Asia in the Mix:

Urban Form and Global Mobilities—Hong Kong, Vancouver, Dubai

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Be Klahowya! Kloshe maika ko yukwa, ka towagh mitlite keekwullie illahee
Greetings! Good you arrive here, where light be under land.
—From Henry Tsang, *Welcome to the Land of Light*.
Public Artwork, Vancouver, 1997.

Introduction

The skyline of downtown Vancouver, British Columbia has been markedly reshaped over the past two decades. In the 1990s, skinny glass and steel residential towers began proliferating, especially around the shores of the peninsula on which the downtown sits. This new urban form is epitomized by Concord Pacific Place, one of the largest urban megaprojects in North America (Figure 1). Pacific Place stretches along the north shore of False Creek, an inlet of the Pacific which was once the polluted heart of the city's manufacturing and wood processing industries and is now a high-priced residential and recreational hub that has become a key element of the city's post-industrial identity (Olds, 2001). The physical form of Pacific Place has become emblematic of Vancouver's contemporary urban landscape and, as such, is central to the city's promotional materials (Simons, 2005). Carefully-crafted marketing images feature its glittering towers, framed by the waterfront and a backdrop of snowcapped mountains, and highlight the development's waterfront walking paths and green spaces as visual representations of Vancouver's much vaunted 'livability' (City of Vancouver, 2003).

The relationship between Pacific Place and the city's identity involves more than simply concrete, glass, and steel, however. The development, which was built on the dilapidated site of Expo'86 and purchased by Hong Kong investors, was designed to attract ethnic Chinese buyers at a time of social and economic uncertainty in Asia. In the wake of Tiananmen and in the lead-up to 1997, Vancouver became a safe haven for affluent, middle-class investors from Hong Kong who were looking for a place to move their families and business interests. Its regenerated urban waterfront and carefully constructed global image

as the livable economic and social hub of "Beautiful BC" fit hand in glove with the federal government's new immigration policy and its drive to establish Canada among the leaders of an unfolding Pacific Rim economy. Thus, the built form and the changing identity of Vancouver were conditioned by flows of capital, people, architecture, and urban design knowledge from Asia. Developed and marketed as a high-tech communications hub, where apartments would be linked into a global 'network society' (Castells, 1996) through fiber optic communications, Pacific Place and its surrounding environ became a base for the growing class of wealthy, footloose, cosmopolitan, 'flexible citizens' and 'pied-a-terre' subjects (Ong, 1999, 2007) that Vancouver's local elites were desperate to attract (Olds, 2001; Mitchell, 2004).

Figure 1: Concord Pacific Place, 2009, Levin, Lowry, Tsang Research Document, Digital Photograph

The redevelopment of False Creek in the 1990s was only one moment in the ongoing 'worlding' and 'Asianization' of Vancouver. Evidence of the city's emergence as an 'extraterritorial' Asian city (Ong & Roy, 2008) and of the active role many of its elites play in influencing contemporary Asian urbanism— the 'Vancouverization' of Asia, as they might say (Sharp and Boddy, 2008)—came recently when local architecture critic, Trevor Boddy (2006), reported that an "almost a perfect clone of downtown Vancouver—right down to

the handrails on the seawall, the skinny condo towers on townhouse bases," was being built in Dubai, "around a 100-per-cent artificial, full-scale version of False Creek filled with seawater from the Persian Gulf" (Figure 2). The design of this 'other False Creek' does not involve some inadvertent isomorphism. Rather, it is a product of another purposeful transfer of urban form, design knowledge, people, and capital. After a chance visit by its chairman to Pacific Place in 1997, the Dubai-based development corporation Emaar Properties enlisted a number of the Concord Pacific corporation's key executives to develop Dubai Marina as a high-rise waterfront way station for footloose global elites (Campbell, 2007). Thus, Vancouver's Hong Kong/Waikiki-inspired model of the Pacific Rim residential urban form was de/reterritorialized once more to produce profit and 'lifestyle' on the other side of Asia from Hong Kong—in the continent's southwest, where the desert meets the Arabian Gulf.

Figure 2: Emaar's Marina Promenade development, 2009. Levin, Lowry, Tsang Research Document, Digital Photograph

These two moments in the production of and inter-referencing among Asian cities set the context for this chapter. Our purpose is to detail and interpret the mobilities, practices, and identities that tie Vancouver to Hong Kong and Dubai through networks of inter-Asian connection and referencing. Specifically, we employ a cultural and historical

approach to these three distant and distinct (post)colonial cities. This approach builds upon and extends literatures on the production of cities in global-relational context (Massey, 1991, 2005, 2007; Peck and Theodore 2001; Peck 2003; Ward 2006; Cook 2008; Guggenheim & Soderstrom, 2010; McCann, 2010; McCann & Ward, 2010, 2011), on 'mobilites' as a socio-spatial concept (Cresswell, 2001, 2006; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, 2006; Sheller and Uryy, 2006; Urry, 2007; McCann, 2008b), on the built environment as a key moment in wider social, political, and economic circuits (Harvey, 1985; Goss, 1988; Domosh, 1989; Lees, 2001; McNeill, 2009), on the analysis of global urbanization beyond the frame of solely Anglo-American theories and examples (Appadurai, 1996; Ong, 1999; Olds, 2001; Mitchell, 2004; Robinson, 2006), and on the social production of False Creek specifically (Ley, 1987, 1996; Olds, 2001; Punter, 2003; Mitchell, 2004). Our primary contribution is to combine these urban geographical perspectives with literatures that address the role of cultural production (and cultural producers) in urbanism, particularly those in art history, cultural theory, and literary studies that focus on contemporary Asian Canadian culture (Miki, 1998, 2000, 2001; McAllister, 1999; Gagnon, 2000; Kamboureli, 2000; Wah, 2000; Lowry, 2006; Cho, 2007; Mathur, 2007; Lai, 2008).

"Welcome to the Land of Light"

We draw upon an example of cultural production in False Creek, Vancouver as an entry point into the case. Henry Tsang's 1997 public art installation, *Welcome to the Land of Light* (Figure 3), allows us to deepen, historicize, and problematize the development of False Creek as an extraterritorial Asian place and, in turn, it permits a consideration of the implications of the inter-referencing and transfer of that place back to Asia through Dubai. Tsang's permanent public installation was commissioned by the City of Vancouver as part of its Public Art Program and, as such, it represents a point of convergence for various social

processes and discourses germane to the regeneration of Vancouver's urban waterfront. Illuminating a 100-meter arc along Vancouver's False Creek walkway, *Welcome to the Land of Light* is at the physical and conceptual fulcrum of a complex urbanism that interlinks Asian investment, Canadian policy development, and global life-style marketing with the legacy of British Colonialism. As we discuss below, Tsang's work speaks critically to and about those connections by invoking the historical palimpsest that is False Creek—a space that has been shaped by intercultural connections, translations, references, and transactions since at least the beginning of the colonial encounter.

In the remainder of this section, we will describe and interpret Tsang's work and outline what it says about False Creek as a global node. Subsequently, we will turn to the de/reterritorialization of the False Creek urban form in Dubai as a lens into the ongoing process of Vancouverisation, Asianization, and mobility that characterizes these places. This, in turn, will allow us to invoke Miki's (2000) notion of 'Asiancy' as a way of interrogating the cultural characteristics and implications of this form of global-Asian urbanism.

Figure 3: Henry Tsang, *Welcome to the Land of Light* (detail) Public Installation, Vancouver, 1997. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Installed along the edge of the seawall skirting the glass and steal towers of Pacific Place, Tsang's site-specific artwork (Kwon 2002) creates an participatory space for reflection on and discursive engagement with the emergence of Vancouver's new urban waterfront. Featuring a series of "translations" from English to Chinook Jargon and back, the two parallel rows of aluminum type that form the 100 meter sweep of this work effectively collapse the distances separating Vancouver's colonial past and its global future. Fixed to the walkway railing, underscored by pulsating coloured light that courses through a thick fiber-optic cable at the base of the railing, Tsang's translations lead walkers along this section of seawall while inviting them to stop momentarily to contemplate off-beat messages of welcome and benediction before going on their way. The affect this site-specific experience produces is uncanny. The empirical reality of global urban development and technologization—solidity of concrete, steel, and glass—becomes ephemeral. Wandering through Tsang's hybrid text, viewers confront a conflation of present and past. A public counterpoint to the privacy of Pacific Place, this walkway installation activates the city's symbolic topography—towers, seawall, oceans, mountains—and re-inscribes it in a psychic geography of trans-Pacific exchange and contradictory new world desires that challenge both the sanctity of nationalist history and immediacy of globalization.

Vancouver's post-colonial, post-industrial waterfront has long been a place of global mobility and of collapsing historical and geographic distances, as Tsang's work suggests. Furthermore, the geo-historical perspective of his installation helps locate technologized communication (and virtual mobility) within larger systems of power and domination. Situating an emergent telecommunication hub within the historical space of Pacific Northwest trade, it recalls a period when Chinook Jargon was *lingua franca* up and down the coast from Oregon to Alaska. Chinook Jargon (a.k.a. *Chinuk Wawa*, *Wawa, lelang*—words, tongue, language (*le langue*)) was a pidgin of indigenous Wawashan dialects mixed

with English and French, as well as other sources. Named after the Chinookan (*Chinuk* or *Tsinuk*) people of the lower and middle Columbia River basin, but based loosely on the aboriginal language, it was structured on the principle of inserting words and phrases from different linguistic sources into basic syntactic or grammatical units. Chinook jargon was readily adaptable and *portable*, capable of facilitating exchanges among diverse cultural-linguistic groups and accommodating disparate regional demographics. Suggestive of a prototypical open source technology, Chinook lexicon reflects the use of Kannaksis (from Hawaii), Chinese, and Norwegian, in addition to Chinook, Nootkan, English and French. In some regions, it became a creole and was spoken as a first language.

Adding layers of linguistic patina to the vernacular of the city's newest urbanism—a high-tech, high-gloss 'Vancouverism' that might even vie with an outmoded Manhattanism, according to Sharp and Boddy (2008). Tsang's playful, noisy translations gesture toward a complex history of cultural hybridity, experimentation, and colonial miscegenation that draws Vancouver past the brink of British and Canadian identities. Reworking the strains of the old trade language, which was spoken up until the second world war, Tsang re-appropriates the cultural specificities of a 19th century Pacific Northwest in order to reflect on a new age of global communication. His site-specific identification with the forgotten innovators and adopters of Chinook Jargon activates three inter-related forms of site—geographic, social, and discursive—Kwon (2002), and informs the work's critical engagement with Vancouver's (real and metaphoric) seawall as a space of racial and cultural mixing. On each of these levels, Tsang's installation speaks back to Vancouver's contested urban transformation—its Asianification (Miki, 2000). Problematizing the primacy of Anglo-European cultural antecedents, *Welcome to the Land of Light* encourages viewers to think about their own movements through circuits of commerce and capital—both those that put British Columbia on the map of empire and also those re-inscribing the

site within the trajectories of 21st century urbanization. The work spatializes the arrivals and departures of hundreds of thousands, now millions, of Asian migrants—Japanese, South Asian, and Chinese—seeking investment and lifestyle opportunities outside their home countries, including more than one hundred thousand who came to Vancouver from Hong Kong in the run-up to 1997.

There is a significant self-referential element to Tsang's work. Self-consciously re-presenting the historical antecedents underpinning transcontinental migrations of actors and ideas, it grounds the unfurling communications networks that enable and direct global mobilities through specific geographic nodes. To the extent that it looks back to the colonial history of this trading ground, it looks forward to Vancouver's urban future or futures. Thus, it stages an engagement with the Concord development that draws on the social and material relations of the work's production and Tsang's involvement in Asian Canadian cultural politics. Commissioned by Concord in compliance with Vancouver's newly minted Public Art Plan, *Welcome to the Land of Light* functions on the level of the social in relation to the artist's cultural identity and his self-identification as a Hong Kong-born artist who migrated to Canada with his family in the 1960s. His activities as a culturally engaged artist, curator, activist, and organizer (Tsang and Chan, 1991; Tsang and Lee, 1993; Tsang and McFarlane 1997a) is an important element of the work, and would no doubt have been considered in the competition through which it was selected. Thus, Tsang's installation provides a significant insight into the Vancouver cultural policy and programming vis-à-vis an emergent diversity. Taking the opportunity to intervene or otherwise participate in the Concord redevelopment project, it chooses to read past and present through the legacies of British colonialism, the racist drive to build BC as a "white man's province" (Perry, 2001; Roy, 2003), and through the limited goals of contemporary Canadian official Multiculturalism (Day, 2000; Mackey, 2002). Interestingly, Tsang avoids obvious reference

to Vancouver's Chinatown (a short distance from False Creek) and popular representations of the so-called Chinese or Chinese Canadian community. Focusing instead on questions of linguistic hybridity, the complex machinations of colonial trade networks, and questions of indigeneity or aboriginality, *Welcome to the Land of Light* creates an ideal site from which to revisit the transformation and mutations of one city into the next; to stop and reflect before walking on.

Along the Seawall / Mohamed Ali Alabbar takes a walk

Vancouver's urban form can be read in terms of a series of cultural, economic, and political flows, relations, intersections, and territorializations extending across space and time. It is a node in the mobilization of development and policy knowledge from place to place (McCann, 2010; McCann and Ward, 2010, 2011), and it is a key site in the creation of what Ong (2007) identifies as "pied-a-terre subjects" who fly from one urban space to another as part of global exchanges of expertise. This new urbanism might be read as a technique with which local governments negotiate the extra-local forces that comprise neoliberal economic development. Vancouverism involves, then, the mobilization of Hong Kong development capital and expertise and this model of high-end, high-density, high-rise urban living has proven to be a catalyst for urban growth, especially for sites outside the dominant geography of world cities. The urban form is a portable technology capable of being mobilized and adapted to the needs of new and emerging middle-classes. The advantage of the "Vancouver model," itself a hybrid of Hong Kong and Waikiki-style urban typologies, rests with its concentration on developing the residential real estate, and the ingenuity of Li Ka Shing and his team of executives, who were able to tap into international Asian markets while taking advantage of local conditions (Olds, 2001). Key players from Li's Concord team were able to lobby local governments and orchestrate the purchase of a massive swath of

Vancouver's urban waterfront at the bargain price of $320 million, financed over 15 years. The size and nature of this project meant that Concord could systematically leverage Vancouver's urban waterfront, repackaging it for offshore investors. In this way, Concord was able to generate a $30 billion project out of a polluted urban site that, in turn, has fueled an impressive market for international real estate speculators.

It is in this neoliberal, globalized context that we come across a curious corollary to Tsang's seawall walker: Mohamed Ali Alabbar, Chairman of the Dubai-based development corporation Emaar Properties. Visiting the False Creek seawall walkway in 1997, possibly strolling by Tsang's installation, Alabbar became so impressed by Vancouver's new, Hong Kong-style urban landscape that he decided to adopt the model and transfer it to Dubai (Boddy 2006). Almost immediately Emaar enlisted or employed many of the Concord Pacific's executive team. Seeing possibilities for Dubai's burgeoning urban economy, Emaar was able to identify and repurpose salient features of the Vancouver model for export/import. These included the exploitation of readily available, inexpensive urban real-estate; the articulation of a mega-development into a growing market for global investors; the enrolment of an already amenable local government into the project; and the marketing of the development within shifting trade networks and local (cultural, social, economic) contexts in order to make it desirable to new urban elites. The result, is an echo of Vancouver – similar yet different. Certain design features, like the curves of Dubai Marina resemble those of False Creek quite closely, as do the railings that skirt the Emirati's version of the seawall walkway (Figure 2). Yet this walkway is wider, more commercial, and in certain spots more lively than Vancouver's (field notes, Dubai Marina, February 2008).

> It boasts a wider diversity of people on and around it … and compared to Vancouver, their seawall is substantially wider and lined with dozens of restaurants and cafés. [In comparison, Vancouver's seawall] looked a little stark and Presbyterian, a

> narrow band for walkers and bicyclists to pass through, a kind of aerobic expressway, but almost nowhere a place to linger, with barely a half dozen restaurants along its whole length. One small strip of the Dubai Marina seawall can have that many dining options at all prices serving up a baffling variety of global cuisines, along with waterparks for children, temporary art exhibitions, live musicians and strollers in every colour and cut of national dress … Dubai Marina's seawall is an obliging urban festival; Vancouver's seawall is an obligation to exercise (Boddy, 2006).

This 'festival' setting is surrounded by a growing number of condo towers, higher and architecturally more diverse than Vancouver's, but housing a similar class of pied-a-terre subjects.

The unlikely rise of the 'other' False Creek at Dubai Marina allows us to think of Vancouver's Pacific Place not as a concrete and glass fetish but, rather, as one moment in an ongoing social process of mobility—the transportation and transformation of desire for a high-priced waterfront 'lifestyle'. Alabbar's decision to duplicate the development in Dubai involved not only the copying of design details and hiring of the same professionals to continue refining a desirable, or at least marketable urban form, but also the creation of new consumers for this mobile urban dream, buyers conversant with a new hybrid language of urban leisure and unfettered enjoyment. In fact, shopping for waterfront, lifestyle condominiums became, until the global financial crisis, a pastime for Dubai's rapidly expanding affluent class, fed as it is from various locations across the globe. The process of de/reterritorializing this particular architectural typology was then a thoroughly social process, that is not only enacted through the practices of key experts but through the mobility of new global-urban subjects with the wealth and cultural capital needed to access liberalized nation/state spaces and by state agents, such as the Canadian consulate in Dubai

that has helped facilitate the emergence of what Boddy (2006) calls a "Maple Leaf Mafia" of architects and developers in the UAE (Interview with consular officials, Dubai, February 2008).

The story does not simply involve Canadian-Emirati connections, however. When we consider the socio-economic conditions that have allowed Dubai to become a hub for Middle Eastern financial transactions, we must take into account not only the billions of dollars "repatriated" in Dubai following September 11, 2001, but also the Emirate's historical trade relations with the Asian subcontinent, links to financial and ruling elites in the US and UK, and the function of Shariah law in creating the conditions for investment. The liberal, secular outlook of Dubai's "visionary" Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum stands in stark contrast to the more repressive state policies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Syria, while providing an alternative to the uncertainty of Iraq (Davis, 2006). We must also consider the ongoing role of race and ethnicity in the creation or destabilization of labour markets throughout the region. During its boom, the Emirate proved its ability to capitalize on migrant workers from across the economic spectrum—the expat executives and experts from Europe and North America, middle managers from India and Pakistan, and massive numbers of labourers also from South Asia and from various other more economically impoverished countries. 'Dubai Inc.' (Fonda, 2006) became a model throughout the region, influencing growth in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, as well as elsewhere in the UAE. In fact, growth of Dubai up until the end of 2008, and its continued efforts at development relies on the ruler's skill in managing complex rights, responsibilities, and expectations and in translating 'western-style'[1] urban development for Arab/Asian consumers.

[1] Of course, we use the term 'western style' here advisedly since our point, through our discussion of relations among Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Dubai, is to complicate the western-non-western binary that tends to characterize much urban studies literature.

Cultural production in, and in critique of, pan-Asian urban form.

Much can be said about the important role innovation or creative thinking might play in 21st century urbanization. In a general sense, culture—understood as social process (lifestyle) and material practice (literature, media, the arts, architecture, and design)—plays a significant role in many of the studies referenced in this paper and culture, variously defined, is often acknowledged as an element of mobilities (Cresswell, 2006). The popularization of Richard Florida's (2002) 'creative class' thesis, particularly among governments, points to a growing interest in culture and cultural producers as significant drivers of the contemporary urban economy (see Peck, 2005 and McCann, 2007, 2008 on the limits of this approach). Among the mobile professional classes, cultural producers—educators, artists, curators, and consultants – have come to play key roles in urban development, not only in Canada but also in the UAE by helping to refine and resituate the so-called Vancouver model (Boddy, 2006). Thus, we argue that critical cultural productions provide a vital avenue into the analysis of global urban development and neo-liberal statecraft since cultural or artistic production can be both an interpretative or representational practice and also a method in critical research.

Local conditions, particularly in relation to colonial history and ethnic relations, are likewise integral to the development of Dubai in particular, and the Gulf Region more generally, as a new economic hub – a goal that still drives Dubai's elites even after the downturn of 2008/2009. In Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Dubai, culture and citizenship are dependent on and also in excess of state practices. In the UAE, we are beginning to witness serious interest and investment in "culture," especially in the sense of starchitect-designed centres and facilities. The most striking example of this is the $27 Billion Sadyat Island development in Abu Dhabi. The plans for this cultural hub include a new Guggenhiem and a

Middle Eastern Louvre, among other museums and an opera hall. Given the size of the UAE, the flow-through of cultural producers from Abu Dhabi to Dubai and Sharjah, the third of seven of the Emirates and host of the 9th art biennial in 2009, is significant. Already, many western curators, artists, and arts administrators, have been invited to work in the UAE. In the wake of the Concord Pacific executives who were hired to help with Emaar's Dubai Marina project, and an ex-city planner from Vancouver who is now special advisor to the Sheik in Abu Dhabi, we have seen a number of luminaries from Vancouver's art world (Jayce Saloum, Ken Lum, Roy Arden) working in the UAE.

Our point so far in this paper has been to illustrate the mobilization and inter-referencing of a particular urban form from Hong Kong to Vancouver, to Dubai. Our argument is that the proliferation of this landscape must be understood not only 'positively' in terms of the concrete manifestation of the landscape itself but also 'negatively' in terms of the historical, cultural, economic, political and transnational connections through which it is produced (Marcuse, 1960). We have suggested, by reference to Tsang's critical evocation of the submerged layers and connections that constitute the Pacific Place development, that cultural production can also constitute a powerful critique of contemporary global urbanism. How might such a critical approach be operationalized in the Asian context?

Asiancy: A critical cultural perspective on the inter-referencing of urban Asia

As we see in Concord's urban megaproject in Vancouver, the mobilization of Asian Canadian actors was necessary in translating urban form back and forth across the difference separating the investors, civic leaders, government, and local and non-local communities. While there might be a tendency to see these acts of facilitation as mundane exchanges between "native" informants and internal and external stakeholders, it is crucial to recognize that they occur within a dynamic of particularized and contradictory

spatializations that have involved large numbers of actors—artists, activists, small business owners, students, and other social groups. These cultural producers are vital to the scripting, depicting or portrayal of hegemonic narratives capable motivating or influencing massive numbers of citizens—voters, consumers, investors, and spectators. These actors are also instrumental to the creation and transportation of ideals about the nature and meaning of contemporary urban experience. To counteract local resistance and entrenched anti-Asian sentiment, Concord Pacific was founded as a Canadian company and availed itself of guidance and leadership from individuals who were educated in Canada and the US and who developed expertise in North American cultures (Olds 2001).

Therefore, Concord Pacific might be understood as an assemblage of national or transnational interests; its ability to respond to the imperatives of various levels of government, while assuaging the material and social needs of local, diasporic, and global communities, is in part a function of Asian Canadian culture and a long history of intricate negotiations between "racialized" minorities and the state. In Vancouver, the extent to which contemporary Asian Canadian writers and artists have been active in imagining and creating alternative realities —"altered states" or "alter-nations" (Miki 2000)—might be linked to the larger community or communities' ability to provide a platform for the flow of new (Asian) capital. More than mere decoration, more than urban texture, Asian Canadian cultural production seeds the promise of future engagements with the forces of urban transformation. Tsang's work, like Miki's, might thus be read in terms of the ongoing, multifaceted engagement of Asian Canadian subjects in the transformation of city and state.

To begin to work across the imaginative divide separating urban experiences in Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Dubai, Miki's work (1999, 2000, 2001) is of particular interest, particularly in light of our inquiry into the boundaries between critical and creative practice. Miki is a Vancouver-based, second generation (Nikkei) Japanese Canadian cultural

theorist, poet, and social activist, and his writing and scholarship works against the grain of racialized language and/or discourses of nation formation through careful attention to cultural forms that challenge the legacies of colonialism, on the one hand, and globalism, on the other. In response to the exigencies of a de-territorialized state, Miki calls for a renovated "ethics of reading Asian Canadian" that involves "critical practices that can negotiate the tension between the material conditions of textual [read knowledge] production . . . and the normative conditions of reception," i.e., beyond the geo-political limits of the nation state against which Asian Canadian identities come into being. In characteristically torqued diction, he calls for "an ethics of reading [that] can point towards a new 'ethnics'" (75). While Miki's language and focus is self-consciously literary, it pushes toward social engagement in which creative practice and knowledge production are inextricably bound with state relations. Miki goes on to argue that "the limits of existing critical frameworks are influenced by the always shifting and shifty contexts of racialization, sexuality, class and gender affiliations," which he defines as "historically-determined privileges and subordination, and ethnocentric frames of reference" (74). Against this, he posits a "condition" of reading (analysis, interrogation, interpretation) for both creative texts and institutional practices that "might be called 'minority-wise'" (75).

Linking Miki's work back to our earlier discussion of the development of Concord Pacific Place and Henry Tsang's artwork, as well as forward toward unfolding, deterritorialized hybrid or hyphenated Asian cultural subjects, identities, and places we might say that Miki provides an important understanding of knowledge construction that is embodied and grounded in questions of political process. It builds on the perspective of those who have been marginalized and often violently excluded from political process, but who nevertheless continue to exert pressures that transform and contest the space of social construction. His ethics of reading remains vigilant to a lengthy struggle over the rights of

Asian Canadians and other dispossessed groups within or on the limits of the nation, and to the importance of recognizing this cultural history in the face of shifting global developments.

In response to the 1999 arrival of "four ships carrying 600 Fujianese people [from China's Fujian Province] seeking refuge . . . on the west coast of Canada" (Wong, 2001, 105), Miki considers "the potential for the emergence of new cultural performances—and by implication new "localisms" — that account for the "spectral" effects of global uncertainties" (2000, 43). He takes issue with the media's ahistoricism, the so-called "'sudden arrival' of unidentified bodies in run-down ships." Borrowing Appadurai's notion of the mediascape, he rescales a shopworn nationalist trope: "the figures entering the Canadian mediascape in the summer of 1999 were instantly enmeshed in representations that occluded connections with a global economy in which bodies —often 'Asian'-identified bodies—are reduced to labour machines. . . . in the logic of capital expansion, in other words, their 'arrival' had already been conjured across the oceanic divide to serve corporate agendas." These "queue jumpers" drew criticism from "the media and some Canadians, including some Chinese Canadians," but in so doing, they helped make visible the Canadians's tenuous hold of its oft-proclaimed tolerance and internationalism. In contrast to the valued "economic migrants" Canadian immigration officials were courting in Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, and other prosperous Asian cities (for whom the glass and steel condos of Pacific Place were constructed), these refugees were treated as a threat and detained in BC's interior and isolated from Chinese-speaking support workers and advocates in Vancouver.

For Miki, this event points to a "crisis in time" or deep-seeded anxiety at the core of the modern nation state that recalls Chinese railway workers: "an exploitable pool of 'Asian' bodies to provide the labour for nation-building." But, as Miki reminds us, even "[t]hese 'undesirables' would translate over time into Asian Canadians" (50), following the painful

logic of cultural assimilation and appropriation by the Canadian nation. Asian Canadian thus becomes a fraught site. Visible and invisible within larger nationalist and global frameworks, representations of Asian and Asian Canadian subjects provide sites for radical re-conceptions of the interdependence of political, geographic, and cultural zones and the multivalent investments flowing through them. Miki writes that "[t]he re-articulation of the past to account for the emergence of alterior narratives of the nation opens the possibility that 'Asian Canadian,' as one site of visibility can be read into the moment of alteration." It remains "a formation linked to the nation and simultaneously in excess of its border":

> "Asian Canadian," when dislodged from its foreclosures becomes a revolving sign which re-articulates and thus exposes discourses of both globalization (i.e., towards Asian markets and economies, for instance) and a reactionary nationalism (i.e., as a 'yellow peril' that is asianizing white Canada). 'Asian Canadian' then becomes both a localized subject —of research, cultural production, interrogation—and a double edged site: where relations of dominance threaten to be remobilized (more of the same), or where critiques of nation can posit future methodologies of resistance and collective formations. (53)

Miki's figure of the "Asian Canadian" as "revolving sign" or "double edged site"— "neither subject or object"—clears the way for an understanding of the complex social processes moving beneath or alongside the mobile forms and actors crossing back and forth across the globe among Hong Kong, Vancouver, and Dubai, as well as for the ethical obligations involved in "reading," or researching new (Asian) cultural formations and paradigm shifts.

Walking Toward a Conclusion

Miki's argument for ethical engagement with these mobile localisms and their uneasy collisions with structures of an emergent globalism provides a useful corollary to

contemporary research on the phenomenal growth of Dubai, and the Gulf region more generally.

Regarding Dubai

The amazing drive and apparent vision of Dubai's ruling elite has meant that the emirate has been able to take advantage of a series of global shifts. Not only has it been able to use its economic clout and geo-political position within the Gulf region to begin massive urban development but, more importantly, it seems to have captured the world's imagination, providing images about what a future city might or should be like. With the expansion of Dubai and its emergence as hub of international shipping (Dubai World Ports purchased P&O, making it one of the largest shipping interests in the world) and passenger transportation (Emirates Air is quickly building the biggest fleet of aircraft in the world), the emirate receives significant coverage in European and North American media. The emirate is also generating interest among academics and cultural theorists (Katodrytis, 2005; Basar, Carver, Miesen, 2007; Davis, 2007; Koolhaus and Obrist, 2007). However, in both the media and academic studies, the Dubai phenomenon tends to be met with cynicism. The achievements of "Sheikh Mo" and his growing force of experts are framed within an important but somewhat obvious discourse of excess.

After introducing his readers to a litany of architectural firsts and inviting them into a lavish consumption of urban opulence, Mike Davis (2006) asks rhetorically, "Is this a new Margaret Atwood novel, Philip K. Dick's unpublished sequel to *Blade Runner* or Donald Trump on acid? No. It is the Persian Gulf city-state of Dubai in 2010" (49). Tellingly, Davis cultural examples hinge on the primacy of Anglo-American references. In fact, his main argument on Dubai's ability to capitalize on the US-led war on terror rests on a dominant status quo. As we see in Davis' overview, much of the research on Dubai might be

characterized by a strong sense that the city itself is a vortex into which western-style consumption is being poured by the barrel. In part, this tendency has been produced by the ruling elites' yearning to import the most desirable goods and services—products and people, including, of course, the key development professionals who built Vancouver's Pacific Place. But certainly a city of this size and with its complicated social structures and strata cannot be seen from the air or even on the drive in from the airport. These are the perspectives Davis offers in his dissection of Dubai. And undoubtedly the view from the air, conveying the vast sweep and frenetic activity that characterizes urban development in contemporary Dubai is worthwhile and insightful, as far as it goes.

Yet, on the other hand, it calls to mind Donna Haraway's (1988) admonition against the 'god trick' of the objective, masculinized, all-seeing gaze. Furthermore, it also happens to be a favourite representational strategy of Dubai's developers themselves, a point which calls to mind another feminist critique of contemporary critical social analysis – J.K. Gibson-Graham's (1996) insightful argument against critical discourses about capitalist development that simultaneously serve to glorify and discursively strengthen it. But how, then, do we begin to move beyond the 'flyover critique'? Attending to the situation on the ground, it is clear that the emirate is becoming a cultural hub with a growing capacity to develop and support Dubai-based artists and designers. Undoubtedly, the main event in Dubai is commerce, specifically real-estate development, and unlike neighbouring emirates Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, Dubai has been slow to invest in cultural infrastructure. Nevertheless, recent events suggest that is changing. The converted warehouses of the Al Quoz district have become home to cultural workers who are actively reshaping the face of city. Individuals such as Sunny Rahbar, director of Dubai's Third Line gallery, artist and filmmaker Lamya Hussain Gargash, who represented her country at the UAE pavilion in the 2009 Venice biennale, and Rami Farouk, founder/director of design-gallery Traffic and the

British Council's International Young Design Entrepreneur of 2009—to name but a few—represent a young, dynamic cadre of Dubia-based curators, artists, and designers who are gaining international recognition. Local cultural producers provide an important counterpoint to a flood of internationally recognized artists and st/architects—the likes of Mona Houtoum, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhas—who have been brought to the UAE as part of a programmatic drive for cultural recognition and global legitimacy. Recent initiatives such as the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, Art Dubai and the Abraaj Capital Art Prize, as well as significant art/design spaces (Tashkeel, Jam Jar, and Shelter) mark a significant change in the role of culture in Dubai and emergent shift in urban development across the region.

As we pursue our still nascent study of the Hong Kong-Vancouver-Dubai nexus, we suggest that cultural production, and its shifting and transformational role in the development of each of these urban spaces, provides both a useful lens into the production of cities in global context from the ground up, rather than through the view from everywhere and nowhere. This sort of situated knowledge might offer an analytical perspective that both complements and challenges some of the dominant perspectives on Dubai's development and on Asian and global urbanism without forgoing a critical edge.

Back to the land of light

The promise of a new, clean, cybernetic universe of unfettered mobility is enmeshed in a colonial geography of free trade and racialized exploitation, as Tsang's *Welcome to the Land of Light* demonstrates. Despite the influx of global capital, despite the promise of multicultural development and a shiny new urbanism, mega-developments in Vancouver and Dubai stage disparate social interactions that rework and re-territorialize Pratt's (1992) conception of a colonial "contact zone." Reciting phrases taken from sales brochures and other documentation produced by False Creek developers, including Concord Pacific,

Tsang's Chinook-English translations (an early Chinglish?) are incommensurable with either standard lexicon. Instead, they belie a difficult irony about the primacy and transparency of communications: "*Chako kopa laly ka tillikums wawa huloima, keschi kloshe kunamokst*" / "Come to time where people talk different but good together." Out of place and time, the Vancouver model sits in difficult contrast with the specificities of ethnic encounter and compromise.

Thus, in Tsang's installation, the trope "light" functions materially and metaphorically. Incorporating the vaunted fiber-optic technology into his installation, Tsang represents the "land of light" as a code space that is simultaneously actual and virtual: "*Be Klahowya! Kloshe maika ko yukwa, ka towagh mitlite keekwullie illahee* Greetings! Good you arrive here, where light be under land." Exacting a pun on the transient nature of knowledge and technology, Tsang's "land of light" marks a threshold of new and old ways of knowing, of the digital/code-based technologies inextricable from the infrastructural developments through which they course. The artist's uncanny pairings of Chinook and English propose evoke a kinetics of migration mirrored in the physical structure of the work. Each discrete phrase strung along the seawall invites viewers to walk as they read; because each phrase exists as a part of a semantic unit, however, this reading takes place moving from left to right or right to left. In other words, the work can be approached from east or west. It can also be read *in media res*. Resisting the lateral pull of the seawall, while also working with it, the structure of *Welcome to the Land of Light* encourages viewers to stop and reflect on the distance between individual phrases and to look between the lines of text and above. Here, translation becomes an act of spatial as well as cultural mobility. A kinetics of interpretation is taken up in the semantic reworking of the original text: promotional copy, hyping False Creek's high-tech, luxury lifestyle, is mediated through Chinook and back into an uneasy English. Tsang's poetics of *ostranenie* troubles the spatial-temporal coordinates of object

and subject. Coursing through this network of cultural interchanges, *au courant* dreams of urban luxury and state-of-the-art connectivity become enmeshed with pasts that submerged, literally and figuratively, below False Creek's reflective surface. Momentary fragments of comprehension speak of another time and place that is also here, also now. Drawing on advertising that is designed to attract buyers from elsewhere—other parts of the city, country, or globe—Tsang's work situates a virtual (promised) land within the particularities of a built environment; in it, commodification runs up against its own physical and geographic limits.

In moments of relative stasis, one's gaze is drawn out across the water away from the steel and glass towers, without ever escaping their looming presence. The almost perceptible hum of cybernetic activity running under one's feet envelops viewers, staging the physical relocations, readings and subsequent re-readings, within the ebb and flow digital information. This cybernetic context in turn suggests a counterpoint to the ebb and flow of Asian migrations that have helped shape the geography of Vancouver and BC—the Gold Rush, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Asian Exclusion Act, the Japanese Canadian Internment of the Second World War, and finally the hyper-urbanization that continues to transform Vancouver beyond the physical territory. The injustices of Empire and nation flow back into geopolitical continuum that links Dubai to the events of Tiananmen Square, the collapse of the twin towers, and the wars in Iraq and Iran. The exchange of ideas and experiences continues to reconfigure the double-edged brutality of yet another promised land (deal). Thinking of how Tsang's work might be picked up and moved to a seawall twelve time zones away, what form it takes beneath the bifurcating towers of what might be legitimately called the Dubai model, we are left to reflect on our place within this unfolding "geography of longing" (Cho 2007). How does the work of scholars and artists enter the waves of diasporic (un)settlement?

Looking forward to the coming decades, Tsang's installation nods and winks (or blinks) toward a future of globally mobile actors and ideas that will transport Vancouver beyond the confines of its place in the history and culture of nation formation. Tsang's strange new vernacular, pseudo-technologized, becomes charged by strains of a series of hybrid translations that might be seen to culminate during 1990s and which suggest an unfolding Asia or plurality of Asias that might also lay claim to the particularities of this urban locale. The continuous waves of traders, explorers, labourers, and entrepreneurs who for the past 150 years have continued to develop and redevelop local cultures in the name of progress, colony, empire, and nation remain connected with a long and complicated engagement with the fluidity of new cultural forms that continue to challenge the racialized yearnings of the nation state—China, Canada or the UAE. Described as a "contemporary monument to the relationship between those who have lived on the False Creek waterfront and those who will arrive in the future to call this area their home" (Tsang, 1997), Tsang's artwork exemplifies a continued drive to transform cultural texts into spaces of negotiation in which readers/walkers/viewers strive to come to terms with their experience of and participation in urban regenerations that are both here and not here, now and not now.

Walking in places, rather than flying overhead, has its own analytical and artistic merits. It conveys one element of a multifaceted ethnographic moment. Yet, it also conjures notions of flanerie and its classed, ethnicized, and gendered power relations (Pollock, 1988; Wolff, 1990). With this danger in mind we remain interested in the potential of what might be thought of as an 'ethnographic-artistic moment' of inter-urban and inter-Asian research, representation, referencing, and articulation. In this regard, we will leave the closing word to Miki (2000, 59), who writes, "The mobility of [postcolonial Asian Canadian] articulations and re-articulations may offer a critical potential to expose and unravel homogeneities—of

culture, identities, discourses—that cover over global/local indeterminacies in the production of aesthetic forms," of which the Asian city is a primary example.

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