

2023-06-01

Of Ice Cream, Potatoes, and Kimono-Clad Japanese Women: Forgetting and Remembering the Japanese Racialization of Lethbridge's Sensuous Geographies

Aoki, Darren

<https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/21351>

University of Athabasca Press

All content in PEARL is protected by copyright law. Author manuscripts are made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the details provided on the item record or document. In the absence of an open licence (e.g. Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher or author.

signs for Wall Drug spaced miles apart, each with a unique hand-painted style, each with a clever slogan promising novelty and refreshment. *Free Ice Water, Wall Drug*: a painting of a cartoon donkey drinking from a trough where a cartoon man lies cooling. *Something to Crow About, Wall Drug*: a painting of a cartoon rooster calling into the dawn. The space between the signs is an ETT, a fleeting moment between a here and a there, the literal manifestation of the urgent distance between desire and the realization of a promise.

Queer theorist Aren Aizura's important work on trans movement, migration, and mobility unfolds within a context of gender reassignment surgery and other transition related motivators. Aizura, building on the work of Jay Prosser (1998), points productively toward the flattened narratives of arrival in a "new" gender and the way in which travelogues use the movement from a here to a there as an oversimplified metaphorical device for transition (Aizura 2018). But I am a basic bitch, and my focus is far less productive and far hornier. My focus is on the erotics that must be (un)mapped as its own temporal territory when a trans body spreads itself lustily across landmasses. It is less about travellers and travelogues, non-arrival, and metaphor and much, much more about the pictures of my transsexual junk I took in the cramped train toilet to send to another transsexual thousands of kilometres away.

I write to Simon in our shared doc,

ETTs must be moved through, felt through. I am a Californian and driving comes as naturally as breathing, as eating, as fucking does to me. I'm not giving a car to my mother. She is paying me for my time and expenses after all. But perhaps I am gifting her the trans ephemeral space that opens up and stays open between us for hours and hours and hours. Hours during which I think about what my mother will do with the car. Will she care for it? Or wreck it? Will she allow herself to be helped by me? Loved?

What a useless gift, this ephemeral trans territory: as soon as I arrive at her house, the trans territory will close and the gift will mean nothing, will not exist. "He is on his way here" is so different, so much more poignant than "He drove from Michigan to Washington." When I started growing a beard years after going on testosterone, I was on the way somewhere again, after having already arrived in "being a

walls, and an indoor courtyard is done up in raw wood panelling to make you feel like you're walking down a Western film set.

man” and being sad that wherever I’d arrived, it was now a here and no longer my beautiful there.

He writes about driving around the deserts of southern California in his Corolla, about all the things one can do in a car when in motion and when not. He says driving makes him feel powerful. In a sentence, he lists fear, desire, and driving, in that order. Writing this, I wish desperately that I could quote him for this paper, but it just isn’t possible at this very moment.

It is early June 2019, and I am faced with the task of writing a chapter about an ETT that has closed, has ended, has been erased from the map. I have just finished my MFA thesis show—the Chico California work—and I am exhausted, empty, and suicidally depressed. I think daily about throwing myself from the High Level Bridge or hanging myself from the river valley cottonwoods or even just walking into the prairie with a bottle of whisky on a very cold night. *What better way to know a place than to know all the ways you can die in it?* But I don’t do any of these things. Instead, I task myself with writing about someone who spoke to me every day for three months and then spoke to me not at all. I seal a rent in trans time, an escape hatch in the geography of belonging, and in doing so, acknowledge that when I chose the word *ephemeral*, I meant it.

It is late 2018, early 2019. What I do not realize is that my emotional state is being chemically affected by my acne medication and a too high dose of testosterone. The feelings are real, but they are being amplified to an almost intolerable degree, both the good and the bad. As I have become less present, less *here*, with Luke, Simon in turn becomes less present with me. He visits his own place of fromness, New York, and there falls for another tran⁷ he meets on Grindr. Her thereness supplants my hereness, but I won’t know this until it’s too late. Perhaps in that moment Simon doesn’t know it either. I buy tickets to visit him in San Diego when he goes back, reading his reserve as doubt in my affection. It is this attempt to close the distance that ends our shared ETT. It is late February 2019, a few days before Simon explains time. He rents us a cabin in the mountains above the Inland Empire, east of San Diego. He is sweet but also irritable and painfully distant. The cabin is tiny, yet I feel I am the farthest from him I have ever been. We kiss but don’t fuck.

⁷ I, traitor to my kind, have been asked to explain *tran*—meaning one tran—in unqueer terms.

West Texas-based essayist Ray Gonzalez describes the experience of being drawn in by the southwestern landscape across a distance:

Image. Distance. Color. Height. Deepness. They work together to get us there, and we know that landscape way over there will not be there when we get to it. It is gone, and the earth is in our face, surrounding us with a magnetism that drew us to it, but that is now transformed into a living, breathing environment that has taken us into itself.
(Gonzalez 2008)

What an idiot I was to think the place I saw from a distance was also the place I'd arrive in once I'd satisfied my perverse desire to get there. When Simon excuses himself to make a phone call, I cry inconsolably on the desert's shoulder, a living, breathing thing that has taken me into itself. Kneeling in the mud, a hole opens in the clouds above me, the opalescent stars a *there* I would only die trying to make into a *here*.

At the end of my trip, Simon makes a final attempt to get me to express appropriately politicized excitement about the photograph on his storyboard, the grainy archival still of protesters walking down the desert road. He talks about power and learning to beat the system, but I'm tired of discussing power. I tell him, you know what, people suck, but when people really love a place, they can transcend themselves. To physically traverse a territory, protesting its weaponization, is to collapse the heartbreaking distance between human and non-human. I tell him what I see is a photo of a people's love for a place. Does he realize the power that lies in relation? Does he hear that I am not just talking about a stupid picture? Does he know he is the place that I love? You must long before you can *belong*. He hugs me and tells me I smell like the incense he burns in his car while driving. *You've marked me*, I tell him. He is either a cartographer or a dog.

It is March 4, 2019. The ETT collapses when I look at the Twitter account belonging to the other tran and find out that her and Simon's relationship is far deeper than I had understood it to be, that she has been referring to him as her boyfriend even after he had told me he was incapable of being anyone's boyfriend. I realize that she, the other Grindr tran, is also Mexican, and somehow it is this fact that undoes me. Like Ray Gonzalez, the other Mexican Grindr tran is from West Texas, and I hear her speak beautifully of the Texan desert in an interview I find online. Never mind that Luke is also trans and Jewish, I'm too jealous, too insecure, too angry and hurt to handle Simon's

omission of facts. I leave him a series of voice messages, twenty minutes of cruel, cutting rage. Time is water, and did you know, blasted at high pressure, water can slice through steel. Time is water, and did you know, it only takes about sixty seconds for an adult to drown. I tell Simon his project makes me uncomfortable, that I quit. I tell him, *You can fuck the entire Mexican diaspora, but you will never, ever meet anyone like me.*

Conclusion

Viewable from a hunting blind set up in the middle of the gallery for “Landscape Is My Sir” (Solís 2019a) were three videos⁸ showing various performances of Chico California. One of these shows slow-motion footage of Chico California in a leather jacket, chest harness, knee-high leather boots, and Levi’s rolling in mud, washing his leather jacket, walking into the river, and floating away. These visuals are accompanied by the sound of birds, water, and Chico California addressing the Old Man River. Chico California’s voice is lusty and begging, somewhere between a whisper and a moan, about to cum, about to cry:

Please Old Man Daddy River take me come on come on you know
you want a piece of your boy come take him he wants you he
wants you inside come on come on take your Chico California take
him take him home [. . .] please take this boy please take him take your
boy take your little California boy take me just fucking take me take
me take me [. . .]

After filming this performance, the clouds are heavy over the Old Man River, and I feel I have created relation with this *here*, a love between one human and a place. The wind blows mosquitos against my skin like many small kisses. I may never belong here, but when insects take my blood, I like to think that I am being loved back.

At the newly opened YMCA in West Lethbridge, there are video simulations of bicycle paths for stationary bikes, where the rider can choose from ten or so landscapes to watch drift by while pedalling. Only after a couple minutes of biking through a California desert do I realize where I am: a semi-pixelated Joshua Tree National Park moves around me, soft and gold, the 3-D

⁸ See Solís 2019b for this segment.

imaging an odd blend of photographs and digital construction, dreamlike, memory-like. I want to see if the simulation will let me ride across the Inland Empire, where my grandparents grew melons, down the mountainous spine of the Cleveland National Forest, into Kumeyaay territory, across eucalyptus groves to Simon's studio—and it is in this desperate whirling on this stupid bike that goes nowhere that I begin to understand what happened. Through Simon I was able to see my own homesickness as well as remember myself not as *a Californian* but as *a California*, a creature made of places and events, a dissident expatriate of Aztlán, a Napanla, an Exican. Simon saw me as a California he could arrive in, and when I heard him articulate that California, I tried desperately to arrive in *him*. At the time we met, we had already formed our own temporal territories of longing, our homing desires. Simon had ached across the country for that ideal of grassroots organizing in a small town, for the desert that surrounded it. I had ached into western Canada to come home without the responsibility of *going* home. Too late I realized Simon was right—I *am* California. But he has already left me for Texas. And can I blame him? The rent is surely cheaper.

I am not a prairie queer,⁹ but I deeply appreciate what scholar Jas Morgan says about the prairie wind:

Me, an Indigenous / gender studies scholar: Don't gender and sexualize nature. The wind is a relation whose gender is fluid and unknown to us, and it still affects everyone and everything it touches. Also me: The prairie wind is gay af. The prairie wind propels the queer body forward in a way shared among queer kin who perpetually followed those sparkling lights on the landscape: that queer lust for the city, that home in the horizon, and that desire for queer possibility. (Morgan 2018, 46–47)

It is possible to be propelled in many directions at once. I know what Morgan means by “that home in the horizon.” I, too, have intimacy issues. What is this ETT that I have built “here” in “Lethbridge, Alberta?” For I am never actually here, am I? Not entirely. Is this bad? Is it excellent?

Consider that this place named Aksiiksahko (Steep Banks), Asinaawa-iitomottsawa (Where We Slaughtered the Crees), and Sik-Ooh-Kotok (Black Rocks) I have called *Lethbridge*, the surname of a British lawyer who never

9 I'm more of a mountain queer if pressed to topographize.

bothered to traverse the distance between his colonial here and his colonial there. How can anyone be fully present in this town whose vertices of power are mapped on a racial x- and y-axis in which white bodies stand while not all but many Indigenous bodies lie horizontal? In a place like, this even those who don't unbelong find themselves having to retheorize and reassert belonging on their own territories.

I wanted to belong to something, said an ex-white supremacist on the radio last year, and I wonder very much if it is possible to be an ex-anything like that.¹⁰ It is critical to consider how one relates to place and belonging as nationalist narratives gain momentum, heat. How do we metabolize time and space as treaty agreements continue to be ignored, as people tell one another to *go home*, as territories are staked out, borders are secured, cultures are defined, and DNA is copyrighted?

It is summer of 2019. The days are endless. Simon and I haven't spoken for months. If I am a California, my regret is an opened fault line that has split me in two. One half thinks I'm better off without my cartographer, while the other misses desperately that feeling of being seen, mapped, and known. I have apologized for my part in the destruction of our ETT, but Simon has only said he isn't ready to speak, that the time isn't right. So come, be with me in this meantime, this meanwhile. Visit me in my Nepantla, this haunted, timeless home. Behold my queer Exican failure: all I can do is theorize my own heartbreak, my own hard-on, my own homesickness, my own tragi-glorious self-dislocation. Come, belong patiently with me.

Running with my dog through the coulees, I am overtaken by a memory of Southern California, my belonging a hysteria: high-pitched tire songs on the I5, crystalline qualities of the desert, the smell of wet sand. I take a moment to reorient myself to the cottonwoods fluttering in the river valley, old clothes rotting pleasantly among thick prairie grass, the thunder of grain and oil cars on the High Level Bridge. Compulsively, I check my phone for new messages. I don't know who I want to hear from most, Simon, California,

10 When asked by the Fresh Air host if he was aware of what he was participating in when he saluted Hitler, Christian Picciolini responded, "At that time, I really didn't. I knew it was a subculture. I knew that I believed that they had some sort of a truth that the rest of the world didn't understand, and I knew that I wanted to belong to something" (Davies 2018).

Sik-Ooh-Kotok, or Aztlán. I just want to slide the notification open and find a message that says, *Here*.

References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2006. *Queer Phenomenology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Aizura, Aren Z. 2018. *Mobile Subjects: Transnational Imaginaries of Gender Reassignment*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. (1987) 2012. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 4th ed., 25th anniversary ed. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, and AnaLouise Keating. 2015. *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhanji, Nael. 2012. "Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies." In *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Border and Politics of Transition*, edited by Trystan Cotten, 157–75. London: Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Brah, A. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge.
- Davies, Dave. 2018. "A Former Neo-Nazi Explains Why Hate Drew Him in—and How He Got Out." Fresh Air. January 18, 2018. MP3 audio, 43:55. <https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=578745514>.
- Fortier, Anne-Marie. 2003. "Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment." Department of Sociology at Lancaster University. Last modified November 27, 2003. <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/resources/sociology-online-papers/papers/fortier-making-home.pdf>.
- Gonzalez, Ray. 2008. *Renaming the Earth: Personal Essays*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Little Bear, Leroy. 2019. Lecture for *LandMarks*, Fort Whoop-Up, Lethbridge, Alberta. February 12, 2019.
- Lockwood, Patricia. 2017. *Priestdaddy*. New York: Riverhead.
- Morgan, Jas. 2018. *Nítisânak*. Montréal: Metonymy.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, 1991, 33–40.
- Prosser, Jay. 1998. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Solís, Migueltzinta. 2019a. "Landscape Is My Sir." Master's thesis solo exhibit, Dr. James Penny Foster Building, 2019. <https://migueltzinta.com/landscapeismysir/>.
- . 2019b. "Landscape Is My Sir Full Installation Video 2." Migueltzinta Solís. June 14, 2019. YouTube video, 26:00. <https://youtu.be/ZINAXgaeIj8>.

This page intentionally left blank

7 Of Ice Cream, Potatoes, and Kimono-Clad Japanese Women

Forgetting and Remembering the Japanese Racialization of Lethbridge's Sensuous Geographies

Darren J. Aoki and Carly Adams

Back [in 1951] ice cream was only, what, five cents? I can still remember being in a line-up that, I never got served, everybody else got served. I had my nickel in my hand and never got served, and I can still remember dad coming up to me and says, "Didn't you get served?" I said, "No," he said, "Well, let's go," and we walked out.

—Pete, personal interview, November 17, 2017,
0:13:49

No, we didn't have any discrimination. [. . .] We're all Canadians and that's it.

—Pete, personal interview, November 17, 2017,
1:04:00

Strategizing “Crap Happens”

On March 21, 1951, a gala banquet was held to celebrate Japanese Canadian / City of Lethbridge co-operation. To the “delightful” spectacle of Japanese

dancers in “colorful native costume,” the city fathers waxed lyrical (*Lethbridge Herald* 1951, 6). Mayor Turcotte observed how far Japanese families had progressed, while Alderman Virtue declared Canada to be “a Land of New Hope.” Indeed, since the “dark days of 1942” and especially since their full release into the Canadian civic sphere in 1949, these erstwhile “enemy aliens” had emerged so fully and quickly from their wartime ordeal as new model citizens that Alderman Huckvale opined, “Your Evacuation may prove a blessing in disguise” (*Lethbridge Herald* 1951, 6).

In retrospect, it is a remarkable statement. To be certain, the patronizing judgment implied in the phrase *blessing in disguise* was in keeping with the conceit of contemporary British white Dominion authority. Yet the blithe erasure of Japanese Canadian suffering was powerful in its exonerating effects. It turned a deaf ear to Lethbridge City Council’s vitriolic opposition just a few years earlier to “having the Japanese established as a permanent resident” (*Lethbridge Herald* 1944, 7). It ignored the City’s resolution that, in keeping with restrictions against Japanese entering and residing in the city, “they be removed” from the province (*Lethbridge Herald* 1944, 7). More broadly, it perfunctorily wiped the slate clean of the City’s facilitating role in the “Evacuation,” as this “politics of racism” (Sunahara 1981) later came euphemistically to be known. In 1942, some 21,500 individuals, or 95 percent of Canada’s Japanese, most of whom were born or naturalized Canadian citizens, were systematically removed from British Columbia’s west coast and displaced into a variety of policed surveillance settings. One of these was the sugar beet farms of southern Alberta. These became a destination for thousands of Japanese who supplied industry-saving cheap labour and a transit point in subsequent waves of forced migration (see, e.g., Kobayashi 1989; Adachi 1976).

The compelling nature of this will to forget should not be underestimated. Indeed, the spirit of reconciliation that seemed to pervade the banquet was neither unique in the apparent sea change it marked in the welcome of the Japanese (e.g., see Roy 1990, 38) nor exceptional in a wider national trend. In public discourse and media, “yellow peril” wartime stereotypes of the Japanese as “mysterious” and perfidious—“they ‘sneak’ into City” and “Grin About it,” declared the *Lethbridge Herald* (*Lethbridge Herald* 1945, 7)—were abruptly replaced by portrayals emphasizing Canada’s Japanese as “unthreatening” and “victims” (Hawkins 2009). Some of this is explained by an emerging new social ethos—as epitomized by the 1945 United Nations Charter—that cast the “Evacuation” as morally dubious and potentially classed aspects of

the federal government's eugenically informed assimilationist program to scatter the Japanese as a "crime against humanity" (Sunahara 1981, 138; see also Bangarth 2008). It certainly helped that, in their "industry and thrift," the Japanese were "being successfully re-established, largely through their own efforts" (*Lethbridge Herald* 1949, 4): they were proving themselves to be good neighbours and citizens. Crucially, too, the Japanese themselves seemed to couple forgetting with moving on. "Crap happens and [you] gotta get on in your life, keep working and you'll make it back," explained Dick (personal interview, March 11, 2011) of *shō ga nai*, a phrase his father had used to describe his "Evacuation" experience.

Japanese Canadian forgetting and the silence that attends it have acted as narrative cues that stimulated the discursive emergence of this history from the late 1960s onward: Adachi (1976) attributes Japanese middle-class mediocrity to it (358–59); Sunahara (1981) likens the mute Nisei (second generation) to a rape victim (166–67); Kogawa's ([1981] 1994) canon-setting *Obasan* paints a portrait of individual becoming as a moral-historical emergence into the cacophony of words, a narrative trajectory that finds its conclusion in the historic achievement in 1988 of a formal textual and material apology to the Japanese—the Redress Movement—as memorialized by Miki (2005); Sugiman (2013, 2009) amplifies in her oral historical explorations the trauma especially of women and the complexity of the "Evacuation" experience; and Oikawa (2012) seeks to flesh out the carceral sites of the "Evacuation" through spoken testimony. This list is not representative of Japanese Canadian historical production. But it does illustrate the overwhelming propensity to characterize forgetting in terms, understandably, of reaction to the war and its aftermath, whose effects are loss—of property, community, rights, and the future—and the violation of one's human dignity. There are other ways, however, to approach forgetting and silence, ones to which this chapter will now turn its attention.

First, let's return to *shō ga nai*, less in terms of its meaning and more in the way Dick said it: plainly, gruffly, "crap happens." It is hardly a helpless response betraying the crushing of one's spirit. Nor is it tactically defensive, for instance, "*kodomo no tame*," as Kogawa's obasan whispers, almost inaudibly—"for the sake of the children" ([1981] 1994, 26). Instead, his approach and the deployment it describes are almost celebratory, an assertion of indefatigability whose credence is his success as the owner of one of the region's most successfully enduring potato-farming enterprises. In this light, it is a performative

moment in our oral history encounter as he narrates himself through—in Josselson’s (2009) conception of the relationship between memory and history—an “autobiographical” appeal in the present to the authority of his own history. Nevertheless, this rendering of *shō ga nai* also speaks his truth about the navigation of racist discrimination and state violence. In a number of portraits, we’ll explore a selection of similar strategies, negotiations, and appeals: historical forgetting through heritage, imaginations of microstrategic confrontation, and the narrative assertion of Canadianness.

Second, take a moment to consider Pete’s childhood memory of his visit to a Lethbridge ice cream parlour presented epigraphically at the outset of this chapter. In privileging this voice, we specifically situate a history of Japanese Canadians—personal and collectively—in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is a critical intervention. Although every Japanese Canadian introduced in this chapter can trace the “Evacuation” as part of their pasts, we nevertheless step out of the overdetermining shadow of the Japanese Canadians’ Second World War, which is not to ignore its influence. We seek instead to amplify the complexity of their human experience: the (re)building everyday of family, livelihood, affiliations, and community; the nurturing of ambition through success and the suffering of hardship in failures; and above all, the resilience to which the portraits presented here all give witness. In paying respect to the integrity of Pete’s and many others’ lives that cannot and should not be explained always, already, and only as an effect of the war, we actively engage Eve Tuck’s (2009) critical response to “damage-centred” research to enact, in her words, “an axiological intervention that is intent on depathologising the experience of dispossessed and disenfranchized communities so that people are seen as more than broken or conquered” (416). This is of historical importance because when we interrupt the teleologies of the mid-century rupture, we can begin to understand the situated complexity of belonging and unbelonging, the contingency of racism even as racist practices are perpetual, and the inherent contradictions of race and nation as they intersect.

And then there is Lethbridge. We define it as the city, which includes, in our conception, its surrounding agricultural environs. Lethbridge is not simply a physical setting, a backdrop to the scenes of one’s life or just the stage with its props through which historical actors move. Rather, Lethbridge is an “experience of the senses,” a “sensuous geography” (Rodaway 1994, 3). According to Rodaway, the senses “are not merely passive receptors of particular

kinds of environmental stimuli but are actively involved in the structuring of that information”; the senses are “significant in the overall sense of a [. . .] living world of everyday life as a multisensual and multidimensional situatedness in space and in relationship to places” (3–5). In this light, the racial environment that painfully scripted an interracial non-encounter for Pete was played out as the denial of the senses, and especially of taste. Unlike all the others in that shop, Pete would not get to eat ice cream that day: the discrimination he experienced in Purity Dairy would map an emotional geography that linked his father and their exclusion from a taste, temperature, texture, and story of ice cream that forever after could only be narrated as rejection. Taste “has been described as an intimate sense [. . .] structurally—it generates an immediate or local geography—and emotionally—it establishes a strong bond between person and environment,” writes Rodaway (67). Perhaps reflective of this memory that is stained by racist exclusion, Pete struggled to remember the address of Purity Dairy, and in describing how his father and he simply walked away, this story poignantly froze one moment in Pete’s Lethbridge, where space is generated into a meaningful—racialized—place (see Relp 1976). Through the focus that senses sharpen on the embodied raced experience and interaction of racial identities, we can begin to map Lethbridge as a postwar history of Japanese race.¹

Re-visualizing the City to Forget History

That the 1950s has come to be remembered as a period of progress not just by the city fathers but by Japanese themselves is suggested in this next memory

1 Research for this chapter is derived from the Nikkei Memory Capture Project (NMCP), an innovative community-based oral history research initiative that explores the cultural and social history of Canadian Nikkei (people of Japanese descent) in southern Alberta, Canada, in the latter half of the twentieth century. Built upon a pilot project focusing on the Nisei (“second-generation” Japanese Canadian) experience initiated by Aoki in 2011, it was transformed in 2017 into a transnational collaboration bringing together the University of Plymouth, the United Kingdom (Aoki), and the University of Lethbridge (Adams) with key Lethbridge stakeholder partnerships: the Nikkei Cultural Society of Lethbridge and Area, the Nikka Yūkō Japanese Garden, and the Galt Museum and Archives. Since 2017, the NMCP team, which includes our student researchers, has opened questions on a range of topics—for example, interracial intimacy, sports, assimilation, and racial discrimination.

anecdote. “It was a beautiful float, Mt. Fuji, [. . .] that’s a cherry blossom tree,” said Helen (personal interview, February 30, 2018; see figure 7.1), describing her photograph of the very first Japanese Canadian Citizens Association (JCCA) entry into Lethbridge’s annual summer exhibition parade. As she tabulated the facts of its conception—it was the inspiration of Hideo Nagata, the flowers were handmade by the church ladies, it won first prize—her tone softened when she came across the image from a few years later of another float since, looking out as if directly at us from the monochrome matte was her younger sister in a kimono. “That’s Amy [pseudonym],” she said. It was difficult to pin down the year. Similar photographs held in the Galt Museum Archive date JCCA participation to as early as 1949, but for Helen, who bedecked one of these annually appearing floats in 1953 or 1954, this collection of snapshots captured a distinctive historical moment. “Wow”—half whispered, this was no exclamation of surprise. Rather, as Helen’s position to try to recount objectively what had transpired six decades ago blurred into a subjective inhabitation of these moments, she marvelled in contemplation at the achievement of what the float represented: “It was a moment of pride for the Japanese, ’cause here we’ve been evacuated in, we’re all trying to rebuild lives, and we’ve gotten comfortable.” As one of the collective “we,” she seemed in wonder at from where Helen herself had come to where she had arrived.

In both the example of the float and of the 1951 banquet, a recurring motif is suggested. Note how each premises civic participation and ethnic projection on cultural display, which are evocatively dynamic: dancing, a procession through the streets. From the perspective of both the city officials then and one person sixty years on, these furthermore emphasize transformation. To be certain, long before the Multiculturalism Act was enacted in 1988 to redefine Canadian identity away from Dominion-era Anglo-assimilationism (see, e.g., Hopkins 2008 on Dominion decolonization), ethnic diversity with an emphasis on (cosmopolitan) sensory stimulation for mainstream white society—the sight of foreign dress, the sounds of unfamiliar words and song, strange food textures and tastes—had long scripted civic celebration. The inauguration of Alberta’s Heritage Day bank holiday in August 1975, for example, invited Lethbridge residents to encounter Italian, Irish, Japanese, Lithuanian, First Nations, Scottish, and Ukrainian performances and displays (*Lethbridge Herald* 1975, 16). While scholars like John Price have critically argued that cultural heritage was easily reduced to “remnants”—and that the only forms



Figure 7.1. The JCCA float at Lethbridge’s annual summer exhibition parade in 1949. Photographer unknown. Darren J. Aoki personal collection.

and customs “that survive are usually these innocuous ones that escape the conforming crush of law” (quoted in James 2003, 209)—this is to misunderstand the foundational role that heritage could and did play, at least for the Japanese. From the very year of their release into the civic sphere, Japanese Canadians selected and coordinated images that in their deployment tactically reimagined space and time as Japanese: those few minutes when the parade float passed by inscribed into the Lethbridge *mise-en-scène* a landscape of Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms; through rhythmic gestures, the gaze of the white authorities was beckoned and held by Oriental women’s bodies draped in silks. This cultural projection was not simply an act of intercultural sharing. Nor was it to expand the local iterations of official multiculturalism, though such displays may have helped cultivate the discursive ground for this eventual development in civic identity. Instead, it was creatively compelling: iconic images of the Far East evoked distance traversed (a Japanese landscape brought to Lethbridge) and closeness embraced (Japanese Canadian families animating this fleeting landscape who might also actually live next door). It was intentionally gendered too: traditional dress that fixed a lens of Far

Eastern exoticism focused on women only, an Orientalist fantasy of unthreatening feminine softness to replace dangerous feminine mystique.

Critically, as Aoki deals with elsewhere (e.g., Aoki 2019), this appeal to the homeland and its heritage was highly ahistorical. In ways reminiscent of Japan's postwar attempts to rebrand itself as a "nation of culture" and pacifist partner in America's trans-Pacific security order, the appeal of Lethbridge's Japanese in civic celebrations to images and icons redolent of their premodern world enabled them to skirt the messiness of the recent past. Whites were confronted with neither feelings of guilt nor tricky questions of complicity in anti-Japanese racism; Japanese, for their part, could reassert a certain pride in the defused cultural provenance of their displays. That is not all, since the scopic remapping of Lethbridge as Japanese in the early 1950s became a longer-term trajectory of sustained cultural and ethnic projection. In 1957, the JCCA gifted the city imported cherry blossom trees (*Lethbridge Herald* 1957, 4); in 1961, the Civic Sports Centre was host to a "Japanese Variety Night," the first of similar cultural events over the next three decades like the *Bunka no hi* (culture day) that attracted thousands to the El Rancho Hotel Convention Room in 1986 (Horvat 1986, A5). The Galt Museum commemorated its relationship with southern Alberta's Japanese Canadians by opening its dedicated exhibit in 1980.

Finally, there was the construction of the Nikka Yūkō Japanese Garden. In its aim to be "as authentic as possible," it was importantly not religious in denominational affiliation or funerary in practice. It was specifically not a cultural centre to facilitate a diasporic transmission of knowledge and skill nor was it a museum that curated heritage. The expertise that was imported from Japan to architect its traditional tea house and to design a garden based largely on classical forms and principles (Van Luven [1980] 2000, 4) was less an exercise in mimetic foreign transplantation than animated by a desire to grow a transforming Japaneseness into the longer-term civic identity (and tourism-based revenue sources) of Lethbridge. The genesis of what continues to be one of Lethbridge's most iconic attractions reads as a trans-Pacific story of community co-operation in a surprising alignment of eclectic interests and idiosyncratic personalities (Hiro, personal interview, April 17, 2019). But what we'd like to emphasize here is this. If at one time the imaginations of Japaneseness were limited to transitory projections into borrowed civic space, a part of the city—actual land in one of its most important public-use parklands—was now claimed and materially transformed to create new

sightlines and vistas: the white panels of its boundary walls demarcating this space; glimpses through manicured vegetation of the greying cypress-wood teahouse made with no nails; its moon bridges, stone pagodas, and its giant bell visible from the opposite shore of Henderson Lake. As an immersive sensual experience, the garden is crafted to provoke stillness, yet its apparent timelessness is illusory, not least because as the city's representative big-budget project to commemorate Canada's centenary in 1967, this space was built as a civic place of declarative celebration, where dignitaries could be conspicuously welcomed. It was opened officially by members of Japan's imperial family, whose next generations would visit to reaffirm this link at the garden's twenty-fifth (1992) and fiftieth anniversaries (2017). At each of these events, at least two elements of the scopic genealogy that had been set in the trajectory of Japanese progress would be extended. The first was kimono-clad women dancing and adorning. The second was, in their active display of tradition, the effacement of history. The appearance in the middle of the Alberta prairies of a Japanese garden is, doubtless, explained in part by the existence of what was Canada's third-largest postwar concentration of Japanese. Yet its authenticity, until very recently, was not made through appeals to Japanese Canadian history and, specifically, the very reason why southern Alberta was home to so many Japanese: the "Evacuation." This erasure was not accidental. Not only were proposals to memorialize this history rejected—for example, the erection of a statue (Hiro, personal interview, March 18, 2011)—rather, the garden divided the Japanese Canadian equation to highlight the former. When Aoki pressed Robert Hironaka (personal interview, March 13, 2011), one of the original members of the Japanese Garden Committee about this, he responded, "We felt this should be a Japanese garden." He asked for further clarification: "As opposed to a Japanese Canadian enterprise or [...] endeavour?" He nodded and said firmly, "Yeah, yeah."

Lest the impression be given of a precisely choreographed ethnic presentation to which all Japanese subscribed, it should be remembered how diverse the Japanese were. The "Evacuation," in fact, served to augment already existing divisions between small Japanese settlements dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century: ethnically distinct Okinawans from the Japanese Empire's colonial periphery worked coal mines north of the city; main-island Japanese were farmers to the south. To this, the "Evacuation" brought differences in religion, generational authority, regional dialect, occupational background, educational attainment, and a range of west-coast

experiences. That the Japanese appeared as a cohesive group was due in part to their efforts to present a united front, especially in the face of white hostility. Indeed, destructive internecine conflict that erupted in the 1960s, for instance, remained largely unknown in the wider community. Apparent Japanese cohesiveness is also explained by the geographical configuration of their postwar urban residence that, to apply Oiwa's observations of Japanese in postwar Montréal, was characterized by "dispersion" as a "style of collective thought" (Oiwa 1986, 34). Although the northern half of Lethbridge, for example, was a residential destination for many incoming Japanese (Kamitakahara [1975?]), no concentration of Japanese ever emerged. But in contrast to new communities emerging "east of the Rockies"—for example, Montréal (Oiwa 1986), Toronto (Makabe 1998), Winnipeg, and Edmonton (Loewen and Friesen 2009)—longer-term "self marginalization" (Oiwa 1986, 20) was not tantamount to complete invisibility.

In her critical exploration of the multicultural polity, Sarah Ahmed describes the constitutionally inscribed legal imperative to welcome "the stranger." Although her example is Australia, this phenomenon is also germane to Canada. Yet the "ontology" of the stranger is not only often maintained; it is to conceal social relationships within a "fetishism" of the embodied other that constitute "processes of inclusion and exclusion, of incorporation and expulsion [. . .] the boundaries of bodies and communities." Through these, "the prior histories of encounter that might violate and fix others in regimes of difference" are reopened (Ahmed 2000, 4–8). Yet for the Japanese, perhaps we might see how in their emergence from colonial violation and survival of state violence, the fetish of the stranger might be selectively self-embraced and powerfully deployed. Such projections not only reflected the post-colonial wobble of white Dominion power in the postwar retreat of imperial Britain but sought to charm an emerging post-Dominion/post-colonial sensibility, stroked its ego, decorated its banality with a touch of exotic beauty, and in the process, transformed a once hostile space into a relatively safe place called home. This is not to misrecognize public conventions of polite interracial tolerance as the end of Anglo-conformist racial regimes. As the next section makes clear, so powerful were these that they could provoke crises in self-certainty. However, a distinctive moment mid-century is illuminated in which an ahistorical Japanese visual imaginary of the city infused foundational historical racialized narratives.