an intense local experience. Goto and Lai assert that place has become a site of intermingling global forces that is defined through its relations to what permeates its space. In *Hopeful Monsters*, the story “Stinky Girl” replicates these “different configurations of ‘glocality’” (Dirlik “Globalism” 45) when Goto writes about “a mall” that stands as “the microcosm, the centrifugal force in a cold country” (45). The mall is a specific local space that is dependent on the interactions between corporations like “Toys ‘R’ Us” (45) and the consumers who converge on its property. The local has become the space in which global capital moves from being an abstract, totalizing concept to a lived “reality” that has material consequences for the individual body.

Goto and Lai not only acknowledge that power is fragmented, but they also construct narrative contexts in which the body is subject to the new capitalist logic of fragmentation and dispersal. In Goto’s “Stinky Girl,” the character locates her “home” in a mall environment in which her body and the bodies of those around her are pieces in a larger global consumer machine. Stinky Girl inhabits a global capital network that breaks apart bodies and blurs boundaries that were previously considered stable. Lai also critiques this fragmentation of the body in her detailing of a business suit that is

“made of some shiny synthetic material” with “pieces for every part of the body” (25). Miranda’s father wears this suit along with “a terrifying anonymous black mask” (25) in order to carry out capitalist functions in a disassembled bodily state. This business suit is indicative of a new way of reading the body as a assemblage of broken and incongruous pieces. As Donna Haraway writes, the logic of capitalism holds that “any objects or persons can reasonably be thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no ‘natural’ architectures constrain system design” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 301). Lai depicts this new consciousness that views the body as a system that can be taken apart into separate components: “a torso piece, two leg pieces, detachable sleeves, boots, gloves, a hood” (25). Miranda and her father find themselves subject to the power of new forces that practice violent and disjunctive dispersal of the body. This power is not constrained by old borders but takes advantage of an unstable body that is vulnerable to appropriation by the “business suit.”

It is difficult for the body to confront the material consequences of this fragmentation because of the masking strategy that late capitalism practises. The texts show that capitalism, in wanting to cover over the fragmentation of its operations, gathers together pieces of various bodies to form a semblance of coherence. In *Salt Fish Girl*, while Saturna and Nexcorp operate through disjuncture, they present a sparkling appearance in which “all the storefront windows gleamed with cleanliness, behind which beautiful things were displayed” (30) and the food “was always vibrant bright and regular in shape and colour” (31). Miranda and her parents are part of a capitalism that removes evidence of its workings by hiding behind light that blinds people from seeing its jarring dissonance. Haraway similarly argues that “our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 294), to underline the danger of this strained perfection. While the corporations function through the fragmentation of the local body, they mask this violence by

projecting artificial unity. Nextcorp can operate unquestioned and unimpeded as long as its façade distracts individuals from engaging with the chaos beneath its surface. Goto's Stinky Girl also becomes aware of the cracks beneath this sunshine that the rest of the mall customers miss. They instead "gulp from tubs of simulated Coke while waiting for their microwave-heated pizzas" (51) and their "late-night Denny's 24-hour breakfast" (70). She lives in a culture in which individuals perceive a surface of sanitized efficiency that covers over the cracks that threaten to invalidate this reading.

The texts argue that this masking is most dangerous when corporations like Nextcorp move to suppress those individual bodies that threaten to reveal its fragmentation. In *Salt Fish Girl*, certain residents of Serendipity, like Miranda, suffer from a condition in which they are plagued not only by the stench of capitalism's ghosts, but also by the memories of its violence. However, Miranda points out that "none of the corporations want to acknowledge it. But some call it the dreaming disease, or the drowning disease" (100). The corporations do not want to acknowledge the disease because to do so would be to acknowledge the authenticity of the memories and the bodies that are being retrieved. The response becomes one of both denial and recrimination. Bodies that serve as reminders of the destruction of capitalist activities are discredited through the "truth" claims of a technoscientific discourse that permit the corporations to operate in an unquestioned state. Goto also highlights the suspect power of science to discredit disruption when she captures female bodies silenced into accepting normative medical treatment in the stories "Tales From the Breast" and "Hopeful Monsters." The former piece describes a female character struggling to reclaim her nursing body while the latter one involves another character, Hisa, fighting for the agency of her offspring who has been born with an "abnormal" tail. Haraway argues that the treatment of these bodies can be viewed "as a kind of quality control industry" (*Simians* 65) that regulates disruptive bodies until they safely pose no threat

to capitalist execution. The characters in both texts feel “shame” (Lai 72) because their bodily experiences are “abnormal” according to those who come into contact with it. They fail to realize that this shaming is part of a campaign to diffuse conditions that threaten to destabilize the hold capital and science have over economic and social legitimacy.

Cyborgian and Alienated Bodies

Goto and Lai respond to the disassembled state of the body by confronting the multiple networks of power that currently face the individual subject. As Lai suggests, “as subjects marked ‘Asian Canadian,’ what is our status with regards to factory workers or stockbrokers? What is our status in relation to new technologies, migrant labour, the representations of ‘race’ emanating from Asia, or those emanating from Hollywood?” (“Future Asians” 169). Lai poses questions that are currently being left unanswered. The texts disrupt the culture of indifference by representing the body as a local space that is now explicitly open to a multiplicity of “outside” discourses and bodies. They deconstruct façades by exposing the individual body as a cyborg that has ceded control of its bodily integrity to its twenty-first century context. In Lai’s case, she juxtaposes Nu Wa and her agency-producing creative acts with those of biotechnology that fragments the body for its own suspect purposes. This juxtaposition highlights the profound loss of agency that has occurred during the transition from Nu Wa’s mythic world to Miranda’s dystopic “reality.” Lai examines what happens when biotechnology falls into corporate hands through the character of Evie, one of many genetically engineered Sonias, who pronounces that she is “not human,” adding that “my genes are point zero three per cent *Cyprinus carpio* – freshwater carp. I’m a patented new fucking life form” (158). Nextcorp reproduces the Sonias who represent a profound

shift in the understanding of the body from one that is a molar to one that is composed of a multiplicity of interdependent particles. Biotechnology permits Nextcorp to push the limits of what is possible for the body and more importantly, to claim the body as its domain.

Whereas Lai exposes the newfound fragmentation of the body through bio-engineered clones, Goto, on the other hand, literally fragments the body of her text and the identities of those within it to expose the body as a fluid, permeable entity. The characters in each of the stories are like the koi, “these mutated excuses of pets” (90), in the piece “Home Stay” who survive despite their fragmented and disoriented state: “the tattered fish, the undead fish, swam in sluggish circles in the iron-stained stink of the toilet bowl. Gills gaping, broken fins ragged with remnants of disease. Their popped-o mouths, open, shutting, thawing from an icy sleep into an awakening hunger” (90). The fish swimming in the toilet bowl are like the human monsters in the text who must also confront the reality of their mixed bodies within the “toilet bowl” context of the twenty-first century. These “monsters” are indicative of what N. Katherine Hayles speaks of as a body that is “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (3). Gender, sexuality, nationality, age, economic status, and cultural identity converge to create hybrid bodies. The stories and subjectivities that compose Goto’s text are examples of bodies that are made up of many dissonant pieces that create a semblance of unity.

Control over the body allows new power forces to cover over their violent disassembly and reassembly of the body. More specifically, Goto and Lai argue that the fragmented body has lost control over its creative resources. Instead, it has ceded creative control to multiple forces that take advantage of the broken state of the body. The character in “Tales From the Breast” encounters the dominating force of medical

doctrine that informs her that “*the hormone prolactin, which causes the secretion of milk, helps you to feel ‘motherly’*” (61). The use of “you” throughout the story emphasizes the profound disconnect that currently exists between the character and her body that prevents her from claiming her body as her own. Instead, science becomes the dominating factor in her understanding of both her maternal body and the body of the child she has just birthed. The character resists science as it attempts to stabilize the creative process by using its discursive machinery to regulate the terms of creation. In *Salt Fish Girl*, the corporations deem the conception of offspring with the seeds of a forbidden durian tree to be transgressive. Science and capital deny the capacity of the body to produce independently by establishing clear rules on when, how, and with whom the body should reproduce. Capital and science illegitimate the reproductive activities of these characters in order to leverage domestic permeability according to its terms and not the terms of those who exceed its invasive control. The danger is when science and capital can shift these pieces to form a reconfigured whole that alienates these characters from their material origins.

The characters in the two texts experience further alienation because their bodies now serve as the raw material for the reproductive operations of science and capital. The biologist R.C. Lewontin highlights this danger when he argues that “this atomized society is matched by a new view of nature, the reductionist view. Now it is believed that the whole is to be understood *only* by taking it into pieces” (12). In “Tales From the Breast,” the character fights against medical pronouncements such as “*your success in breastfeeding depends greatly on your desire to nurse as well as the encouragement you receive from those around you*” (55) that dictate her relationship to her nursing body. She resists the fact that her body has become subject to minute regulation that uses science to order her bodily functions. Meanwhile, Lai begins the process of bringing together the world of Nu Wa in pre-Shang China with Serendipity

in 2044 through her depiction of bodies that metamorphose from creative agents to resources for capitalist reproduction. The narrative charts the movement from the Garden Nu Wa inhabits to an early capitalist society where factories recruit “young women dressed in identical tan-coloured uniforms with military-style pockets” (119) “to attach tin torsos, wings, arms, beaks, legs, guns and bicycles to their springs and wind-ups with precise mechanical accuracy” (120). The rise of these factories in Nu Wa’s mythic anterior time captures the transformation of the body from a singular creative body into an interchangeable cog in the wheel of capitalist machinery. After she captures this world of the assembly line, Lai next transports her narrative to a late capitalist era in which the body is both the raw material and the tool of production.

The narratives expose a present in which the body is an integral component of the production, commodification, and consumption cycle. This body has strayed far from Nu Wa’s self-creating and self-owning Garden in its new role as both the tool and the raw material for production. For example, in “Hopeful Monsters,” Hisa feels alienated from her child and her own body when she feels that because of her failure to “get an amniocentesis” (145), her child is “abnormal.” The doctor informs her “crisply” that “there is nothing at this time which might suggest your baby is mentally or physically impaired. There is only a very minor superficial abnormality that can be rectified with a small surgical procedure” (146). The doctor names her child as “abnormal” and shames her for avoiding his monitoring techniques. He expresses his desire to detect, name, and intervene in order to wrest control from this character as she tries to claim her body as her own. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Miranda becomes aware of this wresting of control when she encounters school workers whose organs “had been shifted” “mimicking the asymmetrical aesthetics of nature, but with human intention” (77). The juxtaposition of the “silicone composite” (76-7) with the “blood and gristle” (77) illustrates the body as raw material that is open to the corporations breaking apart

and recombining it with other previously “foreign” materials. The reductionist view has taken over scientific and capitalist discourse because it justifies the fragmentation of bodies like these school workers.

This reductionist view results in characters who struggle with the loss of ownership over their bodies. In Lai’s text, Ian responds to the school workers with a comment that reveals the normativity of this bodily alienation: “they’re not women. They’re Janitors” (76). The corporations keep these women fragmented to prevent them from regaining bodily integrity. As Jana Sawicki writes, the “aim” of new technologies “is less to eliminate the need for women than to make their bodies even more useful” (193). The female janitors are very much present but their subjectivities are defined exclusively through the labouring work that they perform. Technoscience reduces these women to entities that reproduce capitalist logic in the invisible depths of the school basement. The corporations intervene in the local to such a minute degree that the bodies within the text experience deep alienation, most especially those who must perform the invisible labour that keeps the capitalist façade intact. In Goto’s text, the character in “Tales From the Breast” must also forgo self-definition in order to assume her labouring role. She resists the appropriation of her body within medical discourse, arguing that the pressures to conform have made her feel like a disconnected labouring body: “you consider hanging a sign on your back: The Milk Stand” (62). Like the janitors and the Sonias in *Salt Fish Girl*, this character suffers the alienation of having her body reconfigured according to the desires of others. These characters labour according to standards and rules outside of themselves that work to take away their bodily ownership. The loss of ownership transforms these characters into alienated labourers who are trapped into perpetuating artificial stability.

The danger of this bodily alienation is the covering over of difference with a smoothly working appearance. Stinky Girl circulates in a mall environment where

commodities stand disconnected from their production contexts and where consumers avoid those bodies that disrupt the sanitized appearance of the mall. As Stinky Girl explains, “I have no friends, and people give me a wide berth when I take my trips to the mall” (42). Lai in turn, records Miranda interacting with the Sonias to complicate this appearance. Miranda, like the consumers in Goto’s story, refuses to make contact with the cyborg workers until Evie introduces her to some of the other clones, the “Sonias 116, 121, 148, 161, 211, and 287” (222). The Sonias have been reassembled from the genes and research springing from the Diverse Genome Project that “focused on the peoples of the so-called Third World, Aboriginal peoples, and peoples in danger of extinction” (160). Because hegemonic power is scattered, the characters find themselves forgetting “*the unevenness of political and economic globalization*” (Cheah 300) that affects some local spaces more negatively than others. The sterile worlds in which they live cover over those who undergo bodily alienation and whose mobility is contingent on capital movements and not on their own privilege. Haraway points out that, in this new era of capitalism, “to be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 304). The texts question the female Third World body that has been dematerialized in order to serve multinational companies that supply goods and services to a primarily Western market. These texts focus on unwanted bodies to argue that the presence of these cyborgs requires a more rigorous response that moves beyond denial.

The narratives therefore question the sterile surface of a global world that denies markers of material difference. Stinky Girl questions, “did I mention I am also coloured?” (38). The comment jars because the consumerism in the text has made “colour” an invisible and yet still present marker in the mall landscape. However, the blending of power inequalities into the mix of global fragments does not mean that they

do not persist. Jeffrey Santa Ana identifies “a universal culture of post-identity assimilation that masks global disparities and inequalities of resources and human needs” (21). Santa Ana critiques a culture in which gender and “racial” distinctions have become increasingly lost in the explosion of elements competing for market recombination. Because the Sonias circulate as reassembled alien labourers, Miranda overlooks that they are the products of “a Chinese woman who married a Japanese man and was interned in the Rockies during the Second World War” (160). Nextcorp has assembled women from all parts of the globe and then employs technology to fuse them into a dehistoricized group of cyborg workers. Their invisibility makes inequalities more palatable for those who benefit from their exploitation. Miranda and Stinky Girl begin to realize that consumerism has blunted and aestheticized the state of being “coloured” while simultaneously hiding the power inequalities by which “coloured” people continue to live. The corporations in these two texts displace fragmentation onto the explicitly cyborgian to prevent their consumers from questioning whether fragmentation has affected other bodies as well.

Denial and the Implication of the Body in Capital Flows

Goto and Lai explore the relationship of the body to a global network that makes their characters complicit within its logic. Capital reduces its gaze to the individual body because the body represents a local space whose disruptive potential must be harnessed under capitalist control. In Lai’s *Serendipity*, the corporations achieve this complicity by turning business operations into a videogame that uses the superficiality of play to mask the more sinister aspects of their workings. Miranda declares that “the Business Suit made tax collecting into a marvellous adventure. I thought perhaps that when I grew up, I’d like to be a tax collector too” (27). In concentrating on the escapist

enjoyment of tax-collecting, Miranda fails to register the significance of the “burning landscape,” the “crumpled buildings and burnt-out trucks and tanks” (26) that form an integral part of the game. Instead, she is content to cheer on her father as he uses a machine-gun to extract tax revenue from a scene of death and destruction. Similarly, in Goto’s text, consumers have become so hooked on capitalist artificiality that they are incapable of penetrating its hypnotic façade. Stinky Girl describes a mall employee who “is from a generation where nothing seems to matter. She is so bored of the world and of herself that even my anomalous presence doesn’t measure on her radar” (50). The mall corporations wish to produce through fragmentation and dispersal while at the same time ensuring that these fragmented bodies do not have the ability to situate themselves within this process. The adolescent mall employee is indifferent to her position in relation to the flows around her because she has bought into a larger culture of market denial.

Goto and Lai critique this normativity of commodity culture by depicting characters like the mall employee who are reluctant to awaken from their passive state. Miranda postpones the realization that “it’s all there right in front of you. All you need to do is look” (160). She refuses to consider her ties to the consumerist cycle and the extent to which she is the same as the alien labourers who she has always placed on the periphery of her consciousness. Miranda tries to rid her body of the signs of its hybridity by scrubbing her “skin until it hurt” (73) and when that fails, she avoids “the sight of my own reflection and wished with all my heart that I could simply erase it” (90). Miranda avoids looking in the mirror because she knows what she will see: a cyborg. Donna Haraway makes the provocative contention that “we are cyborgs” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 292). Haraway calls for a raising of consciousness for individuals who persist in denying their involvement in the global marketplace. Goto’s Stinky Girl comes to challenge “the cultural maze of hyper-artificiality” (51) “from her position as

a self-professed “mall rat” (36) who moves within this consumerist culture as much as any of the other mall customers around her. Stinky Girl and the many other characters in *Hopeful Monsters* speak from within the complications of a globalized consumer context. They cannot ignore that they reaffirm their cyborg state every time they interact with the technology and goods that are globally produced and circulated. They consume genetically altered foods, receive hormone treatment, surf the internet, work for multinational corporations, and ingest the medicine developed by pharmaceutical companies. Indeed, the characters live in “a culture which is just beginning to recognize the extent to which it is populated by cyborgs” (Harper 418). The normativity of consumerism as a way of life has reached a point at which the body has become a commodity that late capitalist society can produce, purchase, consume, and then reconsume. The texts demonstrate that in both work and play, the body serves as a complicit component and agent of the circulation and dissemination of capital.

In a further warning of the power of capitalist logic, the texts depict characters who continue to find themselves drawn to the allure of corporate influence even after they are aware of the repercussions of globalization. In *Salt Fish Girl*, Evie is astounded when Miranda claims that she has never questioned corporate influence, exclaiming “is everyone in this town as out of it as you?” (161), but Miranda’s ignorance is unexceptional in a commodity culture in which consumers overlook what unsettles their equanimity. Miranda continues in her complicity because she holds that consumerism has over her cannot be so easily broken. Even as its façade is crumbling, she still holds on to the vestiges of a capitalist order in the hopes of propping up the construction that orders her life. In Goto’s stories, the characters struggle with the awareness of the monstrosity within both themselves and those around them: “His wife. His wife. / Has she been a monster all along?” (129). Stinky Girl remains in the mall environment despite her sickening awareness of an

environment “where hideously greedy children manipulate TV dinner divorcees into making purchases with the monetary equivalence to feeding a small village for a week” (45). Stinky Girl and Miranda are cyborgs who cling onto and perpetuate their cyborg states. Lai similarly shows that awareness does not necessarily end bodily cooptation when she depicts Miranda as she sells her mother’s song. Miranda questions, “how could I have sold my mother’s greatest hit to that shark?”, confused at her betrayal because she knows that “it wasn’t as though I didn’t understand where the shoes came from” (202). Miranda, like the other residents in Serendipity, has followed the rule to “never ever interfere with the Business Suit” (28) for so long that even when she is aware of its suspect origins, she finds herself replicating its logic. The most subtle element of corporate power is that these characters agree to be complicit in their own bodily appropriation. The normalizing presence of capitalist workings makes it easy for them to participate automatically in the consumption and reconsumption that form twenty-first century life.

A Return to the Flesh: Mapping the Body amidst Global Capital Flows

Goto and Lai therefore enact a raising of consciousness in which they expose the body as an alienated cyborg. However, they argue that after exposure comes the search for agency through mapping. Miranda struggles to reconcile how agency can coexist with technology as she considers Evie and the other clones. Whereas the majority of the Sonias resign themselves to being pawns in a corporate strategy, Evie refuses to be silent and submissive:

Somehow I didn’t believe that there could really be thousands, or even hundreds of thousands of women in the world who looked just like her, who were locked up in grey compounds like the one I used to cycle by every day on my way to

Flowers' office. I couldn't make sense of Evie's unlimited capacity for resistance and rebellion in the face of this Karen's docility. (216)

Miranda is daunted by these bio-engineered women, unable to make sense of what distinguishes Evie from all the other passive bodies locked up in grey compounds all around the world. Nonetheless, despite her difficulties with arriving at a satisfactory explanation, Miranda confronts this paradox. As Haraway indicates, "taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts" ("A Cyborg Manifesto" 316). Goto, too, feels that individual subjects must engage with their connections to various power relations in order to displace the natural from its essentialized position. While Stinky Girl may pride herself in her recognition of "the forces of the sun, the moon, the patterns of wind that guide me," she also admits that this recognition occurs "through a film of pollution" (51) that filters her perceptions of these natural elements. As much as Goto and Lai may wish to detach themselves from the oppressiveness of global society, they realize that they must find a way to locate the body without resorting to a demonization of their current context.

The texts warn of the dangers of decontextualizing the body and trying to return to a garden that no longer exists. In *Salt Fish Girl*, the Sonias attempt to distance themselves from their mixed origins when they commence "building a free society of their own kind from the ground up" in which they grow a "tree, those cabbages and radishes" (256). The Sonias dream that they can create a community of their own that exists apart from Serendipity but fail because their Utopian community leaves them vulnerable to the exact power machinations that they try to escape. The Sonias forget that they themselves and the vegetables they produce are mixed beings that retain

connections to the Other that they construct. As Haraway contends, “the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 311) is crucial for combating present “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan 7). Diana Gromala similarly speaks of the need to situate the body and the self in the face of these technoscientific and capitalist developments:

These totalizing myths of a demonized technological Other, as well as the converse utopian rhetoric, reify cultural hegemony in the construction of subjectivity. By relying upon a totalizing view of technology, especially as a seemingly autonomous Other, most of reality is omitted. Further, by not questioning or considering the instrumental forces, conditions, processes and power relations of a technology implicit in the cultural realm, we can unproblematically distance ourselves from our own implicit role and responsibility in these processes. (600)

Gromala emphasizes that technology and capital cannot be treated as Others from which individuals can easily disconnect themselves. She argues that the act of not questioning is a form of complicity that gives “instrumental forces, processes and power relations” licence to operate. Stinky Girl similarly declares that “one must understand one’s limitations, the shackles of social norms, in order to overcome them” (45). Individuals like Stinky Girl must reclaim their bodies by performing a mapping and a claiming of their limitations. Scattered hegemonies require a response that is attuned to the precise position of the individual subject and that takes into account both the discursive and material aspects of the body.

In lieu of escaping to a nostalgic Garden, both authors return to the body in all its messiness and disarray. Lai asserts that “I’m not just dealing with travel and dislocation as social practices, I’m dealing with the hybridity and impurity of the body itself. I was interested in undoing the patriarchal underpinnings of the founding myths

of nation states” (“Future Asians” 174). For Lai, the “answer” lies in recognizing that the Garden and the body within it have always been impure, disruptive, and smelly. Nu Wa states that “in the beginning there was me, the river and a rotten-egg smell” (2) whose pungency stands in contrast to the sterile odourlessness that characterises Serendipity. This odourlessness hides the seamy side of the activities that Nextcorp fears will disrupt its smoothly operating façade. The corporation operates through fragmentation and dispersal but enlists science to cover over its cracks even as they fracture beyond its control. Lai challenges this denial by centring her narrative around a smell that cannot be masked, no matter how much the corporations try to wish it away: the stench of the durian. The durian and its putrid odour are the expressions of a body clamouring to be acknowledged in a world that desperately wants to ignore its presence. Miranda writes that the durian will not be defeated and continually reasserts its existence to such an extent that “my sour body stank up the whole house. The unpleasant cat pee odour oozed from my pores and flowed into every room” (15-16). The smell of the durian spreads until “the narrowest cracks” and most “airtight” (16) locations of the house have been revealed and thoroughly “polluted.” While the corporations want to sanitize away the fragmentation that they have perpetrated, Lai proposes a durian politics that locates itself in a disruptive body that refuses to accept elimination. This durian politics aligns itself with the aims of a cyborg politics that involves “the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution” (Haraway “A Cyborg Manifesto” 312). Lai uses the durian to insist on the noise and pollution that Nextcorp desperately denies.

Goto also writes physicality to the forefront in order to challenge scientific and corporate interests that suppress bodily materiality. While the body is physical, fleshy,

and disorderly, science and capitalism keep the body dislocated to avoid the jarring materiality that will bring on-the-ground events back to individual consciousness. However, *Hopeful Monsters* ends this denial of the body. In the story “Hopeful Monsters,” Hisa decides to leave her daughter’s tail intact, while in “Stinky Girl,” the character takes pride in a body that is too large for those around her to ignore. Stinky Girl writes, “when people see obesity, they are amazed. Fascinated. Attracted and repulsed simultaneously” (37). The ambivalent reaction she receives from mall customers originates from their conflicting negotiation of their own consumerism. On the one hand, they are drawn to her body in its blatant physical excess but on the other hand, they wish to cancel out this spectacle of over-consumption because it reminds them of their own complicity. Her body is so excessive that it is impossible for those around her to expel her presence from their consciousness. Because she is externally marked, her body disrupts the calm and indifferent mall environment and gets those in it to react.

Goto and Lai unsettle those around their characters with bodies that disturb by refusing to fade away. These characters remind people that they are materially present through their bodily secretions and odours that exceed the containment of regulated borders. In short, their bodies leak. As Irene Gedalof writes, “like the leaky female body, ‘women’ bleed across those borders” (“Identity in Transit” 352) that separate various communities and group affiliations from one another. In these cases, these bodies literally bleed over the superficially bright surface of global capitalism, demanding that individual consumers confront the messiness that their bodies secrete. The blood, the body odour, and the “thin stream of pus” (Lai 163) that appear in the texts are reminders that the body is an active agent that produces in excess of a sterilized façade. Stinky Girl gives off a smell so pungent that it forces acknowledgement. Those in the mall cannot remain indifferent to her presence but

find that “the lips curl back, the nose wrinkles toward the forehead, trying to close itself” (42). Similarly, in Lai’s text, the smell of durian stands as a constant reminder of the failure of the corporations to control deviant bodies because the more Nextcorp attacks the dreaming disease, the more it draws attention to the very thing that it wishes to ignore. The smell is “an irritant of the worst sort, because it was always present. It began to nag at people” (21). The smell jars Miranda and those around her into considering hidden corporate violence and more importantly, their own participation in globalization. Both Miranda and Stinky Girl share a common propensity to cause a stink in a corporate environment that wants their unsettling bodies to disappear.

These odours are effective at eliciting responses because their specificity disrupts a generalized celebration and exploitation of difference. Stinky Girl proclaims her unwillingness to cover over her particular difference, declaring that on no terms would she “rather be a stinky, fat, white girl. Perhaps, mauve or plum. Plum ... now that’s a colour!” (45). Stinky Girl plays with the many nuances of “colour” as she challenges the white oblivion of consumerism. Lai also inserts specificity into the general late capitalist malaise with a character who reeks of durian, a fruit whose smell connects Miranda not only to Asia, but more precisely to Southeast Asia where many transnational corporations take advantage of “favourable” labour conditions. The durian smell “nag[s] at people” (21) because it refuses to lose itself in the dizzying array of difference that Nextcorp offers. It questions, it probes, but most of all, it deconstructs. The durian odour is consequently an unstable marker of Asianness that represents the contestation that exists over a local site. Lai shows that corporate power structures are composed of a multiplicity of differences that Miranda learns to break down into their particular origins. Once she separates the chatter of the Sonias, Miranda discovers “a smattering of Chinese, a few words of Spanish, some French, some English. Four of them were busy wrapping a seasoned mixture of pork, bamboo

shoots and black fungus into won ton wrappers” (222). Each of the individual voices emerges to situate itself in a particular spatial location with singular cultural signs. As Stuart Hall asserts, “the Third, ‘New World’ presence, is not so much power, as ground, place, territory” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 243) that materializes the bodies that global capitalism dematerializes. Both Goto and Lai stress the importance of situating the body in a grounded, yet contested local space in order to combat the displacement and erasure of difference.

More interestingly, these bodies are threatening because, in addition to their acidity, these smells provide an olfactory mapping of the connections that global capitalism masks. Their odours, in their unavoidable materiality, contextualize these bodies and initiate an uncovering of the violence and chaos that a consumerist pretty exterior has thus far hidden. Goto and Lai initiate this mapping process by placing their characters in the centre of a corporate network. Goto’s Stinky Girl proclaims that “the sounds that emanate from my skin are so intense that mortal senses recoil, deflect beauty into ugliness as a way of coping. Unable to bear hearing such unearthly sounds they transmute it into stench” (53). Nonetheless, Goto delves into this stench to break it down into its individual emanating strands. Lai performs a similar unearthing with the dreaming disease that taps into the collective unconscious of Serendipity to bring forth the memories of famines (101), tuberculosis (102), and “all those things buried and forgotten in the years of corporate homogenization” (225) to the surface. The smells present a counter narrative of oppression, of exploitation, and of neglect that has been silenced by the tide of corporate interests. None of these smells are welcome in the sanitized world of Serendipity but the fact that they continue to exist means that the capitalist hold over the body is incomplete. Both texts privilege bodies that claim both the materiality and the historical specificity that the corporations around them suppress.

This retrieval of historical specificity begins a process of recontextualizing the body within the ambiguities and fluctuations of place. The characters map the scattered power structures that constrain them and then force these structures to be accountable for their violence. Stinky Girl muses, “it is not enough to simply stand on the outside and gape” (51). She continues, “what if I *am* to overcome the shackles of social norms and thus, reach the outer limits of time and space? Do I want to survey the vista, alone? I must join the epicentre of humanity” (51). Stinky Girl perceives that she can claim agency upon locating a space from which to act. Stinky Girl literally halts her movements and claims a space in the tube of the “man-made maze” where she stands as “a clot of fat” in the “artery” (52) of the usually unimpeded consumer flows. Her body in all its fleshiness dares to pause amidst the incessant movement of selling, buying, and discarding that pressures her to keep on moving without surveying the consumer maze in which she moves. Stinky Girl hangs in the middle of the mall environment where she can see her own complicity most clearly. Although reluctant to do the same, Miranda eventually seizes the power of mapping by forcing herself to see beyond her capitalist blinders. She writes, “I had no idea about these alleyways, no idea that the city was connected by them, that it had this whole internal logic, an organizing principle beyond its noisy, commercially active facade” (220). As Miranda grows aware of her physicality, she gains the capacity to locate her body within multiple and competing flows. Mapping thus becomes a critical way for Miranda and Stinky Girl to break out of the spatial confusion that makes them feel entrapped within a seemingly totalizing global system.

This mapping permits these characters to regain lost materiality as they discover the enabling potential of situating themselves amidst disparate connections. For example, when Stinky Girl stops amidst the frantic mall environment, she ends her alienation from her body and claims a place for herself within her surrounding

capitalist flows. Caren Kaplan argues for “a politics of location that theorizes the histories of relationships between women during colonial and postcolonial periods, that analyzes and formulates transnational affiliations between women, requires a critical practice that deconstructs standard historical periodization and demystifies abstract spatial metaphors” (138). Goto and Lai write about characters who have spent too long accepting the demystification science and capital practise on their bodies but are finally negotiating their bodies as their own. These characters see that naturalized constructions have shaped their responses to their bodies and begin finally to take a self-inventory of their bodily needs and desires. In “Hopeful Monsters,” Hisa realizes that “she had been an amputee her whole life, without knowing it” (160), while Miranda admits that “it was true, I did not feel unwell” (167). Suddenly grounded in their rediscovered physicality, these characters discover the power inherent in a mapping process that reforges the connections that capitalism has kept hidden. They engage in “a politics of location” that embraces their mixed origins and returns abstract capitalist spatiality to a contextualized ground-level experience.

This abandonment of the pretence of “wholeness” asserts subjectivities that are fragmented, mixed, and most of all, materially located. These characters embrace that they are cyborgs that are hybrid products of the recombinant production of capitalism and technoscience. In doing so, the texts themselves embrace their own cyborg natures. In short, both texts and characters brandish the fragmentation that late capitalism thrives on, yet keeps dislocated. Miranda realizes her cyborg subject position when she connects herself to Evie and her mixed origins, writing of “both of us, such putrid origins, climbing out of the mud and muck into darkness” (253). This acknowledgement that she is equally implicated in a technoscientific and capitalist power web is a marked departure from her earlier denial of her cyborg connections. Miranda sees that “within the belly of the monster, even inappropriate/d others seem to

be interpellated – called through interruption – into particular location that I have learned to call a cyborg subject position” (Haraway “The Promise of Monsters” 300). The child in Goto’s “Hopeful Monsters” demonstrates the power of the cyborg subject position to claim the right to be mixed when “the tail twined tightly around Hisa’s wrist in a reflex of survival. Gripped closely, solid, as if she’d never let go” (163). These characters claim cyborg subject positions that give them a new level of power and location within the womb of technoscience and global capitalism. As cyborgs, they have the potential to reconfigure identity in more enabling ways because they can resist without escaping the context in which they are located.

Immaculate Conception: Autonomous Generation

In her essay, “Political Animals and the Body of History,” Lai writes that “my compunction towards home-making belongs to the realm of the feminine in a way in which some branches of feminism might not approve” (153). Both Lai and Goto stress the urgency to locate a “home” from which to launch an attack because a body that exists in a state of spatial confusion leaves itself open to appropriation from a power structure that thrives on disunity. As a result, both authors stress the need for the body to take a stand that resists reappropriation. Whereas capitalism is premised on reproducing a body from fragmentation and dislocation, Goto and Lai offer final conceptions of the body that combat the cycle of commodification by claiming a space and a “wholeness” for itself. Irene Gedalof speaks of the “need to *take* [a] place of their own to define their own relationship to place on a different basis, and to insist on their right to intervene in the processes of redefining the ‘imagined communities’ of which they are part” (“Identity in Transit” 342-43). Gedalof envisions a counter-movement to capital in which the individual combats the hyper mobility of goods and capital by

claiming a place of his/her own. Instead of thriving on the disunity of the body, Goto and Lai proposes a body that claims a “home” that resists the nostalgia of essentialism. This “whole” body claims ownership of itself by emerging out of and beyond late capitalism.

This body claims self-ownership by revealing and mapping the body back into context as it produces something *new*. Goto and Lai argue that their texts must enact its own rereading of the body in order to combat a global capitalism that is adept at commodifying and neutralizing the threat of resistance. Miranda realizes during her medical examination that she will remain alienated even as she becomes conscious of the invasion and manipulation of her body. Instead, she articulates her desire to seize control of her body and take action with the words, “No!” “Get that fucking thing out of me” (113), that move her towards a resistance of self-ownership. However, Miranda is still hesitant to claim her body and consequently, she submits to Flower’s knife even after she has voiced dissent. Similarly, in “Hopeful Monsters,” Hisa confronts the “abnormality” of both her child and herself but persists in deferring to medical authority. Hisa resists the possibility of leaving her child’s “tail” intact even after she is aware of her own cyborg origins: “What are you saying! No one could live in this world with a tail! You’d have to join a circus! A freak show! It’s not really a tail. It’s a skin growth. Fatty gristle. The doctor said. Leave me alone” (161). Laura Gray-Rosendale and Gil Harootunian offer a “solution” to this unwillingness to see potential within fragmentation with what they term “fractured feminism,” arguing that “fractures clearly also imply a positive potentiality, alluding to the texture of a surface that has in fact been broken and changed into something new, something that continues to transform in shape and substance” (14). In other words, Gray-Rosendale and Harootunian isolate a need for critical, political, and social work that takes what is fractured to create something “new.” Moreover, these potentialities “also seek to

preserve within them that which is fragmented, broken, or disrupted” (14). Goto and Lai agree that resistance will be brought about by moving to the next level and *doing* something with the fragments that have been revealed. They see that awareness is an inadequate measure to combat such seeming totality.

The texts disrupt this totality by arguing that dissent is possible within twenty-first century context because the seeds of dissent are already contained in the body itself. Lai captures Serendipity faltering as the bodies within it realize that the tools for resistance have always been right in front of them. Like Nu Wa, Miranda has her own shape-shifting capacities. At the end of the narrative, Lai brings together the bifurcated parts of her narrative to forge a stronger, reconfigured textual body. As the novel progresses, the two storylines merge into a single cyborg narrative. Miranda receives a flyer that declares that “SERENDIPITY IS FALLING,” calling on her to “EMBRACE THE CONTAGION” and “PARTY INSIDE THE WALLED CITY!” (189). The leaflet articulates the will to resist by embracing the contagion from the “INSIDE.” Serendipity falters from an attack from the inside that uses the very resources it deployed for oppression to topple its carefully constructed façade. Goto and Lai write cyborgian texts that recognize the alternative worlds that emerge from reconfigured bodily connections. Their cyborgs, as the declared offspring of a technoscience womb, are cognizant of their indebtedness to the past and to the mixed origins from which they have emerged. These mixed origins will be the raw material from which new bodies will be created. When Goto’s character Emiko in the piece “From Across a River” questions, “did every action in her life come to this place?” (107), she expresses awareness that her past offers her the opportunity for praxis. “The beauty of the raw flesh”(112) and the pain of her revealed physicality remind her that change lies within her. As Goto writes, “her inner arms were torn from elbows to wrists, blood caked dry and brown. Heat pulsed dimly in several fingers. She turned her hands around to stare at the missing

fingernails and the beauty of the raw flesh speckled red and white. She could see” (112). Like the other characters in both texts, she is aware of her flesh and her body as agency.

Flesh circulates in these texts to insist that the body is the tool for both oppression and resistance. Although these characters may forget their capacity to shift and above all, to create autonomously because of their bodily alienation, the texts argue that they can seize the creative capabilities of the body in order to attain agency. In each text, they gain agency within the body through the creation of offspring that defy the boundaries of categorization. In Goto’s “Hopeful Monsters,” while Dr. Armstrong informs Hisa that she is about to experience “a commonplace miracle” (137), Hisa gives birth to a tailed offspring whose singular identity and physicality disprove the commonplace nature of creation. The child disrupts the construct of reproduction with the miracle of its individuality and thus realizes the paradox of Dr. Armstrong’s words. Characters like Hisa are just beginning to see what the corporations have understood for quite some time: the body is a resource that the individual subject can either plunder or allow others to plunder for their own gain. As the biologist Enrico Coen says, “organisms, from daisies to humans, are naturally endowed with a remarkable property, an ability to *make themselves*” (1) that permits corporations like Nextcorp in *Salt Fish Girl* to keep their “labour costs” “so low” (157) by leveraging the body as a reproductive engine. It is up to the characters in these texts to take hold of their capacity to create resistance. Goto and Lai argue that control over bodily creative powers will determine whether the makeup of the new global offspring will lead to further cooptation or to renewed bodily agency.

Accordingly, both Lai and Goto centre on maternity and reproduction in order to privilege a body that asserts ownership through acts of self-production. As Goto’s character from “Tales From the Breast” declares, “it’s my goddamn body and I make my

own decisions on what I will and will not do with it” (62). The characters in these texts declare that they will henceforth self-direct their creative acts. At the end of “Tales From the Breast,” the character seizes back control of her body by transferring the labouring machinery, her breasts, to her husband’s body. These self-directed acts of creation are a new form of immaculate conception that occurs in excess of patriarchal capitalist reproduction. As Rosi Braidotti argues, there is still “the urgency to reformulate the unity of the human being – without moralism or nostalgia” (*Nomadic Subjects* 55-56). Goto and Lai recognize that a nostalgia that denies the impact of late capitalism is not a possible alternative for effective resistance. Instead, this new form of immaculate conception describes generation that disrupts patriarchal capitalism by reworking the very intersections and collisions that gave birth to the subjectivities of these characters. In other words, these characters self-create for their own agency producing purposes. By the end of *Salt Fish Girl*, Miranda is willing to see that the seeds of potential are within her body:

Inside of me something turned. Something without feet. Something as yet without arms or legs, something long and coiled. I dreamed that it spoke. *This is the best hour of the day, right now, as I hang here in your womb as though asleep in some ancient garden. My body has not yet sprouted limbs, not yet become definably human ... Serpentine.* (227)

The amorphous body within her womb is the self-owned and self-producing body that waits for its birthing event. The melding of bodily creative capacity with a capitalist and technoscientific context forges a potent weapon for destabilizing a global façade. The texts emphasize the need to locate a “unity” for the body but they show that this reformulation must emerge out of and beyond late capitalism.

Birth becomes the focus for these texts in a way that challenges the patriarchal capitalist mode of reproduction. Goto and Lai challenge the traditional enshrinement of

immaculate conception within patriarchy by transforming it into something beyond patriarchal control. In their case, the gendered body moves from a vessel that reproduces, to a body that generates offspring that exceed this intent. For instance, not only is Miranda herself created through “immaculate” conception, “given the fact that my mother was a good eight years past menopause” (15), but she herself produces an offspring through the unregulated durian seeds that inseminate her womb. She writes, “I became the seed and the seed became me. Whatever grows from it will be mine” (209). Miranda generates agency once she understands that her body is a tool she can own for herself. The offspring created from this immaculate conception is her own because she created it:

I moved through the cool dark with her, my body a single silver muscle slipping against hers, flailing for oxygen in a fast underwater current, shivering slippery cool wet and tumbling through dark towards a blue point of light in the distance, teeth, lip, nipple, the steel taste of blood, gills gaping open and closed, open and closed, mouth, breath, cool water running suddenly piss hot against velvet inner thighs and the quick shudder silver flash of fish turning above the ice-blue surface of the lake. (161-2)

This creative act occurs during the realization of desire that intermingles flesh, myth, and the host of other forces that permeate the interconnected bodies of Miranda and Evie. Similarly, Goto’s Hisa who initially labels her child as “a freak of nature that was wrong, wrong, wrong!” (153) eventually comes to see that the “freak” is part of herself. The characters realise what Haraway describes as the desire “to displace the terminology of reproduction with that of generation” (“The Promise of Monsters” 299) with offspring who, in their singularity, stand apart from the cloned commodified bodies that circulate in the marketplace.

The texts return to a Garden that leverages the ability of the body to exceed imposed designs. Goto and Lai take a Garden of nostalgic “wholeness” and transform it into a borderspace in which the multitude of competing and overlapping connections that form the body are left in continuous play. In Goto’s text, Hisa demands, “give the Garden back to me!” (160), as she calls for new origins. Goto captures this borderspace in her piece “Osmosis” as her character immerses herself in a swirling body of water: “*I slide backward, underwater, slicing down through dark fluid soft as egg yolk. Slowly twist my body around. Kick the mud with my feet and propel upward. My head breaks the surface and I start swimming to the other side of the lake. I imagine I hear a voice softly murmur, ‘Kappa’*” (20). Goto and Lai argue that reconfigured immaculate conception occurs in a generative amniotic space that, like the body of water in this passage, propels movement and the breakage of surfaces. Lai reconnects pre-Shang China with Serendipity as her text negotiates its many competing and overlapping connections. Out of this blurred space emerges Nu Wa as a goddess figure who claims a location and a materiality in-between the mythic and the real, the designed and the unforeseen. She mobilizes acts of creation that occur at moments of possibility when “the materials of life still lay dormant, not yet understanding their profound relationship to one another. There was no order, nothing had a clear relationship to anything else. The land was not the land, the sea not the sea, the air not the air, the sky not the sky” (1). Nu Wa relies on ambiguity and change as she generates offspring who split off into the unforeseen once she breathes life into their bodies. The Garden metamorphoses into a fluctuating space that demands an on-going negotiation of the relationships that compose physicality.

The texts claim a generative space for the creation of both physical and textual bodies that negotiate these evolving relationships. The bodies that emerge are tricksters like Goto’s “*Kappa*” (18) that contain within them possibilities for alternate forms of

materiality that elude containment. Goto and Lai address the breakdown of binaries with characters who transgress the borderlines that have conventionally kept intimately related elements discursively apart. For example, the eleven stories that make up *Hopeful Monsters* construct a place in which the mythic and material, and the foreign and domestic meet and interact with one another. In the story “Osmosis,” Goto explores the blending of different worlds through the figure of the “*Kappa, I think. Kappa*” (18) who embodies what Donna Haraway terms “a protean trickster” (“The Promise of Monsters” 298). Haraway speaks of “the lively languages that actively intertwine in the production of literary value: the coyote and protean embodiments of a world as witty agent and actor. Perhaps our hopes for accountability for technobiopolitics in the belly of the monster turn on revisioning the world as coding trickster with whom we must learn to converse” (298). The two texts emerge as protean tricksters themselves as they find voice through their negotiation of the slippages and intricacies of creating meaning. As the narrative progresses, the two bifurcated parts of *Salt Fish Girl* intertwine and speak to one another in an evolving and constantly uncertain dialogue. Miranda embraces the offspring within her whose growth parallels the growth of the textual bodies in the authorial creative wombs.

When that thought crossed my mind, I imagined that something inside me turned and whispered, something long and coiled, a body that had not yet sprouted limbs, had not yet become definably human. I imagined I held a pomegranate seed in my mouth. I felt its presence, the small weight of it against my tongue. (236)

The generative spaces in these texts produce bodies that claim bodily “weight” yet still remain undefined and slippery in their serpentine subjectivity. The *Kappa*, *Nu Wa*, and the texts themselves are trickster figures whose straddling of multiple worlds attest to the ambivalent and productive potential of border crossing.

Hopeful Monsters and *Salt Fish Girl* leverage the potential of bordercrossing with the birth of children and textual offspring that claim their mixed origins as their own. Control over reproduction is achieved by leveraging the productive capabilities that are contained in the body itself. Haraway stresses “seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 311). Goto and Lai make an argument for an impure body that is subject to metamorphosis that looks forward to new forms of possibility. In “Hopeful Monsters,” Hisa discovers her own suppressed abnormality and answers her prayer, “Love the lepers. Blessed are the deformed. The kindness of hunchbacks,” with the demand “Give it back!” (160). Agency for these two writers lies in the recognition and claiming of the slippages that exceed reproductive stability. Like Nu Wa, science may “pretend it was part of the original design” (3), but these texts derive power from the propensity of the body to grow through variation that defies a pre-determined design. Dr. Flowers tries to scare Miranda into ceding control of her body when he declares, “what monstrosities might have come of those births. Those trees have been interbreeding and mutating for at least three generations since the original work. The fertility those durians provided was neither natural nor controllable” (256). Nextcorp employs biology to engineer bodies but by invoking genetics it unwittingly risks creating self-mutating bodies. While Miranda has often disconnected herself from the durian smells of her body, at the end of the text, she gives birth to a child as she claims the fragmented seeds of durian as her own. She uses science and technology in order to locate herself with a body of her own making.

Goto’s and Lai’s characters achieve agency by acknowledging and then reworking the current relationship that the body has to technology. The characters in the texts challenge late capitalist disunity and fragmentation by finding “homes” coexistent with twenty-first century biotechnology. Science calls these mistakes “monstrosities” but these texts create space for these mutant bodies to thrive and to

multiply. In the end, their characters turn to these mutant bodies for agency precisely because of their “uncontrollable” nature. Goto ends her text with a final reminder of the importance of reconceptualizing the mutant into a hopeful sign of bodily agency. She introduces the piece “Hopeful Monsters” with an explicit argument for the power of the body to mutate into a form for survival:

Goldschmidt did not object to general microevolutionary principles, however, he veered from the synthetic theory in his belief that a new species develops suddenly through discontinuous variation, or macromutation. He agreed that most macromutations ended disastrously, with what he called ‘monsters.’ Nonetheless, Goldschmidt believed that a small percentage of macromutations could, with change and luck, equip an organism with radically beneficial adaptive traits with which to survive and prosper. These he called “hopeful monsters” ... (135)

This privileging of mutations highlights the hope that remains within the body itself. However, individual subjects must claim these mutations before they are absorbed once more into consumerist machinery. As Lai writes, “Evie’s beauty lies in her ability to survive, adapt and reproduce in forms that mutate the present. She both doubles the past and diverges from it, in order to open to an embodied, knowing hopeful future” (“Future Asians” 175). Thus, although Goto and Lai are all too aware that global stabilizing mechanisms are efficient and brutal and that a very “small percentage of macromutations” survive bodily alienation, they persist in writing about these hopeful monsters. In Goto’s text, Hisa seizes the “weight” of her child, its tail “weaving a subtle pattern” into the future as she “carefully lifted her baby into her arms” (168). Goto entitles her concluding piece, “All Possible Moments,” to underline that it is within the possibility and agency of the moment that the voice of change emerges. Similarly, Lai concludes her novel with the birth of a baby girl and the hope that is contained within

this reconfigured body. With the threat of appropriation ever looming, both Goto and Lai seize one of the remaining tools left to the individual subject: the body itself.

Goto and Lai seize the body and find for it a “home” and productivity coexistent with twenty-first century capital and science. Lai and Goto advocate a politics of the cyborg, of the mutant, and of the many mixed bodies that are committed to seizing their materiality to create variance. These cyborg bodies take the tools that have formed them and name them as their own. The result are both physical and textual bodies that create new forms by reading and then rereading the mixed origins that lie within their makeup. Far from a naïve celebratory cry, Lai’s final words, “everything will be all right, I thought, until next time” (269), reflect an understanding that resistance is a constantly negotiated act that must ward off the ever-present threat of appropriation. Meanwhile, both novels remind the body of its power to own itself and write itself into the future by using its own code. The future is uncertain, strange, and above all hopeful:

I thought, we are the children of the earth, of the earth’s revenge. Once we stepped out of mud, now we step out of moist earth, out of DNA both new and old, an imprint of what has gone before, but also a variation. By our difference we mark how ancient the alphabet of our bodies. By our strangeness we write our bodies into the future. (Lai 259)

Hiromi Goto and Larissa Lai produce examples of a textuality that locates creativity within the intricacies and ambiguities of denaturalized borderspaces. This textuality positions Asian Canadian as a reading and writing medium for reclaiming creative agency. The hope for Asian Canadian literature and criticism thus lies with the texts themselves. The next chapter turns to the work of the artist/writer/poet/filmmaker Laiwan who has been offering a condensed glimpse of

this uncertain and hopeful textual future that awaits Asian Canadian literature. Up until now, Laiwan and her work have existed on the margins of a body of literature and criticism that has largely focused on claiming an identity space for Asian Canadian within the nation. Laiwan has fallen outside of efforts to claim the nation because her heterogeneous cultural background and the cyborg nature of her work have resisted categorization. However, Laiwan and her work take on new importance when examined through a critical lens that can engage with fragmented and ambiguous textual performances. Her works speak from spaces where denaturalized borders reconfigure themselves and take on new creative forms. Laiwan is able to create such forms because of her location in a shifting cultural and national space. She matches a border-crossing subjectivity with work that combines different creative media and that crosses a multiplicity of discursive boundaries. In the end, her texts presage a future for Asian Canadian literature by offering a cyborg poetics that can address the complexities of twenty-first century impositions while still representing the specifics of context in which the racialized writer produces.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Voice from the Womb:

Laiwan's Cyborg Poetics

Desire and Cyborg Poetics

Elspeth Probyn argues, “desire remains for me crucial in thinking about belonging” (*Outside Belongings* 25). She continues with the assertion that “desiring identities refuse to stand still; inbetween being and longing, they compel connections, producing themselves as other” (35). This power of desire to compel connection is especially evident in the creative work of the artist/writer/poet/filmmaker Laiwan. Laiwan is an artist of Chinese ancestry who was born in Harare, Zimbabwe, in what was then Rhodesia, and then later moved to Canada in 1977 to escape the civil war in that country. Laiwan uses her border-crossing subjectivity to explore desire that moves, connects, and most of all, produces. Her body of work includes two published poems, “notes towards a body,” “notes towards a body II,” a video, *Remotely in Touch*, as well as numerous other poems and exhibitions that she has created over the years. This list traces the unstable borders of a work-in-progress that finds agency by negotiating with textuality itself. While each of the pieces have their own distinct representational concerns, they share a commitment to the body and the power of fluid and interconnected textuality. “Notes towards a body” enters the local space of “*mozambique*” and reworks the post-colonial body into a site of ambivalence and contestation; the sequel piece, “notes towards a body II,” examines four invasive technoscientific images and their relationship to the body; and, finally, *Remotely in*

Touch splices thirteen minutes of music, text, images, and video clips to explore agency in a digital world. In all three pieces, desire is a catalyzing force that propels the creative voice to move from line to line, from photograph to photograph, and from video image to video image, in its search for a “textual” home from which to locate itself. Her work now assumes new “centrality” within Asian Canadian literature with a cyborg textuality that speaks directly to the interpenetrations of current globalized conditions that face the Asian Canadian subject.

Each of the pieces commences with one fundamental desire: the longing for body. The “*longing for body*” (“notes towards a body II” 147) is a desire for a form that the poet can claim as her own. The title of the two poems, “notes towards a body,” highlights a writing “towards” both a physical and a textual body that is missing in today’s current despatialized context. This desire launches a journey that will take the poetic voice through the many connections and pathways that converge to create body. The journey begins in the first poem with the lines, “i once believed / compassion could only originate from memory” (“notes” 11), and continues in the video with the words, “are you / remotely / in touch” (*Remotely*). These two openings express a desire for a wholeness that is “remote” from present bodily experience. The promise of a “*body of compassion*” and “*unconditional love*” (“notes II” 147) drives the search for a home for the body through the process of creating text. This focus on the process of finding belonging transforms desire from a sign of lack to one of possibility and transformation as it catalyzes the poetic moment to new representational levels.

All three works begin with the desire for body that uses a commitment to textuality to keep this desire active. The potential for the longing for body to stymie the creative process forces the poetic voice to be conscious of the point at which negotiation ends and unproductive nostalgia takes over. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston argue that nostalgia is inadequate for dealing with the multiplicity of scattered

hegemonies that currently exist. They call for a new response to present threats to the body, asserting that “the price of indulging nostalgia for the immediacy of edenic nakedness, or for the spontaneous and bodily unity of the revolutionary crowd, is too high. The urgency for new kinds of coitions and coalitions is too compelling in an age of continuous and obligatory diasporas” (2). The texts respond to this urgency by taking nostalgia beyond its essentializing tendencies through their focus on the longing for body and not the realization of body. This longing for body finds an enabling function for nostalgia by keeping it in perpetual motion with its object always out of reach. The two poems and the video are connected in their disruption of nostalgia to create textuality that is in a constant state of negotiation. Together, the three works keep the body in excess of the representational gaze through a new form of textuality: cyborg poetics.

These creative works exemplify a cyborg poetics in their claiming of a material presence within what is broken and fragmentary: “here is an image of being *not yet* in this world / a floating, bouncing, jumping shape closer to cyborg than human” (“notes II” 146). A cyborg poetics is a way of reading and creating textuality amidst fragmentation and dislocation. A cyborg poetics disrupts fixity by revealing the multiplicity of connections that the textual surface hides; it claims an embodied location within this fragmented space; and finally, it creates new textuality through impurity and contestation. It is the fundamental paradox of claiming location in a space of dislocation that gives cyborg poetics its creative force. The three works exemplify a cyborg poetics because they take the poetic voice through the multiplicity of competing connections that compose “body.” Donna Haraway describes her desire to produce effects of cyborgian connection: “my diminutive theory’s optical features are set to produce not effects of distance, but effects of connection, of embodiment, and of responsibility for an imagined elsewhere that we may yet learn to see and build here”

(“The Promise of Monsters” 295). Like Haraway, the texts imagine a reconfigured body that owns its connections and responsibility to a recontextualized local space. A cyborg poetics is a creative act that recognizes the longing for body to effect change. In short, it is an active form of creative production because it takes a stand.

Moreover, a cyborg poetics is a new conception of the body that resists the binary separations between inside/outside, Self/Other, local/global, and human/technology. Doreen Massey proposes a similar reconceptualization of space that moves beyond binary relationships. She argues, “if social space is conceived of as constructed out of the vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global, then ‘a place’ is best thought of as a particular part of, a particular moment in, the global network of those social relations and understandings” (115). The “place” of the text must, like the places and bodies it represents, function as a nodal point in a network of social processes and interactions. While the text acknowledges the desire to return the body to an isolated state, it brings together many discourses, bodies, and images as an argument for seeing the body as an assemblage of disparate parts. If the body is the ultimate local space, it must find a way to negotiate its relationship to the “outside” in such a way that it expands to include its many connections. The text embraces “processes” (“notes II” 150) that transform the body from a signifier of “unconditional love” into a constantly negotiated space:

never forget

how telling this is: this rashness of blood circulating some kind of insistence

circumnavigating unconditionally a desire to listen to this that so reveals (151)

The text is continuously listening to the many desires that claim bodily form. Like the cyborg that claims its hybrid state, the text performs an opening of its body to competing readings. This cyborg poetics reflects a conviction that, as Massey asserts, “place is thought of, not as an inward-looking enclosure but as simply a subset of the

interactions which constitute space, a local articulation within the wider whole” (115). Consequently, the breakdown of boundaries within the text are a call to engage more deeply in the interactions that constitute the local space that the poet represents. Each of these three works reclaims the body through the revelation, situating, and reworking of bodily connections to “outside” forces. They may pursue their own individual representational projects but they collectively witness the birth of a new form of embodied, yet fluid textuality.

The Erasure of History: “notes towards a body”

“notes towards a body” is an entry point into an exploration of history and place that breaks out of Canadian context into an “outside” local space: Mozambique. The decision to leave Canada and enter Mozambique interrogates the fixity of Canadian national space; nevertheless, the traces of her displacement to and subsequent racialization within Canada inflect the body of the poet as she explores her identity and its relationship to Mozambique. Her awareness of this racialization process gives her gaze the ability to question those who both gain and lose from border maintenance, as well as reclaim the body through an unearthing of the history that has been lost “*to forgottenness*” (“notes II” 147). The piece is composed of black and white images that accompany textual explorations into the many spaces of Mozambique. The text stresses the specifics of location as it delves into the discordant fragments that compose a particular space. At a time when local sites are vulnerable to global impositions, the poet returns to place and the very singular conditions that construct its relationship to outside forces. She speaks from a place that has suffered not only colonialism, but also the enabling and destabilizing progression towards self-determinacy. This decision to examine Mozambique and its material and discursive history reflects a commitment to

remembering context. Mozambique emerges as a site that struggles against containment but one that claims agency through its reclamation of representational authority.

The text locates itself in-between the colonial and the post-colonial, the Self and the Other, and also Africa and North America. This in-between position permits not only an engagement with the many geographic, social, cultural, and political landscapes that make up Mozambique, but also a reading of its many competing markings that demand simultaneous voice. The poet detaches herself from both colonizer and colonized in order to see the multiple layers that have emerged into post-colonial space. Moreover, her location between Mozambique and Canada adds another factor to the conglomeration of “race,” gender, and sexuality that have converged to create the representational lens. Trinh Minh-ha makes statements on the negotiation of identity and difference that are fundamentally aligned with this particular critical and creative project:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in other words, this inappropriate ‘other’ or ‘same’ who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (418)

Minh-ha captures the ambivalence that the poet experiences towards the text and the “*mozambique*” (11) that she reads. Her connections and disconnections from the

landscape and its bodies are the starting point for representation. This act of representing begins with the “i” who questions “what,” “why,” and “who” (11) she has forgotten in order to remain aware of her own positioning in relation to the place she represents. This place, “*mozambique*,” that has already had to endure so much violence, is vulnerable to further representational appropriation as the poet reconfigures the representations that have contained it thus far.

As a result, the poem begins with the process of self-consciously reading historical, cultural, and political terrain. It reveals a site that colonialism has marked with its imperialist claims and that now strains to come to terms with past violence. The text critiques a European mentality of exploration that roamed the globe seeking out “*terra nullius*” to discover and claim. The East African area which is now Mozambique was from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries a hub of activity for Bantu, Swahili, and Muslim populations until Vasco De Gama of Portugal “discovered” the place in 1497 en route to the Malabar coast of India. The moment of contact created a new reading of place that attempted to obliterate other competing versions. The “memory of misdirected exploration” (12) haunts the landscape with its reminders of the pre-contact history that was wiped out at the instant of the colonial encounter. Anne McClintock speaks of the “recentering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance” (*Imperial Leather* 11). In other words, Mozambique is a place that in 1497 suddenly experienced a moment of recentering as the European “ideology of navigation and science on the rocks” (“notes towards a body” 12) claimed a monopoly over the history of the place it had found. This recentering had an ideological basis that was as “misdirected” as De Gama’s voyage to India. The colonial encounter like “every crashing wave / marking this site” (12) placed its imprint on the landscape in a repeated, yet evolving relationship. Once discovery occurred, the colonizers proceeded to act upon what they

had discovered and forged a new relationship between the landscape and those who claimed it as their own.

This new relationship positioned the colonized as an invaded body to be claimed and commodified at the discretion of the colonizer. The traces on the landscape that attest to the violent entry of the colonizer into its body underline the gendering of the Mozambique landscape. The process of colonization was extremely effective because, as McClintock asserts, “knowledge of the unknown world was mapped as a metaphysics of gender violence” (*Imperial Leather* 23). Gendering the intended site of colonization as female permitted the “masculine” colonizer to take advantage of his superior position in order to penetrate the womb of the colonized. The juxtaposition of the photographs of water and beaches and the images of lighthouses, ships, and settlements emphasizes that Mozambique is not an untouched site. The meeting of the text and images disrupts the superficial calm of the landscape with complex textual negotiations:

this is a place that has never existed
never permitted to exist
some one else’s desires invade (12)

Mozambique is a place into which “some one else’s desires invade,” and whose innocence has been stolen or at least never been “permitted to exist” because of violent colonial penetration. The descriptions of the landscape replicate the gendering colonialism performs in a way that draws attention to this constructed categorization of Mozambique. This space is a body that testifies to its rape and that challenges its containment as a passive gendered victim. The comment that “these images are not about beauty” (12) underlines that colonialism has used feminized Mozambique as a means of appropriating its agency and representational autonomy. Mozambique bears

witness to beauty stolen, beauty desecrated, beauty plundered but, more importantly, beauty that strives to redefine its bodily form.

The text not only captures the violence of colonial erasure, but it also confronts the equally damaging nostalgia that denies the legitimacy of Mozambique's past. It interrogates a post-colonial Mozambique that has turned to nostalgia in order to escape the markings of the past and lose itself in a reconstructed, naturalized version of history. The question, "how did we forget?" (13), and the repetition of other questions of remembering and forgetting stress the politics of memory in operation in Mozambique. Antoinette Burton writes of the "regret for the passage of that historical moment when the subjects of history were as yet uncontaminated by the critical apparatus set in motion by the historical events of the past quarter century" (6). This regret appears in the poem as the nostalgia for the "uncontaminated" space before the violence of the colonial and post-colonial moments. The reference to "*mozambique / what am i forgetting? / a generation of people wanting body back*" (14) reflects an understanding of the drive to erase place of context in order to escape the fragmentation and the pain of history. Part of the longing for body comes from a need to relocate to an imagined time when the body has not yet suffered the violence embedded in the past. Nostalgia is such a compelling desire because it does not merely suture the wound; it pretends that the moment of wounding never occurred.

However, nostalgia transforms Mozambique into a blank slate that must be reread in order to see the fragments that the surface massages into artificial coherence. Redefinition begins with a belated witnessing of the violence that has occurred in silence up until this point. This remembering fights back against the erasure imposed upon the landscape through years of colonial and civil strife. It gives place to the violence and destruction needed to bring about the colonial space and later, the

independent nation. The poem launches an unearthing of the past by making forgetting a contested act:

what did i forget?
why did i forget?
who had i forgotten?
why are you forgotten? (11)

The repetition of doubts prevents the process of forgetting from becoming automatic. The text interrogates the act of forgetting that sutures over the disjunctures between past and present as it questions, “how did we forget?”, and laments the consequences when a “body shrivels as memory shrivels” (13). The body shrivels when it is detached from the memories attached to its many layers. These memories lie buried in a present that uses forgetting to keep their disruptive effects from unsettling the façade of the current landscape.

The poet resists such superficial unity by destabilizing the unbroken landscape with the unburying of the bones of the past. She demands to know “to whose advantage is forgetting” (14) by forcing the landscape to reveal the markings on its body. The text brings forgetting to consciousness and then deconstructs the motivations of such a forgetting. Forgetting is a highly orchestrated act that erases particular memories to benefit those who want to disconnect themselves from the past. In short, what is forgotten is equally as significant as what is remembered. In this case, Mozambique has undergone multiple forgettings that deny violence from claiming a place within the nation’s history and make invisible the political and capital motivations that spur on this forgetting. The text witnesses the commodification of the body that dematerializes it from its history. The sacrifice of history for capital gain appears in the lines, “a body of money without memory / a body of memory without money” (13), that discuss the way material gain comes to replace the material history

of a place. In other words, forgetting covers over Mozambique for the sake of profit and more importantly, privileges a place that is detached from the material conditions of its production. Without a location in context, Mozambique is vulnerable to those who capitalize on its dislocation in order to relocate it into capital flows. The poem exposes those who benefit from forgetting and why this forgetting is to their advantage. This exposure makes visible the connections that those who seek monetary profit fight to keep hidden, and prevents the loss of context that traps the body in a perpetual forgetting.

The text breaks this cycle of forgetting by relocating Mozambique within its many interconnected histories through the insertion of material evidence of violence that demands recognition. The suspect blankness of colonialism and of nostalgic return are both disrupted as the text presents material evidence of the violence needed to construct such a smooth surface. Not only does the text fight against the erasure of colonialism, but it also fights against the desire of those who inhabit Mozambique to essentialize the landscape in a pre-colonial past. As Doreen Massey writes, “we should question any characterization of place which is singular, essentialist, and which relies on a view of there having been one past of this place, one story to tell, most particularly where that story is an internalized one of the evolution of that place within its bounds” (114). Although the longing to escape into an untouched past is tempting, the material traces within history demand unearthing and an active response. This unearthing begins by recognizing the violent and multiple fragments of the past. The photographs of beaches are beautiful but buried beneath the sandy ground lie the bodies sacrificed to achieve such superficial splendour. The lines that describe “a generation of body being burned / a generation of nose and ears cut off” (12), “a generation of roaming children” (13), and “skeletons along the shore” (13), prevent the photographs and the text from sanitizing the past. Each of these reminders of violence jars the superficial

calm of the text and the forgetting process as well. These burning, maimed, and decomposed bodies force the landscape into a remembering. Mozambique must suddenly see these material traces as visible and undeniable parts of its history. Both the events from the past and their material traces become visible parts of the textual encounter.

By delving into the chaos of memory, the text emerges with hands that are bloodied as a reminder of the colonial past as well as the violence perpetrated to move into the post-colonial moment. Those who live within the resutured Mozambique may wish to bury the dead but the rematerialized skeletons of the past demand the right to speak. Donna Haraway argues for the importance of remembering flesh when she writes, “but the materialized semiosis of flesh always includes the tones of intimacy, of body, of bleeding, of suffering, of juiciness. Flesh is always somehow wet. It’s clear one cannot use the word flesh without understanding vulnerability and pain” (qtd. in Goodeve 86). “Flesh” reveals its presence in the sanitized past and brings up the wetness, the vulnerability, and the pain that Mozambique’s history must now report. Moreover, because each of these material traces is tied to a specific moment in time, whether it be the civil war or the turmoil of the 1975 independence movement, their emergence also marks the return of situated memory to the body. Flesh not only attests to its pain, but it also establishes intimacy between past and present. These eruptions of textual violence ensure that those who live in Mozambique are intimately aware of their own complicity in scarring the landscape and in denying the history of colonialism through their desire for wholeness.

The text engages in a reconfiguration of history as well of the economic, cultural, and political landscape that avoids stabilizing into a singular representation. Instead, along with the “i” that is always contingent, the poetic voice also produces a “*mozambique*” that is perpetually shifting to elude containment. While “a generation

of people” want “body back” (14), the text performs instead a fragmented and ravaged body that still has a vital role to play within the reconstructed national body. As a result, the “*mozambique*” that the text constructs is vastly different from the “Mozambique” that Portugal or those seeking independence constructed. This new place is a process that pushes the text into a state of becoming as it moves in and out of the many landscapes of Mozambique. The black and white images collide with the instabilities of the words to produce a new shifting landscape for “*mozambique*.” Like “the ship” that “keeps revisiting and repeating the crash” (14), the text is in motion in order to give each voice a chance to speak. The following lines explicitly argue for place making as a meta-process:

i spent days absorbed by this sand that changed every moment
like my understanding changed every moment
like the war tactics changed every moment (14)

These lines evidence a reading of Mozambique that is changeable because it is subject to the shifting interactions between the gaze and the place of which it represents. Understanding is an interactive process that takes into account both the complexity of place and the complexity of the one doing the representing.

The poet takes her representational power seriously by keeping visible her own positioning as she struggles to capture elements that exceed her gaze. The focus on the “moment” balances the need to permit these elements to exist in excess and the equally important need to locate these pieces within their specific contexts. Creativity is located in this “moment” that crystallizes into a representation that is ephemeral and subject to further negotiation. It is attuned to the moments at which it can engage with context while still leaving the relationship between the gaze and its object unstable. The fragments of history are read through an equally fragmented and contingent representational strategy that avoids performing further violence on the landscape. The

impetus to represent the conflicts and discrepancies of history and space replaces the initial desires to capture the landscape within a singular impression:

i once thought only memory can revive my compassion

i once thought only compassion can revive my body

i once thought only body can revive my memory (14)

Whereas the text once searched for a singular home, it now gains creative voice through an awareness of place as a intersectional point and a commitment to negotiating conflict and violence. The retelling and the reviewing from different perspectives empowers “*mozambique*” from its voicelessness and allows for representations that speak without containing. The text that emerges is a shifting body that floats in its unstable form.

Reclaiming the Maternal Body: “notes towards a body II”

In “notes towards a body II,” the continuing “notes towards a body” piece moves from Mozambique to a more minute local space, the human body, as it probes similar issues of bodily alienation, memory, and agency. Four technoscientific images launch four sections that each look at the position of the body amidst technologies that penetrate and capture its inner workings: an ultrasound of the foetus in the womb, organs targeted in exploratory surgery, x-rayed hands from the Human Genome Project, and blood cells under an microscope. The desire for wholeness in the face of such fragmented images collides with and complicates the competing need to form a relationship for the body to these technoscientific representations. In this case, nostalgia centres on the maternal body that stays fluid as the text launches into rigorous inside/outside explorations. These explorations reveal the multiple and often invasive representations that the scientific gaze produces and the dislocation that the body

experiences as a result of this penetration of its private recesses. Current bodily disintegration finds new poetic possibility as fragmentation and ambivalence weave together into a cyborg textual creation. The superficial digital images gain body through a text that seizes them and claims them as its own.

The piece takes as its starting point the desire for an untouched body that offers salvation from current fragmentation. At a time of global dispersal, the need to rethink the powers of the local is especially pressing. This recognition resonates with Irene Gedalof who also stresses that “we need to both account for our locatedness within these specific community identities, while also thinking about alternative ways to imagine both women’s embodied locations and the communities which they help to constitute” (“Identity in Transit” 345). The poem reimagines “women’s embodied locations” by exploring the desire for wholeness in the face of fragmentation. The lines that speak of “*a still life in portrait / longing for body*” (“notes II” 147) acknowledge the desperate wish for materiality within the digital portraits that now define subjectivity. The lack of material presence within these portraits creates a yearning for a new conception of the body that will combat its current despatialized state. The poem seizes this yearning and goes into its shape and limits in order to transform it into an interrogated presence within the textual space.

The desire for body is nostalgia for a pre-fragmented identity space that is protected from the ravages of time and the naming process. Within this space, the body returns to an anterior time that is free of contemporary societal interventions. This anterior time offers a retreat through memory to an essentialized past that rids the body of the disturbances of late twentieth and early twenty-first century life. The body is situated in an imagined past: “*i am remembering the time i was not yet born / when there was no such thing as time / and no such thing as remembering*” (146). These lines express a wish to return to a temporal no-man’s land in which the body is devoid

of all memories. In this no-man's land, the body exists beyond its past and present in the pleasure of artificially coherent memories. These fabricated memories pose as the "real" in a limbo time "of being *not yet* in this world" (146) when the body is still unformed. These imagined memories deny current context and mourn a purity lost upon the entry into the present. While Arjun Appadurai speaks of the dangers of "imagined nostalgia,' nostalgia for things that never were" (*Modernity* 77), the foregrounding of this mourning in this work prevents it from naturalizing the essentialized space that it constructs.

As well, the text resists the temptation to free the body of the markings of the nation, capital, and science, and of the categorizations of gender, sex, sexuality, race, class, economics, and religion. Anne Balsamo speaks of the "desire to return to the 'neutrality' of the body, to be rid of the culturally marked body" ("Forms" 287) that is extremely powerful given the current hyper-marked surface of the body. This unmarked surface promises to cast the body into a time before a multiplicity of categories have marked it with their identity traces. The lines, "*when there was no such thing as time / and no such thing as remembering*" (146), speak of a moment when relationships between times, places, and people are still unstable and undetermined. This space of indeterminacy frees the body of the interpellation process and more importantly, the responsibilities attached to these identity affiliations. The body drifts in this "limbo" space (146) without engaging with the numerous forces that circulate around it. This dislocation of the body severs its ties to the material and discursive connections that create context. However, as tempting as the neutral body is, it leaves the body open to the identity agendas of others.

The engagement with bodily markings within the poem works to end the vulnerability of the body to those who mark it with their representational claims. The first image of a foetus complicates nostalgia by questioning the sanctity of the womb-

space. This ultrasound image of the offspring captured in the womb highlights the maternal body as an ambivalent site of security, containment, and permeability. The initial security of the womb fades as it transforms into a critical borderspace that witnesses both the blurring and maintenance of boundaries. The maternal body, more specifically the womb, emerges as a vehicle for the search for a stable space apart from the disorder of the outside. The mother functions as a memory of a time when the body was protected from outside regulation. The mother is the haunting “*her*” and “*she*” (147) who offers the promise of the stability that the body seeks out in a context of fluctuating and seemingly ever shifting representational impositions. The desire for comfort in the face of present “*inhumanity*” (147) impels the body into seeking a lost maternal space throughout the text. The poet finds it difficult to ground herself in a sense of context from which to speak and act with the absence of the “*unconditional love*” and “*compassion*” (147) that she usually associates with this space. Instead, this lack becomes the focus of the text as she laments her inability to situate herself without the identity salvation of the maternal body:

i can no longer feel her. i ignore her as she always available yields.

mother, forgotten by a surge of inhumanity:

the one person who could know so well unconditional love

who could be my body of compassion (147)

The mother comes to represent the one body that can overcome the spatial confusion of the body and return it to perfect physical union. The poet reaches for the mother to soothe the fragmented pieces that now compose substance but is left with air and silence. Instead, the search for materiality leads to a grappling with the many fragments that have filled the void that the departure of the mother has created.

The poet self-consciously charts the desire to massage fragments into a renewed maternal presence. The maternal body offers the hope of combating the placelessness

that the body experiences amidst fragmented virtual flows. This inability to locate bodily presence leads to a focus on the maternal body that once housed the foetus before it was expelled into the “outside” world. The line, “i remember mother feeding me” (148), refers to a time when a single connection defined the body: the dependency on the maternal body. As E. Kaplan writes, “the mother is the one through whom we come to be subjects in this formation, in our similarity and difference from her: she is therefore deeply lodged in the unconscious. This subjectivity is, moreover, prior to other subject-identities (such as class, race, or nationality)” (45).

Remembering maternal materiality is a pathway to confronting a sense of body that is missing in the present. The memories associated with the mother not only invoke a time of wholeness, but are also a pathway for reconstructing a material presence for the body. The remembrances that “i am remembering mother’s hands” (148), and that once “my mother was my body” (149), struggle to recover a sense of physicality. The mother represents a stable sense of physicality that exists through the power of nostalgic recall.

However, the fact that recall is limited to parts of the body of the mother, and that this recall is deeply inflected with nostalgia underlines the need to keep this body fluid and porous. The return to a stable maternal body is elusive because of the many strands that compose subjectivity and demand negotiation. The maternal body is a denaturalized space that necessitates a response that moves beyond nostalgic recall. The text thus works to locate itself in a womb that is subject to the invasiveness of technological and scientific innovations. The four images that introduce each section of the text are examples of a technoscientific gaze that penetrates the body for its representational purposes. Rosalind Petchesky uses the term, the “*panoptics of the womb*” (“Foetal Images” 180), to describe the technologization of the maternal body that has transformed its interior into a space open for scientific observation. She

stresses the need to “image the pregnant woman, not as an abstraction, but within her total framework of relationships, economic and health needs and desires” (188) as a response to the loss of agency women undergo through visualization technologies. The poetic voice must constantly negotiate its fluctuating relationship to scientific panoptics before the “*i, waiting to be born become[s] remembered solely by a frozen image*” (147).

This panoptics overrides bodily barriers and examines its most private recesses for scientific purposes. The apparent transparency of these images makes it harder to locate the silences and absences that elude a technoscientific gaze that relentlessly probes to make certain that nothing escapes its visualization powers. A scientific mindset presumes the right to go in and capture every particle of the body that it encounters: “*i am going in, looking in / to see what i am made of*” (149). The images of the “*bowel and intestine area from exploratory surgery*” and the “*blood cells of the author captured through an electronic microscope*” (151) evidence this probing scientific mindset. For example, Barbara Duden speaks of the repercussions of ultrasound technology, arguing that “*the pregnant body – formerly the metaphor for the hidden, the secret, and the invisible – is turned into a space for public inspection. Pregnancy – formerly perceived as an aptic somatic experience of being with child – is redefined into the disembodied realization of an optical imputation*” (“*The Fetus*” 24). This optical going in shifts the body from a private interior space to a site that invites the penetration and intervention of previously “*outside*” forces. The “*disheartened surgery of feeling*” (149) challenges a body that finds itself subject to the invasiveness of the scientific gaze.

Consequently, the four images that depict different parts of the body question the scientific desire to make interior spaces into exterior display. The foetus, the hand,

the bowel and intestine, and the blood cells in the images are now exterior to the body where they are subject to the scrutiny and regulation of “outside” gazes. These scientific visualizations of the body appear in the poem without perpetuating their representational violence by drawing attention to the relationship of the body to their visualization technologies. The poetic voice speaks from a space whose borders are now immaterial and where the previously binary distinctions of private/public and Self/Other are now blurred. The ultrasound, x-ray, and microscope images override readings of the body premised on a fixed separation between inside and outside. The images project internal workings to highly visible public spaces, “this image: this is my blood / outside of me because i had forgotten” (151), where they create a feeling of disconnection and alienating displacement. The blood cells in the image are the property of a technoscientific gaze that examines them for its own purposes. While these representations circulate seemingly beyond reach, they collide in disruptive intimacy within the space of the textual encounter: “this is my body, this is my blood / *no, i am wrong, this is a portrait of me*” (150). The body now inhabits a space in-between public and private, “a cramped, unfamiliar, freezing space / which could be purgatory, limbo, nowhere / *everywhere*” (146), that creates a deeply unstable form. The question over what constitutes body and where this body is located is pressing when the barrier between the gaze and its representational object has disappeared.

Moreover, the erasure of this barrier gives the gaze inordinate control over bodily movements. New visualizing technologies take a snapshot of the body and project it to produce an alienating two-dimensional representation. The “x-ray of hand from the Human Genome Project on the internet” (151) disassembles, catalogues, and reassembles that body into a virtual informational resource. The text counters the representational violence that the scientific gaze performs by disrupting and complicating the images that technoscience claims as its own. In their discussion of

new technologies and Asian American subjectivities, Rachel Lee and Sau-ling Wong similarly challenge the overcirculation of bodily images when they argue that “when thinking about the Asian and the Asian American in relation to technology, Internet or otherwise, not so much absence but overrepresentation” (xvi) characterizes this connection. Overrepresentation masks the fact that science has detached these images from their referents. The question, “do we regret contributing to this most dulling of deeds / of removing life from being itself?” (148), exposes a gaze that captures the body in flat, virtual representations that stand in for the “real.” While the gaze is able to penetrate all nooks and crannies, it ensures that these spaces spill out into the public domain in static, depthless representations. This metamorphosis of the body from material subject to image facilitates a spectating process that freezes it in virtual space as it is “*named by image then frozen in space*” (148). These images circulate independently of the bodies they depict, leaving the body remote and reaching for connections. The reinstatement of these connections shatters the smooth façade of technoscientific images and inserts the body back into virtual representations.

Consequently, at a time when, as Anne Balsamo writes, the “body is redefined as a machine interface” (“Forms” 283), the impetus to relocate materiality is important. The mother functions as a contested, embodied subject within the poem to disrupt the two-dimensionality of technoscientific images. The maternal presence destabilizes even as it comes into being through the continual questioning, “*how can i come to know unconditional love*” (149), and the question marks (148) that trail after the memories of the mother. In the lines, “i once believed love originated from my mother’s body / i once believed my body came from my mother’s love” (149), the repetition of the “once” emphasizes that the connection between the mother and bodily stability is tenuous and subject to contestation. The mother resists circulating as a given. The constant undercutting of the mother makes the desire for body a negotiated experience that stays

fluid and refuses to reduce itself to an essentialized escape. There is a place for the maternal body in the struggle to combat alienation but this body needs to function as a tool to spur on movement and not as a device for imposing closure on identity negotiation. In short, the maternal body remains amorphous to keep identity exploration in motion.

Even more significantly, materiality is possible in this amorphous, moving body that exceeds the gaze of both the text and technoscience. By positioning the mother as a borderspace, the text situates “home” *within* the interactions and negotiations of technoscientific connections. Elspeth Probyn speaks of the “moment of being – like the moment when the trapeze artist has let go of one ring but hasn’t yet grasped the other. This is an image of momentum and chance that captures for me what belonging is all about” (*Outside Belongings* 42). The text similarly captures a stretching to connect with the maternal body without providing the final moment of contact. The presence of the mother within fragmentation and absence questions the images that the technoscientific gaze presents:

i am remembering mother’s hands
no this is not hers she is not here
not a part of this (148)

These lines maintain the ambivalent awareness that the x-rayed hand is a constructed representation; this awareness prevents the adoption of a fixed position in relation to the four images in the text. The maternal body transforms into a productive space that assumes form through the ambiguities of the textual encounter. The regret that “*i can no longer feel her*” (147) spurs the poetic voice to generate its own materiality through a search for the maternal body amidst its technoscientific connections. The maternal body is a wavering presence because its reappearance would bring textual explorations

to an end. The mother therefore functions as an unstable referent that mobilizes the desire for body without allowing this desire to become a given. The maternal body eludes the representational gaze and turns from a stable object to a shifting body that produces change.

As a result, the text not only reclaims the maternal body, but meaning and form also work together to create a new textual body. The text combats the alienation of two-dimensional images by claiming agency in the performance of its fragmented subject position. The words on the page reveal and engage with the fractures in meaning construction in order to find voice in the process of negotiation. The longing for body propels the poetic voice further into its fragmentation and into the individual pieces that strive to make the text whole. As Donna Haraway claims, “knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention” (*Modest_Witness* 36). In this case, the cyborgian poetic practices of the text remain visible through a questioning tone that resists simple answers. For example, the Genome Project x-rayed hand incites the questions, “could this be my hand? could this be of my hand?” (148), that deconstruct the “truth” claims of the image as well as confront the complicity of the poet in its production. This ambivalent wordplay continues with the haphazard breakage of the stanzas, the occasional indentation, and the switching back and forth between italicized and non-italicized text that create a work whose body defies packaging. The text resists easy consumption through halting lines that stop and start and that frequently dissolve into silence as it struggles to locate meaning. In the line, “*this* my mother was my body” (149), the disruptive pause between “*this*” and “my mother” is where the heart of the text can be found. Overall, creative production transforms into a negotiated act that demands an attentiveness to the process of meaning-making.

Representation is a performance that propels the creative voice in the poem towards further identity exploration. This performance re-establishes connections that technoscience has severed by mapping and positioning the body in relation to its many flows. Textual embodiment exists within flux at the moments at which boundaries collapse and meaning emerges out of contestation. The final image of the blood cells under a microscope confronts the relationship of the body to the texture of the images and words that appear on the page. Their cyborg poetics moves towards awareness as it pieces text and meaning together:

i look at her and remembering comes flooding back to body

blood rushes to circulate some kind of lightness

and day to day motion becomes derailed for this most invisible of flurries (150)

The above lines exemplify a poetics that claims contingency as the driving force of meaning construction. The text stays fluid as one line leads onto another and a lack of punctuation keeps the words in constant connection. Moreover, the sheer number of verbs in these lines conveys a sense of change without the accompanying need for closure. The lines depict a body that is in the midst of “remembering” a past that is “flooding” back as its materiality “rushes,” “circulates,” and is in constant “motion.” The “derailment” at the end is yet another example of a text that disrupts the easy flow of words in order to consider what lies unspoken and “invisible.” The textual body undergoes a continuous exploration process that prevents it from closing off from possibility and leaves subjectivity in a space of productive ambivalence. As long as the poem moves, it can envision alternative ways of being that are committed to textuality that is dynamic, fluctuating, and interactive.

As a result, the text challenges the reproduction of technoscientific images by claiming materiality within the chaos and fragmentation of the creative process. The reconfigured maternal body is a creative force that defies the flatness of technoscientific

representations and reworks them into an embodied cyborg text. This poem is cyborgian because, like Haraway's cyborg, "it redefines the self by breaking out of the confined and fixed place of origin or 'home' to travel across the apparent certainties and stabilities of community identities. Yet it also holds onto a sense of locatedness in the impure space of complex power relations" (Gedalof "Identities in Transit" 351). In other words, the text travels to dismantle the boundaries that contain it within their binary logic but at the same time, it also claims a generative location at the point at which these boundaries are in disarray. For example, the lines, "*still / i am breathing deep / so as to never neglect / what her body is telling me what my body is telling me / without words, without gesture*" (150), demonstrate that speech is possible even in seeming silence. A cyborg poetics constructs new channels for the body to find agency where technoscience claims there is none. The poet answers the question, "*from where is the cause of my upheaval / this knotted gut / this gutted heart / this disheartened surgery of feeling?*" (149), with the following lines:

i am remembering the stillness of this moment
which reminds me of when i once had to be reminded of mortality, of body,
of blood
of when i was reminded to be still (150)

The reference to the "blood" and to "the stillness of the moment" attest to a body that will henceforth claim the materiality that emerges in the moment. Whereas science and technology want to forget material context, the text remembers the multiple and ever fluctuating connections of the body. The recognition that "this image: this is my blood / outside of me because i had forgotten" (151) reclaims ownership over once disconnected fragments and more importantly, over a renewed, cyborgian sense of materiality. The intermingling of images, text, and the poetic voice itself produces a textual body that delves into blood and guts and claims them for its own.

Remotely in Touch: Cyborg Poetic Performance

Remotely in Touch is a thirteen minute assemblage of music, text, imagery, narration, and video clips that brings together these numerous representational forms in a cyborg poetic performance. The piece organizes itself around the five elements of earth, fire, water, air, and love as it explores the body imagery that circulates in digital and visual technologies. Longing for body propels the work through spliced images that are individually isolated but that collectively disrupt a stable conception of text. This longing for body extends the concerns of the two “notes towards a body” texts in its explicit engagement of the body as a conglomeration of fragments that cross the borders of the natural and the technological. The fragments circulate within the video to depict the body as a layered and moving local site. The film includes images of Mars, a foetus in the womb, x-rayed hands, blood cells, volcanic smoke, worms burrowing in the earth, and individual bodies performing martial arts in the search for agency within the disorienting state of the body. The text literally explodes with its many representational fragments. It explores questions of representation and perception in a technoscientific society as it develops a new, agency-producing cyborg form. Taken as a whole, these various images and media refract the body through a new representational lens and mesh together to create a monstrous creative body. The piece is thus a simultaneous opening up and creating of a textual body through the blurring of representational borders.

The piece opens with the words, “are you / remotely / in touch” (*Remotely*), to introduce the paradoxical question that appears repeatedly throughout the piece. The body yearns for touch but inhabits a context in which it feels remote from its body and the many forces that circulate around it. The video work begins with the longing for

wholeness but finds the body quickly enmeshed in a multitude of natural and technological forces. The desire for connection amidst the alienating effects of technoscientific intervention is a palpable presence in the images and sounds of the video as it focuses on five elements that connote the basic and the “natural.” Most especially, love is one of the five elements that emphasizes the need for connection and interaction that the body lacks amidst the disorienting flows of technoscience. As Irene Gedalof asserts, it is time for the body to take a stand against dislocation for “what should be important then, even within the terms of a Deleuzian project, is *not* ‘the going,’ but a different kind of relationship with the space one inhabits, that resists the striations of binary logic” (“Identity in Transit” 343). The impetus to redefine a relationship to place becomes more crucial as the body becomes increasingly detached from the spaces in which it circulates. The film uses five elements that ground and give substance to the body before it then juxtaposes them against technoscientific images that expose how far the body has strayed from its initial base matter. The images of fire, earth, water, air, and love have become impure as they mix with the many other elements that now make up body.

The current impurity of the body makes it difficult for it to claim its multiple fragments as its own. The feelings of alienation and the struggle to locate a sense of place within the work contrast against the placelessness of science and technology. Space exploration emerges in the video as paradigmatic of a larger technoscientific strategy to alienate the body and displace it from a grounded “home.” A series of black and white images of Mars flash in the video to highlight current bodily alienation that one of its narrators reinforces with the words, “we search the world to find resources, maintaining a vestige of identity from what we are not. A spot in the sky without a trace of humanity” (*Remotely*). Science searches for resources in alien sites that take it further away from a sense of “humanity” and “identity.” Instead, the body becomes

increasingly enmeshed within the inhuman and technological as scientific exploration becomes normative. The narrator of the video draws attention to a world in which the alien soil of Mars has replaced the security and wholeness of the earth. She says that “in Chinese we say the earth bears and carries in receptive abandon. Yet this is not earth. Dusty, rocky Mars where soil cannot be earth and does not bear fruit” (*Remotely*). Whether it be in images of Mars or of the womb, the body lacks the ability to recognize and claim itself. Once again, the longing for body fuels the creative process that seeks to recover materiality through textual foreplay.

However, despite present alienation, the work finds location within these technoscientific flows as it achieves productive agency. The video commences with five elements but as its thirteen minutes unfold, more layers contribute to its textual fabric. The combining of underwater volcanic imagery with satellite imagery, images of Mars, and x-rayed hands, exposes the impurity and contradiction of current bodily context. Donna Haraway argues that “if technoscience by our moment in history is unmistakably ‘nature’ for us – and not just nature but nature-culture – then understanding technoscience is a way of understanding how natures and cultures have become one world” (qtd. in Goodeve 156-157). This one world emerges in the text through “natural” elements that intersect with technoscience in ways that call into question the untouched state of the body. The film uses the black and white images of Mars to question human complicity in the creation of an alienated bodily condition:

USE

BETRAY

DIVERT

ABANDON (*Remotely*)

These four verbs function as a call for individuals to hold themselves accountable for the misuse of the resources of the earth. The film questions the material effects attached to images that have used, betrayed, diverted, and abandoned the humanity of the earth. The spliced images, sounds, and text work together to confront the impure origins of science, technology, and capital, discovering that the alien is more intimately acquainted with the body than it first appeared to be.

The spliced images, sound, and text force an awareness of the body as a technologically invested entity that demands a cyborg poetic response. *Remotely in Touch* performs the impurity of the body by placing different media in coexistence without drawing them together into a single representation. N. Katherine Hayles writes, “Bruno Latour has argued that we have never been modern; the seriated history of cybernetics – emerging from networks at once materially real, socially regulated, and discursively constructed – suggests, for similar reasons, that we have always been posthuman” (291). Hayles makes comments that are relevant to a filmic performance that also exposes the body as a networked node. In other words, the posthuman like a cyborg poetics unmask wholeness as a construction that masks the position of the body within a network of technological and discursive connections. The exposure of fragmentation maps out a web of connections that challenge a singular reading of the body. This network of images jars, disconcerts, and connects to produce many different representations of the body. Creative movements are in dialogue with one another to prevent their voices from merging into stable meaning. For example, as images of smoke and fire appear on the video screen, a narrator declares that “fast movement will make me not breathe again, will catch my breath, inhabiting spirit gets lost with speed” (*Remotely*). The fire and the fiery words intersect to present a body that moves in and out of discourses and media in its search for meaning. The overlay of so many stimuli

ensures that the text is located in the zone where limits dissolve and come into question. The variation contained within this blurred space produces meaning that is in a state of becoming as it interacts and engages with its diverse connections.

This state of becoming is an argument for the body as an intersectional point. Hayles proposes, “when the human is seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to *depend* on the splice rather than being imperilled by it” (290). The images, sounds, and words form productive connections that strive to locate the body amidst all these flows. The words in the film, “things of the world are fleeting and transitory. There will be nothing left but this breath” (*Remotely*), describe a video project that races through images, sound, and written text to arrive at further ambivalence. The fleeting connections between the various images create textuality that is in tension with itself as meaning slips past the borders that it erects. The desire for connection in the face of disconnection keeps the representational process in dialogue with itself. The video is “a body, bursting in form of heat and light and energy” (*Remotely*) because of the sheer number of layers inserted into its textual body. Akin to the cyborg poetic performance in “notes towards a body II,” the film privileges movement even as it searches for “humanity” (*Remotely*) in many different images and sounds. The pleasure in movement derives from keeping negotiation in play and not permitting the body to settle into complacency.

However, despite the exploratory nature of the text, the video images are linked in their allegiance to the physical and textual body. The video fragments combat their alienation by relocating themselves in their connections to the other components that circulate within the piece. No matter where the text travels or to which speeds of exploration it reaches, it returns to the body and its materiality. The video clips are “too fast” and are “unable to be secured nor caged” (*Remotely*) because they are concerned with intensifying and energizing bodily connections. Donna Haraway

argues that “what I mean to emphasize is the *situatedness* of situated. In other words it is a way to get at the multiple modes of embedding that are about both place and space in the manner in which geographers draw that distinction” (qtd. in Goodeve 71). The text strives to find a new form of situatedness that challenges images that decontextualize. It eventually develops a sense of locatedness that pauses to situate the body within context before it shifts to its next line of flight. This materiality grounds itself in textuality that accepts fragmentation and then proceeds to work with it. The images of the rocky ground, of the worms burrowing, of the cells and organs of the body, and of the moving and producing human body, present bodily presence in slightly variant ways but together form an argument for a material presence. Despite their singularity, they each stress the need to keep the body at the forefront of the representational gaze.

These fragments appear in a strategic constellation that reclaims the bodies contained in these images. This materiality of ambiguity asserts presence in the pause between the destabilization and restabilization of borders, arguing that materiality still exists even in the images when the body seems most compromised. The reading of the body as ambiguous and compromised resonates with Hayles who comments that “located within the dialectic of pattern/randomness and grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information, the posthuman offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines” (287). The manipulation of the dialectic of pattern/randomness serves as a creative engine for reclaiming a body within technological flows:

presence

pattern

absence

randomness (*Remotely*)

The words that appear on the video screen stress that the interplay between seeming oppositions produces textuality. The paradoxical relationship between presence and absence, pattern and randomness, ensures that bodily texture is a contestation. Each word and image fight for a materiality that takes what is fixed and present and looks deeper to uncover and engage with their silences and inconsistencies.

In particular, the footage of the writer who is in the process of putting words to paper is a reminder that the creative body is also a part of the network of meaning that it creates. The creative body is then made an explicit presence in the video not only to draw attention to the constructed nature of the representational project, but also to recognize that meaning-making is a dynamic and interactive process. The image of the creative body keeps the text and the representational gaze in conversation. The meshing of these various media with the body of the writer shows that, as Hayles writes, “it is not a question of leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local, and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis” (291). The writer finds location through her awareness of her position in relation to the web of images that she maps out. Moreover, the writer in motion shows that embodiment emerges out of fluctuation. As the camera pans over a rocky piece of ground, a voice declares, “we have traveled so far to see. We are at the beginning and the end, rotating and reinforcing” (*Remotely*). In other words, groundedness occurs as the writer and the other bodies in the text rotate and reinforce each other in their search for enlightenment. The film finds embodiment as it creates textuality through the representation process.

This creative work witnesses the birth of the bodies of the text and the poet herself as it explores where the “longing for body” will take it. Irene Gedalof argues that the birth of a body that claims materiality within change and fluidity offers individual subjects opportunities for agency:

Drawing on the break-points and dissonances in dominant models of identity, we can argue with Haraway that birth is always the birth of (an)other, and not the reproduction of the same. A differently imagined body and birth might provide a different basis on which the birth-based identities of communities are imagined, one which places change and fluidity-fluency at its centre. (*Against Purity* 220)

Remotely in Touch births two texts through its struggles within silence and ambiguity. The two bodies that emerge from this creative project are both cyborgs in their meshing of capital and technoscience with a variety of representational media. More significantly, these creative productions differentiate themselves and generate more energy as they speak of their individuality. The voice in the video describes this creative process in the following way: “I have searched dark and anti-matter for life. Does not yield heat willingly nor easily. Not as this body with desire. Her presence wills body into light” (*Remotely*). In the search for “light,” the film delves into “dark” and anti-matter” and eventually locates itself within the efforts to construct textuality. It finds generative agency within the gaps, silences, and disruptions of textuality itself. The birth of the text is a fraught passage into meaning; it represents a hard fought struggle that claims textuality word by word and image by image. The advice, “gently label it / as ‘thinking’ / then let it go” (*Remotely*), encapsulates a creative project that creates a body while still allowing it to exceed the borders of its representations.

Consequently, in all three works, the poet responds to the longing for body with a creative voice that engages in a cyborg poetics that speaks to the current destabilized identity conditions that face Asian Canadian writers and their texts. For so long on the margins of Asian Canadian literature and its criticism, Laiwan moves to the forefront of the critical lens as her cyborg poetics offers a condensed example of the power of textuality to disrupt, question, and destabilize once naturalized boundaries. This

textuality, in its inaccessibility and refusal to stabilize into meaning, demands an active reading process that keeps the body contingent and evolving. The desire for form is finally realized in the silences, pauses, and gaps of textuality in which the text struggles to produce meaning. In the end, Laiwan uses her poetic voice to bring about the birthing of two cyborg bodies, that of the poet and the text itself, as she seizes the breakdown of boundaries to generate new creative life. This commitment to textuality, in all its ambivalence and disarray, connects Laiwan to the many other Asian Canadian writers and critics who also seek to realise the potentials of potent textuality. Ultimately, the works that emerge from her cyborg borderspace perform a future for Asian Canadian literature that locates itself in the productive possibilities of textuality itself.

She said be still and learn how to move me (*Remotely*)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Cyborg Textuality: Asian Canadian and the Nation

“We have traveled so far to see. We are at the beginning and the end, rotating and reinforcing.” (Laiwan *Remotely*).

This critical performance has demonstrated that the future of Asian Canadian literature and its criticism lies with the works themselves as they leverage the power of textuality to generate more enabling cyborg identity configurations. The interweaving of words, discourses, and contexts into a national identity has had material effects for those who have found themselves living according to its fabricated texture. Throughout its history, the Canadian state has proven adept at constructing a national texture whose imposity has enabled it to mask the heterogeneous and discordant elements within its borders. However, the now exposed texture of the nation means that power lies in the act of reading as well. Ultimately, whoever has the power to read, also has the power to determine the form and content of future textuality. Asian Canadian writers are challenging the power of the nation-state to claim future textuality by claiming the right to reread the past out of its naturalized interpretations. These naturalized interpretations persist because the nation-state retains its own reading power despite its altered position amidst shifting global conditions. Writers must continue to mobilize the category to disrupt, complicate, and break apart new bounded readings of the past. Asian Canadian critics must also perform their own disruptive voicings as they realize their own rereading potential. In these disruptive

efforts, writers and critics connect themselves to creative artists and community activists who are also mobilizing the category Asian Canadian to effect change. Two recent events illustrate that national textuality and the role of the Asian Canadian subject within this textuality are still ongoing processes that demand equally interconnected reading and reconfiguring strategies.

With a Canadian federal election imminent, the Liberal minority government negotiated a settlement that aimed to recognize the past imposition of head taxes and exclusionary measures against Chinese Canadians. On November 17, 2005, the National Congress of Chinese Canadians (NCCC) announced that it had reached an agreement with the government for a \$12.5 million payout to set up a Chinese Canadian Community Foundation that would distribute funds to various Chinese Canadian community groups. The government would first allocate “a \$2.5-million contribution that would be aimed at projects, such as museum exhibits and school programs, that highlight laws that limited and then banned Chinese immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (O’Neil B1). However, amidst the celebratory words and jubilant handshaking of government officials and NCCC representatives, other Chinese Canadians came forth to voice their opposition to what they called a “secret deal” (Keung “Group Upset” A8) that sacrificed “true reconciliation and redress” for “political expediency” (B. Lee C7). Bill C-333, the “Immigrants of Chinese Origin Exclusionary Measures Recognition Act,” sparked considerable controversy because it not only removed the language of apology from the agreement, but it also failed to offer compensation to individual victims. Other Chinese Canadian groups, like the Chinese Canadian National Council that had registered more than 4,000 head-tax payers and their families since 1982, had been left out of negotiations that named the NCCC as the sole negotiating partner of the government. The agreement with Chinese Canadians

followed Italian and Ukrainian Canadian settlements that also made no mention of an apology or individual compensation.

On a first reading, the agreement appeared laudable. The Liberal government had recognized the injustices of the past and was offering a financial package to back their conciliatory gesture to Chinese Canadians. However, on further readings, the settlement revealed the complex management of past disruption that underlay this carefully worded federal Act. In reaching this agreement, the government was constructing a particular reading of the past that imposed closure while disclaiming culpability for the treatment of early Chinese Canadians. The state was willing to write exclusionary measures into the texture of national history because these measures were contained within the language of “sedative politics” that “attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them (Kamboureli 82). The result was an “acknowledgement” in a legislative form that smoothed out past disruption and more disturbingly, contained it within the present reading lens of the state. Brad Lee in an editorial in *The Vancouver Sun* wrote that “historians who review the implications of Bill C-333 on social justice will not see words like ‘unjust,’ ‘discrimination,’ ‘racism,’ nor any of their derivatives. Equally, they will see no evidence of ‘reconciliation,’ ‘redress,’ ‘reparations’ or ‘compensation’” (C7). Instead, the Canadian state cleansed the agreement of any language that would illegitimate its power to produce *the* definitive reading of the past. The result was a packaging of early state discriminatory practices into a parliamentary text that upheld the very legislative power for which it superficially attoned. As Lee argued, “the backward reasoning for watering down the text and intent of the bill is that the head tax and Exclusion Act were legal at the time so the government bears no actual responsibility for what happened” (C7). The government reasoned that individual compensation was

unnecessary because of the legality of exclusionary policies; any monetary commitments represented state benevolence rather than an admission of guilt.

Moreover, the Act also worked to silence competing readings by naming a single group as the representative of all Chinese Canadians who had been subject to the exclusionary state legislation. Susan Eng, co-chair of the Ontario Coalition of Chinese Head Tax Payers and Families, wrote that “it is outrageous that Canada’s Minister of Multiculturalism Raymond Chan would say publicly that he is still open to negotiations with other groups while concluding a secret deal with his political cronies” (qtd. in Keung “Group Upset” A8). The Liberal government had removed other groups from the compensation package in order to ensure that only one reading of the past emerged from the head tax talks. The unified front of the government and the NCCC covered over the dissonant voices of those Chinese Canadians who refused to accept their relegation to the margins of the negotiating process. Instead, the state privileged a Chinese Canadian organization that subscribed to a “no apology no compensation” (B. Lee C7) policy that simultaneously raised and suppressed memories of past discriminatory legislation. The question remained whether the NCCC had sacrificed the individual experiences of those who had suffered under head tax and exclusionary legislation in its rush to reach a settlement with the government. The Liberal Multiculturalism Minister, Raymond Chan, reduced early Chinese Canadian hardships to a common immigrant experience when he explained, “I saw that generations after generations of immigrants, no matter whether they grew up in Asia, have faced some kind of discrimination” (qtd. in O’Neil B1). The Congress and the Canadian state jointly agreed to allow the goodwill gesture of the present to overshadow the racist legislation of the past. Without “true” redress, the bodies of the Chinese labourers in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and *The Concubine’s Children* continued to linger within the

national womb where they demanded an agreement whose text did justice to the splintered and ambiguous legacy of the past.

However, the federal Liberal government had miscalculated the response to what they perceived to be “a politically beneficial resolution” (Cernetig C2). Immediately after the announcement of the agreement, competing voices emerged to assert their readings of the past. Other Chinese Canadians disrupted the efforts of the government to transcend history as they spoke the language of apology and compensation that was missing from the state Act. While the Act had the backing of legislative authority, these other voices had their own power to speak their “illegitimate” claims. For example, Brad Lee challenged the right of the NCCC to speak for all Chinese Canadians when he wrote of his own specific connections to head tax legislation: “(Never mind that the \$500 my grandfather paid to enter Canada, along with the varying amounts from more than 82,000 other Chinese, had generated \$23 million by 1923 for government coffers. In contrast, non-Chinese immigrants were offered a quarter-section of land to settle here)” (C7). While Lee bracketed these statements, his words exceeded the space of his newspaper editorial. His words merely appeared to be contained within his column just as state culpability appeared to be invisible within the recent “Recognition Act.” Lee’s words were representative of many other texts that questioned the legitimacy of both the NCCC and the Canadian state to determine the fate of the Chinese Canadian redress movement. In highlighting inconsistent and discriminatory past and present legislation, Lee and these other dissonant voices circulated competing texts that unsettled the state authorized reading of Chinese Canadian history.

Thus, what started out as a politically “expedient” way of appeasing Chinese Canadians prior to a November 30th election call, turned into a public outcry as critics of the Act became increasingly more vocal. These critics brought the issue to the

forefront of the election campaign as all of the major political parties offered their reading of the agreement as they vied for the support of Chinese Canadian voters. In a bid to outdo the incumbent Liberals, the Conservatives, New Democrats, and Bloc Québécois endorsed the request of the Ontario Coalition of Head Tax Payers and Families to “issue a formal apology in the House of Commons, rescind the deal, and negotiate with head-tax payer families” (Keung “Liberals Promise” A9). The Liberals meanwhile, refused to give into public and political pressure by continuing to claim that they were wary of the legal repercussions of a formal apology. As Raymond Chan explained, “My reason for not apologizing is because of the legal position that was given to me by my department,” “if there’s no legal consequences, I would be the first one to ask the government to apologize” (Cernetig C2). However, the issue refused to fade away and eventually, then Prime Minister Paul Martin offered a “personal” apology on Chinese-language radio after Industry Minister David Emerson suggested that “the party had new legal opinions that put the government in the clear legally” (Keung “Liberals Promise” A9). Raymond Chan was forced to change his position and admit that “we will do whatever we can to apologize and make sure the taxpayers would not be exposed to unlimited financial liability” (Mertl A1). Raymond, however, was still hesitant to consider individual redress or to rescind the \$2.5 million agreement-in-principle that the government had already signed with the NCCC (Keung “Liberals Promise” A9). In the final days of the election campaign, the head tax issue became a war of ambiguous and often changeable words that saw politicians, activists, and many other various groups fight for the right to define future national textuality.

The defeat of the Liberals on January 23 and the election of a minority Conservative government failed to bring the issue to a conclusive resolution. Instead, it lingered on as a question mark that demanded a response from the newly elected federal officials. In his first news conference following the election, Prime Minister-

Designate Stephen Harper affirmed his campaign pledge, stating that “the Chinese Canadian community deserves an apology for the head tax and appropriate acknowledgement and redress” (qtd. in Scott B1). On June 22, Harper stood up in front of the House of Commons and said, “on behalf of the people and Government of Canada, we offer a full apology to Chinese-Canadians for the head tax and express our deepest sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants” (qtd. in Mulgrew A1). Despite such words, the implications of this “apology” and the accompanying compensation package are still unwritten. Irregardless of this outcome of the Conservative pledge, the head tax issue has demonstrated that the language of the state will remain uncertain provided that other groups continue to claim their right to create and circulate competing national readings. As the Conservative government prepares to produce its own national textuality, new voices will emerge to contest, challenge, and rewrite the textual documents that it constructs. The borders between past, present, and future will therefore continue to exist in unsettled and fluctuating negotiation.

While the head tax issue demonstrates the continued efforts of the Canadian state to rewrite the national façade, one other recent event illustrates the potential for new and more generative reclamations of Asian Canadian history. On November 3, 2005, the Save the Kogawa House Committee was successful in its bid to get Vancouver City Council to pass a 120-day order delaying the demolition of the home Joy Kogawa lived in before she was interned in the Slocan Valley in 1942.¹ The owner purchased the house without any knowledge of its past and intended to demolish and rebuild on the site. The house and its connections to the wartime history of the Kogawa family were under threat of erasure until the Committee launched a campaign to save it from demolition. The Committee had 120 days, effective November 30, to raise the

approximately \$750,000 needed to repurchase the West 64th Avenue house at fair market value. It sought the support of the federal government, corporations, foundations, the Vancouver Olympics, as well as members of the public as it worked to prevent the erasure of an important site of Japanese Canadian history. The project received the endorsement of many writers' associations as well as organizations such as the Vancouver Public Library, the Vancouver Opera, Heritage Vancouver, the Alliance for Arts and Culture, the National Association of Japanese Canadians, and the National Nikkei Museum. It also received the support of The Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC) who agreed to lead the campaign to save the house. If successful in its fundraising efforts, the Committee would then go about converting the house into a writers-in-residence centre for writers who would stay within the house for approximately one month each.

The Committee proposes a future for the house that is markedly different from the one that its owner planned. The struggle occurs over the place of history within the present and more importantly, the consequences of dehistoricization. The fact that the owner was initially ignorant of the history of the house demonstrates the amnesia of the present. Amela Simic, Executive Director of the Playwrights Guild of Canada, underlines the need to remember when she writes that “we think that it would be a grave mistake to allow the demolition of Joy Kogawa’s home, which is an important landmark for Canadian culture and Canadian history in general” (qtd. on *Save*). While the owner wished to construct a new building by covering over and essentially forgetting the past, the Committee envisions creating a present layer for the house that remains contextualized within its internment history. Past and present would intersect to produce a local space committed to not only the particularities of context, but also the vital importance of staying connected to the many layers of the past. As Brian Brett, Chair of the Writers Union of Canada, explains, the site at West 64th would serve a dual

purpose as both “a literary landmark” and a “writers-in-residence centre” (qtd. on *Save*). In effect, the Committee intends on transforming the house into a borderspace where new literary production coexists with the constraints and violent legacies of the past.

Consequently, the planned residence commits itself to creativity that stays grounded in context. The Save Kogawa House project is an affirmation of the agency of textuality that reclaims location within a multi-layered local space. It is fitting that a house whose painful history generated creative work like *Obasan* holds the possibility of housing other writers who will produce their own rereadings of place, history, and individual subjectivity. Brian Busby, President of the Federation of B.C. Writers, writes that “the emerging consensus favours employing the house as a new cultural centre that would highlight the contributions of Vancouver artists from all backgrounds – not as a shrine but rather as a working place and as a place for work to be seen” (qtd. on *Save*). Busby emphasizes that the Kogawa home would be a meeting point where a diverse group of writers would come together in an active and ongoing engagement with textuality. He argues for a “working place” over a “shrine” out of a belief that cultural production is a constantly negotiated process that seeks to open up the past to new readings as opposed to enclosing it within a single, fixed interpretation.

The house represents a new form for Asian Canadian literary production, one that thrives on interconnectivity and dynamic interchange. In short, the envisioned Kogawa house would be a generative womb-space for future cultural production. This womb-space would produce textual forms that are situated in the ambiguities and fluctuations of an interconnected borderspace. While Asian Canadian writers like Larissa Lai and Hiromi Goto are claiming new textual forms of fragmentation and ambiguity, the Save the Kogawa House Committee is proposing its own example of this new cyborg form. The Committee is mobilizing change by bringing together a

multitude of individuals who are working in coalition to achieve a new writers' residence. This coalition functions as an assemblage of literary, artistic, and cultural organizations whose boundaries defy fixed categorization. The coalition stands as more of a commitment to effecting change by breaking down and deterritorializing constructed borders than as a definitional category for belonging. Constance Rooke, President of PEN Canada, appeals to potential supporters of the project with the words, "you have an opportunity here to do something of historical importance: a chance to turn threatened destruction into a very public gesture of preservation, reparation, and new life" (qtd. on *Save*). Rooke positions the house as a new site for performing creative work that emerges out of past oppression. The hope is that the writers-in-residence project will bring forth diverse creative output out of a recontextualized and dynamic local space.

Despite the hopeful future that the house promises, the Kogawa project is also a reminder of the precarious nature of any bid to reclaim a local space for change. The project is contingent on the authorization of the Vancouver City Council as well as the resources of governmental and corporate groups who have their own motivations for supporting the restoration of the Kogawa site. Moreover, the Committee must often use the language of Canadian multiculturalism and the global marketplace as a means of legitimating its fundraising efforts. Brian Brett speaks of the house as a place where "Canadian writers and writers from abroad could write first hand about our complex and evolving multi- and inter-cultural society and how different values and traditions can peacefully interact"; Brian Busby meanwhile stresses that the Committee plans to have "the facility in operation well before the 2010 Olympic Games" (qtd. on *Save*). Both statements stress the utility of a writers' residence on a Japanese Canadian heritage site that will help to brand Vancouver as a multicultural metropolis positioned within an increasingly globalized world. It remains to be seen whether, if successful, the

Committee manages to prevent the house from becoming a shrine that serves more as a testament to governmental and corporate “goodwill” than as a reclaimed local space for creative work. And while the project represents the possibilities of coalitional politics, financial constraints and the laws of the marketplace will be the final deciding factors in determining whether the Kogawa project is successful. In the end, organizers narrowly missed having to take out a mortgage on the historic site (Griffin F5), saved by a last minute donation from an anonymous corporate donor. However, even after this purchase, the Kogawa house story continues to unfold. As Joy Kogawa says, “the story is being written right now,” “we don’t know what the ending will be. Will the house survive? Well, Obasan survived. So I wait, and I watch” (qtd. in Hutchinson A6).

The fates of the Kogawa house and the Head Tax redress movement are uncertain. Nonetheless, these events demonstrate that the nation continues to evolve as it negotiates new relationships to the interconnected national and transnational concerns that circulate within it. They also illustrate that the cyborg border-crossing of Asian Canadian writers is occurring within a context in which activists, community leaders, and politicians are also deploying Asian Canadian as a means of constructing and disrupting new identity borders. The case of the Kogawa house and the Chinese Canadian head tax agreement demonstrate that agency lies in claiming and reconfiguring the content and form of past, present, and future textuality. They serve as reminders that the shifting textures of national and Asian Canadian identities blur and intertwine with those created through literary production. Because the nation-state continues to construct a textuality of coherence, Asian Canadian writers must continue to pursue textual forms of fragmentation and contestation in order to fight against the reappropriative writing practices of the state.

More importantly, the power to engage with these new textual forms ultimately relies upon an Asian Canadian critical lens that meets fragmentation with its own

strategies of disruption, deterritorialization, and reconfiguration. This dissertation has traced the shifts and turns of earlier and more recent Asian Canadian literary texts in order to demonstrate that Asian Canadian has and continues to derive strength from its potent cyborg textuality. This cyborg textuality continually faces threats of appropriation from those who wish to read Asian Canadian into a static identity space, but Asian Canadian writers will destabilize these readings as they insist upon their power to generate new and richly complex creative work. Throughout these chapters, a multiplicity of works, contexts, and identities have intersected to produce an assemblage of readings that are located in the possibility of a conscious, continually negotiated critical moment. This assemblage represents one example of the type of work that Asian Canadian has the potential to produce as critics mobilize it as an altering critical medium. The future of Asian Canadian criticism is uncertain but hopeful precisely because it depends on the creative work, critical writing, and identity negotiations that are both occurring now and are yet to come.

NOTES

Chapter One:

- ¹ Asian Canadian criticism is composed of numerous critical articles on literary texts and more general reflections on Asian Canadian as a cultural and critical formation but overall, does not cohere into a unified body of criticism. The category possesses considerable critical potential precisely because it has not yet crystallized into a fixed definitional space.

This reading of Asian Canadian criticism is part of this dissertation's extended engagement with the question "What is Asian Canadian?" that resists seeing Asian Canadian as a definable identity space. It proposes instead that Asian Canadian is a signifier without a stable, unitary signified whose strength lies in its ability to produce and grow through fragmentation and disorder. The many elements that compose this category are individually significant but also interdependent. The term is a body of literature, a body of criticism, a state production, a resistant category that provides ground-level social and political agency, as well as a lived experience for those who call themselves Asian Canadian. The term currently circulates in many spaces that position the category in various ways vis-à-vis the nation but that share a common goal of claiming the nation. However, despite their surface claims to unity, each of these individual elements are themselves unstable and evolving definitions of what constitutes Asian Canadian identity.

- ² The Dominion of Canada was formed on July 1st, 1867 after the introduction and passing of the British North America Act (BNA) in March 1867. Canadian confederation was the product of economic considerations, security fears, and changing relations with Britain that made the idea of political union more appealing to the politicians and businesspeople of the British North American colonies. The BNA was a "top-down exercise" (Conrad et al. 608) that politically brought together three disparate colonies and their residents. The union emerged from considerable debate between those who were highly sceptical of a larger political formation and those who believed that a united Canada would lead to considerable economic benefits. Margaret Conrad et al. argue that the Canadian nation-state was a political exercise that artificially constructed unity out of heterogeneity: "from the beginnings of human occupation of what is now Canada, the peoples of the area had shaped a multitude of societies, sometimes in harmony with nature, sometimes in blind disregard of nature's limits. Collectively they would also shape the 'new nationality' – in reality a gathering of nationalities within a single nation-state. The sun that shone brilliantly in clear blue skies over most of the new nation-state on 1 July 1867 seemed to announce new beginnings; but the people who, on that day, became citizens of Canada were not marked out for a particular destiny. Rather they would continue to shape their own destinies, both in concert and in conflict with others. Confederation on 1 July 1867 was simply a document and a territorial map" (608)
- ³ The Dominion of Canada that came into being on 1 July 1867 united many disparate peoples under the banner of a nation-state that purported to represent them all in a single imagined community. "'With the first dawn of this gladsome midsummer morn,' trumpeted the Toronto *Globe*, 'we hail this birthday of a new nationality'" (qtd. in Conrad et al. 606-7).
- ⁴ Throughout this dissertation, the term "nation" functions as a signifier without a signified. "The nation" is a constructed projection of the state that masks the fragmentary and heterogeneous make-up of its identity space. The state attempts to naturalize its representations of what constitutes "the nation."
- ⁵ See Chapter Eight for a discussion of the current debate over a pending Head Tax settlement with the federal government.

- ⁶ New immigration regulations were implemented on February 1, 1962. They proposed to evaluate immigrants based on education, skill, or other relevant qualifications without regard to colour, race, or national origin. Shortly after, during a period of significant economic change, the Department of Manpower and Immigration commissioned a policy document to reevaluate Canada's immigration policy. The White Paper was tabled in Parliament in 1966. Among its many recommendations, the Paper advocated the increased entry of skilled immigrants and the reduction in the number of unskilled and uneducated immigrants. The recommendations of the White Paper in 1966 led to the implementation of the Norms of Assessment Points Scheme in 1967. Prospective immigrants would be assigned a score in categories that were divided into short-term factors (arranged employment or designated occupation, knowledge of English and/or French, relative in Canada, area of destination) and long-term factors (education and training, personal qualities, occupation demand, occupation skill, and age).
- ⁷ "The dominant trend in immigrants' place of origin was the steady, but steep, reduction in emigration from Europe as a proportion of total immigration. This change reflected the adoption of the points system in 1967. In 1962, 78 per cent of all immigrants came from Europe, a figure that fell to 38 per cent in 1976. British immigration fell from 28 to 16 per cent, and Italian immigration from 17 to 3 per cent, over this period. In the late 1960s, the proportion of immigrants coming from Asia and the Caribbean increased dramatically, from 10 per cent in 1965-6 to 23 per cent in 1969-70. By 1976, more than a quarter of all arriving immigrants were Asian in origin" (Kelley and Trebilcock 348)
- ⁸ Between the 1971 introduction of a multicultural policy and the Multiculturalism Act in 1988, the government continued to preoccupy itself with immigration issues. In order to aid their development of new immigration policies, the government commissioned a study to provide factual information and policy recommendations. The result was the Green Paper or *A Report of the Canadian Immigration and Population Study* that was tabled in the House of Commons in February 1975. The Green Paper controversially attributed many of Canada's population problems to immigration. Kelley and Trebilcock state that "the Green Paper went on to detail the increase in racial tensions that accompanied the changing ethnic composition of Canada as a direct result of the 1962 and 1967 changes to immigration policy" (372).
- ⁹ In December 2001, the senate introduced a motion that designated May as Asian Heritage Month. Its Official Declaration declares that "Asian Heritage Month offers all Canadians an opportunity to learn more about the history of Asian Canadians and to celebrate their contributions to the growth and prosperity of Canada" (*Asian Heritage*). The Department of Canadian Heritage through the Minister of State (Multiculturalism) also sponsors and provides funding for other festivities and events like the Vancouver Powell Street Festival that "celebrate" Asian Canadian culture within Canada.
- ¹⁰ "Writing Thru Race: A Conference of First Nations Writers and Writers of Colour" was held in Vancouver from June 30 to July 3, 1994 and was organized by the Racial Minority Writers' Committee, a section of the Writers' Union of Canada. The decision to limit the enrolled participants to First Nations writers and writers of colour sparked a public controversy that saw mainstream media and Canadian politicians launch an attack against the conference and its organizers for their supposed exclusionary policies. After the resulting public and political storm, the federal government bowed to these pressures and withdrew its support and \$22,500 funding for the event. The event went ahead as scheduled.

In the summer of 1999, four boats from the Fujian Provinces in China carrying 599 migrants arrived off the shores of British Columbia. Their arrival resulted in much public and political debate and outcry over Canadian immigration and refugee laws. These migrants were kept in prison detention centres in British Columbia while they waited for the long and slow

processing of their refugee claims. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration responded to the crisis by undertaking a study on the refugee status determination system and Canadian border control.

Both of these incidents underlined the continued anxieties surrounding the maintenance of Canadian borders.

Chapter Two:

- ¹ Then Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier stressed his ambitions for Canada when he declared in 1904 that “the twentieth century shall be filled by Canada” (qtd. in Finkel 170).
- ² Paul Yee writes of Canada’s use of Chinese labour for its nation-building initiatives. He writes that “between 1881 and 1885 seventeen thousand Chinese came to Canada and many worked on the railway” (17).
- ³ This prologue is set three years before the completion of the CPR. Lord Strathcona drove the last spike of the CPR at Craigellachie, B.C., in 1895.
- ⁴ I use “White” as a signifier with a complex array of shifting and negotiated referents. I read it as a term that masks a host of discursive and material assumptions that regulate the division between “White” and “non-White.” In other words, “Whiteness” projects the appearance of imposity and stability and is as much of a construction as other “racial” and cultural categories. Nonetheless, despite its constructed quality, the category has material repercussions for those who are able to belong within “Whiteness” as well as for those who fall outside of its regulated bounds. The very instability of the category requires constant and anxious border regulation. For example, the early Canadian nation-state claimed origins through “Whiteness” in order to obscure the cultural heterogeneity of the nation, as well as to place a unequivocal binary division between itself and those who it positioned as “outsiders.” However, this “Whiteness” was always contingent and under threat from those bodies that blurred its carefully constructed limits.
- ⁵ While in 1882, John A. Macdonald said to British Columbia’s *Amor de Cosmos*, “it is simply a question of alternatives – either you must have this labour or you cannot have the railway” (qtd. in Anderson 51), by 1900, Chinese labourers had “outgrown their usefulness” (Anderson 61).
- ⁶ See Chapter Eight for a discussion of recent negotiations with the Canadian government to “redress” head tax and exclusionary legislation against Chinese Canadians.
- ⁷ This “Humiliation Day” marked the virtual cessation of Chinese immigration into Canada with only forty-four Chinese people entering the country in the twenty-four years after 1923 (Yee 53).
- ⁸ Patricia Roy substantiates these observations, writing that “in 1927 the registrar of vital statistics reported that the natural increase of the Chinese was at a virtual standstill. If there were no new immigration, the number of Chinese residents would decline as its largely male population returned to China or died” (*A White Man’s Province* 55-56).
- ⁹ Patricia Roy’s reference to British Columbia as “a White Man’s Province” and Peter Ward’s reference to “White Canada Forever” highlight mainstream Canada’s impetus to create the illusion of Whiteness. Roy writes, “of British Columbia’s half-million residents in 1921, slightly less than half had been born in Canada; only 27 percent were natives of the province” (*A White Man’s Province* 55).

Chapter Three:

- ¹ Patricia Roy writes that “Japan’s importance was recognized internationally, and the British Empire had negotiated several treaties with her. Because of Japanese pride and British alliances, British Columbians discovered that even ingenious restrictions on Japanese immigration ran afoul of ‘imperial reasons,’ that the only diplomatic way of halting Japanese immigration was by the Japanese government limiting emigration” (*A White Man’s Province* 93).
- ² Patricia Roy speaks of the early history of the Japanese in British Columbia: “The white fishermen were bitter towards the Japanese, who they increasingly feared would work for lower wages and ultimately displace both them and the Indians in the fisheries” (*A White Man’s Province* 85). She details that the checking of Japanese competition increased in the interwar years of 1919-30: “in the more prosperous fishing and lumbering industries, where labour organizations were weak, the Asian question was a source of division. Nevertheless, federal and provincial politicians legislated to push Asians out of fishing and lumbering respectively. They were among the few British Columbians with a persistent interest in checking Asian economic competition and preserving the province for the white race” (*The Oriental Question* 90).
- ³ Ken Adachi writes that Japanese Canadians represented to White Canada a “burdensome, distracting element in the early months of 1942. Their mass removal, it might well have been argued, would greatly simplify the task of defending the coastline against possible invasion, of removing the source of widespread apprehension among the white population which might become the focus for localized, but nonetheless serious, community disorders, and permit the concentration of energies and resources on the war effort” (211)
- ⁴ See Chapter Eight for a discussion of the current efforts to save Kogawa house from demolition.
- ⁵ Kogawa’s sequel narrative, *Itsuka*, continues to work within the nation as it charts the involvement of Aunt Emily and Naomi in the Japanese Canadian redress movement. The text has just recently been republished in a new revised edition entitled *Emily Kato*.

Chapter Four:

- ¹ In 1992, the Vancouver Public Library selected *The Jade Peony* as the first text in its “One Book One Vancouver” (OBOV) project that claims to be “a book club for the entire city, cultivating a culture of reading and discussion in Vancouver by bringing people together around one great book” (*One Book*). The official status of the novel as *the* representation of Chinese Canadian history cedes Chinese Canadians limited domestic territory without requiring a questioning of the overall borders of the domestic space. The library is explicit about the conflation of the literary with the commodified on its OBOV website:

The success of the first was outstanding. The inaugural book was checked out 7,000 times; between 1,500 and 2,000 people attended OBOV events; 215 people registered their participation; 6,000 copies of the book were sold in BC; and the book was catapulted onto the BC Bestseller list for 13 weeks! (*One Book*)

In other words, the effectiveness of the text relies on its capacity to be consumed and reconsumed as quickly and as frequently as possible. The OBOV status of Choy’s text reflects the success of narratives that replicate dominant representational paradigms.

In 2005, the VPL selected Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* as its OBOV title. The selection occurred 60 years after the close of World War II, 24 years after the text was initially published, and 25 years after the text won the *Books in Canada* First Novel Award and was selected as the Canadian Authors’ Association Book of the Year. While the choice raised further awareness

of the text and Japanese Canadian internment history, it also signified the risks of reappropriation in the construction of new, more “liberal” and often, more market-driven readings of the past.

- ² Wayson Choy’s sequel, *All that Matters*, retells the events in *The Jade Peony* from the perspective of the eldest brother, Kiam.

Chapter Eight:

- ¹ See the Save Kogawa House website at <http://www.kogawahouse.com>

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