Diverse Spaces

Diverse Spaces:
Identity, Heritage and Community in Canadian Public Culture

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5147-7, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5147-3

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Frost Centre at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada for supporting this project during the two years of my SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship. During that period, with the collaboration of Centre Director Dr. Julia Harrison, we organized the 2012 international conference *Diverse Spaces: Examining Identity, Community and Citizenship within Canadian Public Culture*, where the public presentations that resulted in most of these chapters were first offered and discussed. I would like to thank all those who took part in this stimulating event, as well as the many people who contributed to its success. Special recognition must go to Dr. Harrison for her advice and support. I would also like to express my gratitude to the many anonymous reviewers who read, critiqued and improved the essays submitted for this volume.

Another crucial influence on this project who I must acknowledge here is Roger I. Simon, whose writings are quoted in many parts of this book. Dr. Simon was an inspirational teacher, a great thinker and a personal mentor who died in September 2012. His penetrating questions on the ethical nature of public space, public memory, public pedagogy, and the coming together of publics are central to understanding public culture in diverse spaces. His role in the lives of young scholars was profound; he encouraged all of us to question "What might it mean to live our lives as if the lives of others truly mattered?" (Simon 2000, 62). This book seeks to follow his lead by nurturing and featuring contributions of new and early-career scholars inspired by Roger's ideas.

Susan Ashley, Editor

Simon, Roger. 2000. "The Touch of the Past: The Pedagogical Significance of a Transactional Sphere of Public Memory." *Revolutionary Pedagogies: Cultural Politics, Instituting Education, and the Discourse of Theory*, edited by Peter Trifonas, 61-80. New York: Routledge.

INTRODUCTION

DIVERSE SPACES IN CANADIAN PUBLIC CULTURE

SUSAN L.T. ASHLEY

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference held in April 2012 at Trent University, Peterborough, Canada, which addressed the ways that community identity and belonging are negotiated within sites of public culture in Canada. The conference, *Diverse Spaces: Examining Identity, Community and Citizenship in Canadian Public Culture*, explored the roles that public spaces play in the expression or contestation of different histories, different identities and different forms of local, national and transnational citizenship. The event provided a platform for discussing and developing links between various disciplinary perspectives about the spaces, media and practices of public culture as they occur on institutional and grassroots scales. "Diverse" academics and practitioners in Canadian studies, cultural studies, diversity studies, anthropology, sociology, Indigenous studies, museum and heritage studies, performance studies, and arts and culture organizations were brought together at the conference.

This interdisciplinary approach produced active and heterogeneous interpretations of the meaning of "diverse" and "spaces." Public discourses shape the multiple understandings of both words—whether within the "diverse spaces" constituted as cultural sites in Canada, or among the network of researchers who contributed to the conference and this volume. The interrogation of the complexity of these terms, and their articulation as a discursive field, lies at the core of our project. This book reflects on some of the theoretical and practical preoccupations that emerged at the conference, examining how "diverse" meanings of culture, identity, heritage and community, both dominant and alternative, are produced and consumed in many public "spaces" of engagement.

The expression of Canada, as a location and as a discursive formation, is an integral aspect of these histories, subjectivities and senses of belonging.

The “spaces” described in this book inspect Canada the nation as a bounded landscape, as well as diverse sites within its borders as venues for expression and interaction. The idea of Canada as a landscape is a foundational construct of Canadian identity that matters in material, affective ways: location is imbued with human emotion, identity-significance and politics. This space is constructed on official and everyday scales—the imagined nation of Benedict Anderson (1983) is produced, as Begona Aretxaga has written “through discourses and practices of power, produced in local encounters at the everyday level, and produced through the discourses of public culture, rituals of mourning and celebration, and encounters with bureaucracies, monuments, organization of space….” (Aretxaga quoted in Henderson and Wakeman 2013, 7). While public museums and monuments are the primary places producing Canadian-ness considered in this book, we see that some people have also sought to create alternative and “common” spaces—outdoor, virtual or community-oriented such as libraries—within which to enrich and complicate ideas about the heritage, identities and communities of Canada.

A particular goal of the conference was to examine and theorize this production of Canadian cultural spaces in relation to “multiculturalism,” interpreted as a signifier of “diverse” and as another foundational social construct. The mythology of Canada as “the most multicultural nation in the world” co-exists with the idea of Canada as physical place and affective landscape. We asked, what relationships, conflicts, negotiations, compromises, successes or failures emerge when people from diverse cultural backgrounds seek to engage with cultural, historical and social knowledge in the public sphere? Not only are older narratives and representations altered, but locations and sites are created or rethought. Many of the chapters of this book touch on or engage critically with multiculturalism as a central imaginary of Canadian-ness, starting off with Caitlin Gordon-Walker’s opening chapter on the normative ideal of multicultural nationalism. Underlying most criticisms in this book is the way that the plurality of peoples, histories and processes inherent in an ideal multiculturalism have been obscured or erased. Authors criticize how the idea of multiculturalism (as well as “diversity”) has been twisted or stagnated or employed for expedient purposes, especially in public policy applications and public institutional representations, as explored for example in Andrea Terry’s chapter. Formulaic multiculturalism has been universalised as an object and as cultural objects rather than generated as a fluid, creative, relational and activist practice. Keynote speaker at the Diverse Spaces conference, Rinaldo Walcott, also drew attention to the distortion of the ideal of multiculturalism as pluralism, into a conservative

value serving neoliberal goals that has enlisted a "preferred ethnic multicultural hierarchy of citizens" who share those conservative values (2012). Walcott emphasized the ways that public culture in Canada is being transformed to reflect these neoliberal values, and asked, what then happens to ideals of equality and social justice, and how might public spaces be reclaimed as commons? Some of the chapters in this book answer that call, demonstrating how public culture is an important means for marginalized citizens to express resistance, such as the photography of Jeff Thomas as described by Julie Nagam, but also how spiritual, cultural and heritage practices outside the mainstream can voice values irrespective of mainstream public culture, as detailed by Karim Karim regarding Ismaili community spaces and by Satwinder Bains on the Sikh Heritage Museum in B.C. The latter two chapters also illustrate how the identities of Canadians become pluralist through modern diasporic connections, complicating and elevating ideas about history, community and the mapping of space to transnational levels.

The conference call also sought broader meanings of "diverse" not just in the sense of ethnic diversity of actors. Who gets to constitute public spaces of expression, and the forms and processes of such public cultural manifestations, were important ideas to the conference and this book. Conference papers addressed diverse subjectivities of race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation, as well as their relative positions of power. This book highlights research that interrogates this diversity in relation to official producers of public culture as well as actors on the margins. Chapters explore conventional modes of meaning-making such as exhibitions and commemorations, but also recognize and draw attention to unofficial means of visual expression. Authors point out the ways that alternative voices and appearances within public culture may be performative, ephemeral or "in the shadows," sometimes offered through art, the Internet or even chalk drawings. The cover photo of Toronto's central square covered by spontaneous expressions of public memorializing, illustrating Brittany Ross-Fichtner's closing chapter, is one example of a diversity of ideas, styles of rendering and mappings of space by myriad transient peoples brought together over matters of concern.

The "public" nature of these spaces and the "publicness" of information in the public sphere draw my own academic interest: how the making-public of ideas affects the nature of the communication presented. Discourses about Canadian culture are constituted in the public realm through official statements and representations, and through unofficial practices and actions. Their entry into public space involves deliberate attempts—whether asserted, represented or performed—to communicate

with others. The nature and effect of this publicness, this visibility, denotes and connotes meanings. Sometimes the structuring of public space involves the concealment or protection of the private realm, possibly connoting public as a secular space, and private as intimate, spiritual or religious. Sometimes the public functioning of official institutions, and the effects of the social gaze of others in the public realm, serve to structure hierarchies of difference, more so than democratizing equality (Simon & Ashley 2010). But through such public display change is also possible, since dominant discourses are challenged, added to, or altered by the very presence of diverse ideas "in public" or within view of each other. The relative power of those who make public statements is shaken by public presence, especially when the address is made to all in the public realm, not just towards those in power. The vulnerability or risk inherent in putting one's idea in public, on display and subject to the scrutiny of others deserves recognition and consideration. This book's authors, in their own way, draw attention to diverse cases where those who appear and speak in public cultural settings are able to challenge what is normalized as appropriate visibility. Ongoing problems of exclusions, erasures and lack of voice within official culture are brought to light in these chapters, such as the deficiency of public commemoration of African Canadian history explored by Brittney Anne Bos, the invisibility of Indigenous stories in Nova Scotia criticized by Laura-Lee Kearns and Nancy Peters, and the shadowy narratives about the treatment of disabled or "unsuitable" immigrants uncovered by Jay Dolmage. These members of Canadian society still operate from the margins, but their re-appearances serve to take back and re-map public space, and re-inscribe erased narratives.

How people come together as "publics" to demonstrate forms of human connectness, is also a concern of these essays. The formation of such publics can be seen as limiting and hierarchizing, or as liberating and democratizing. For Hannah Arendt (1958), the public world is important because it does both: publicness relates and separates people at the same time; it gathers us together yet prevents us from becoming one, or the same. Forms of communication within the public realm have historically invoked a shared culture or collective past contained within hierarchies and boundary-making, as chapters in Part 1 demonstrate. But for Arendt, as well as Roger Simon (2008), connectedness between people must move beyond this towards a sociality that is open to diverseness, specificity and disagreement, especially in our world characterized by plurality, fluidity and uncertainty (Harvey 1989). While some chapter authors have sought out such "collected" not "collective" publics in their research, cases where

plurality and disagreement are accommodated within shared public spaces are elusive. Mary Elizabeth Luka's chapter outlining ArtSpots as a metaphoric "house" of creative citizenship, wherein participants are "present" together, sharing space but perhaps not purpose, comes closest to Arendt's sense of publics and their relatedness through difference. Conference keynote speaker Mo Dhaliwal (2012), a leading arts navigator in Vancouver, spoke about his on-the-ground experience of organizing cross-cultural events, advocating the need to shatter barriers between people by using arts spaces to enable connectedness between communities. His presentation illustrated the kinds of social and behavioural changes envisioned by Arendt, which were generated through the mixing of strangers and the reformation of publics during Vancouver's Bhangra celebrations.

It is worth noting that most chapters in this book address the visual, exhibitionary forms of expression employed in official and unofficial spaces of culture. Questioning what we might learn from more diverse processes of public cultural expression (speaking, touching, moving) that lie beyond exhibitionary outputs is also important. How might such non-visual modes and forms be affected by their "publicness"? And in turn, what impacts might such forms of public cultural expression have on our senses of identity, heritage and community? Whether this visual emphasis reflects the public nature of culture, or limitations in the research presented here, is a question left to future publication.

This volume also places particular emphasis on the role of "heritage" in the discourses about public culture, public spaces and publicness, and on the nature of the "diversity" that is articulated in heritage sites and practices. Heritage is defined through this book not simply as material structures or objects from the past to be preserved, or as sanitized official rhetoric meant to cohere multiculturalism into sameness (see James 2103). Such perspectives are critiqued in this book, and instead heritage is interpreted as a dynamic, emotional, and entangled cultural practice of the here and now, helping all generations get on with life as cultural beings (Kearney 2012). This heritage, understood as a complex of histories, stories, things, practices and ways of thinking that we want to pass on to future generations, is materially and affectively situated in spaces, narratives and performances. Public expressions of this more layered vision of heritage help to enable the self-definition of individuals and communities, not only as pedagogical expressions of history, identity and traditions, but also as activist statements used to assert demands for recognition and legitimation. My own research has examined heritage as a cultural process both on individual and group scales: how the past and

shared traditions shape, and are shaped by, people and communities. The relationship between people and their heritage is the base upon which individual and communal identities are formed—both a foundational bedrock and a well of creative potential to draw upon. Tony Bennett, citing William Ray, has written that this as the "logic of culture," seen as a "mechanism of person formation" (2006: 51). The process of working on and transforming the self arises from the tension between heritage and creativity, the past and the future, or "sameness" and "difference" (Ibid). Persons or collectives articulate their sense of self by thinking about, recognizing and shaping themselves in relation to the past and their heritage, and through self-conscious efforts to strive for and distinguish individuality or uniqueness.

Communal heritage is constituted through shared representations, discourses and practices sometimes defined as "collective memory" (Halbwachs 1992). A shared history is perceived as crucial to the formation of the "imagined community" or "imagined nation" such as Canada—through spaces and technologies of representation, people are able to sense that they belong to a broader collective (Anderson, 1983). Nation-states represent and enshrine collective memory in public institutions and memorials, a process that organizes, preserves and communicates those perceptions and remnants of the past. Such "in public" displays of shared memory or heritage is often invoked (like citizenship) as an indicator of group membership. As part of the colonial and modernist project, such forms of public culture tend to select and reproduce dominant or majority types of knowledge and ways of knowing, while minimizing or ignoring subordinate others (Ashley, 2005). This selectivity brings notions of shared singular heritage into conflict with ideas of pluralism; or as Karim notes in this volume, might possibly demonstrate diversity but not necessarily pluralism. These tensions come into play and are interrogated in several chapters of this volume.

This book also draws attention to the way perceptions of heritage or memory are bound up with ideas of space in multifaceted ways that reflect the conditions of postmodernity (Huyssen 2000). According to David Harvey, the meanings of time and space are created through material practices that constitute social life (1989, 204). The authors in this volume focus on material cases where both time (the past and heritage) and space (place, geography, location) are conceptualized in diverse ways that produce alternative meanings. Most have extended these observations into their political implications, especially for marginalized Canadians, and promote the emancipatory potential of alternative or complicated ideas of time-space more so than their disruptive or disorienting effects. Through

the collection of these chapters, I have tried to suggest James Young's (1993) notion of "collected" rather than "collective," in relation to heritage and identities, to reflect memory's inherently fragmented, individual and sometimes divergent characterisation of time and space.

Outline of the Book

The chapters presented here are organised in two sections. The first grouping, *Contested and Exclusionary Places*, offers accounts of official institutional sites of Canadian public culture and the ways that tensions and disagreements have been hidden and sometimes negotiated. Papers in Part 2, *Remapping Spaces of Voice and Community*, describe and inspect alternative cartographies of cultural space, reimagining the stories, participants and relationships that constitute a collected Canadian community.

Caitlin Gordon-Walker opens Part 1 with a close inspection of multiculturalism as a centrally defined feature of Canadian culture, and as a concept that constitutes and frames any discussions of diverse spaces in Canada. Her chapter, *The Process of Chop Suey: Rethinking Multicultural Nationalism at the Royal Alberta Museum*, explores museums as ideal places in which to examine "multicultural nationalism," its inherent limitations and its negotiation. Gordon-Walker points out that public museums within a multicultural national context are often called on to represent and enable expression of both the identity of a national community and the identities of different communities within the nation. The chapter discusses how the claims of a Canadian multicultural nationalism are expressed within the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in Edmonton, Alberta, especially the claim that every culture within the multicultural nation can be recognized. Gordon-Walker shows how the work of the Folklife/Cultural Communities program at the RAM simultaneously reproduces the limits of a specifically multicultural nationalist politics of recognition, while also challenging the limits imposed. She examines how a particular travelling exhibit called *Chop Suey on the Prairies* seeks to trouble received ideas about the nature of multicultural nationalism, and engage the museum's audience in a process of self-reflection and dialogue about cultural interaction and mixture as part of what it means to be "Canadian."

In *The Underground Railroad Monument and its Position Within a Visible Multicultural Discourse*, Brittney Anne Bos continues the interrogation of the nature of multiculturalism and its representation in Canada. She discusses how commemorations and monuments act as

physical manifestations and visual markers of nation and its identities. Bos looks at the ways that these spaces of memorialization can take on new meanings that reflect evolving understandings of the historical event. She considers as a case study the marking in Windsor, Ontario of the Underground Railroad as a significant event in Canadian historical narratives. The commemoration of the 19th century flight by enslaved people of African descent from the US into Canada began with a single plaque in 1929. Shifting imaginaries re-marked this site in successive memorials, reflecting white benevolence, anti-American patriotism, identity politics and multicultural performance in the space of 70 years. The chapter also points out how commemorations are not simply impositions on citizens by those holding positions of power, but rather they are negotiated by the community and people utilizing the public space. By tracing the changing meaning of the Underground Railroad's commemoration and its links to contemporary identity politics, this paper illuminates the critical connections between spaces of memorialization, policies of multiculturalism and the representation of national identity in Canada.

Andrea Terry also critiques multiculturalism as a trope in institutional representation of Canadian identity in her chapter *From Object Base to Multicultural Place to Digital Space: The Toronto Museum Project*. Terry also takes an historical perspective, telling the story of efforts by municipal officials to develop a museum in Toronto for the collection, protection and presentation of objects from Toronto's past. Lack of money, combined with shifting ideas about Toronto's historical narratives and changes in technologies of exhibitioning, resulted in abortive or inadequate attempts to create a public space to represent the heritage of "Torontonians." Terry explores what's at stake in the turn to virtual representations of history and heritage, with the Toronto Museum Project's latest incarnation as a website. Here, "Torontonians" continue to be institutionalized as representing "different ethnic groups," through the showcasing of objects, curatorial narrative and interviews.

The theme of exclusion and erasure in Canada's official spaces of public culture is central to Laura-Lee Kearns and Nancy Peters' chapter *(Re)inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence Through Public Petition, Performance and Art.* The authors bring together pointed observations about the non-diverse spaces of commemoration, memorialization, museums and libraries in relation to Aboriginal Peoples in Nova Scotia. They detail how the Mi'kmaw in contemporary Nova Scotia are "hidden in plain sight" while public culture celebrates white settlement history. But Kearns & Peters articulate and advocate the (re)inscription of Mi'kmaq presence

through public petition, performance and art. Such practices of heritage, art and cultural expression are detailed throughout the examples in Part 2 of this book, in particular by Julie Nagam in relation to Indigenous artist Jeff Thomas. *(Re)inscribing Mi'kmaq Presence* describes the installation of Alan Syliboy's mural *Dream Canoe* at the People's Place Library in Antigonish, N.S. as an example of a new relationship between non-Mi'kmaw and contemporary Mi'kmaw. The authors advocate public art as a part of "place-making" and "place-stories," powerful forces for social inclusion, public conversations, respect and affirmation of Indigenous knowledges, culture and heritage.

Part 1 concludes with Jay Dolmage's powerful chapter *Grounds for Exclusion: Canada's Pier 21 and its Shadow Archive*, which exposes a long and sickening history of social exclusion in Canada's immigration history. Multiculturalism as a central Canadian identity and ethos has been institutionalized in the Canadian National Museum of Immigration established in 2011 in Halifax, N.S. Known as Pier 21, the location was designated a Canadian National Historic Site in 1997 and became an immigration museum in 1999. The reproduction of a celebratory multicultural nationalist politics works at full force here, but Dolmage writes that Pier 21 was really "a space that was altogether unsatisfactory, a 'ground' for exclusion; the inverse of the 'diverse spaces' this collection centres." Dolmage reveals a "shadow archive" of documents, artifacts and structures that "haunt and bear witness to the rhetorical claims of the official museum." He details how the erasure of conflict and difference in the historical record of immigration within this National Museum has been reinforced by neoliberal ethics and practices of post-racial and non-agentive "diversity." Dolmage decries current policies and resource cutbacks in many government departments that perpetuate the camouflage of unsavory accounts of Canadian immigration and multiculturalism.

While the chapters in Part 1 emphasize the limitations and erasures imposed by multicultural discourses and representations in official public spaces in Canada, papers in Part 2, *Remapping Spaces of Voice and Community*, offer positive movements towards the creation of more truly diverse spaces of public heritage and culture. The language in these cases stresses recovering and remapping concealed histories and geographies, bringing them into public light through performance, art and exhibition.

This section begins with the unusual history of ArtSpots, a unique multimedia space in the public sphere that supported a collaborative mode of artistic community. Mary Elizabeth Luka, original developer of this space in 1997, is the author of *Mapping CBC ArtSpots*, an exploration of how arts practice can be seen as both creative labour and citizenship

engagement within public media, and the particular role of public broadcasting. In this case, cultural spaces were fashioned within an official institution, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), but had a productive autonomy born of their marginal situation. ArtSpots was a forerunner of the kinds of new media spaces of the early 21st century that bring together artists, viewers and users to engage with creative visual works and stories. Luka maps the creative activities and inter-relationships of artists in society using the space-oriented metaphor of a house. She sees such activities as a new form of "creative citizenship," an assertion of presence, membership and relationships through active arts practice.

Karim H. Karim takes up the notion of re-mapping in *Pluralism, Migration, Space and Song: Ismaili Arrangements of Public and Private Spheres*. Karim discusses the relocation and assertion of transnational spaces within the Canadian national space, specifically Ismaili spaces, and its affect on Ismaili subjectivities. He interrogates the adjustments of private and public spaces by migrant subjectivities as they map out both new and replicated locations and relationships. Ismaili Muslim experiences of settlement in Canada necessitate new *jamatkhanas* (prayer halls) as private spaces of ritual practices, but also major new structures that articulate the community's presence in cityscapes. The Aga Khan Museum prominently located in Toronto is a prime example of the balancing between seclusion and publicness designed for Ismaili spaces as a contemporary strategy of active citizenship. But the nature of the public face presented in these spaces is questioned by Karim for its tendency to favour unitary discourses despite the purported support of pluralism by Ismaili leadership. He uses the example of the decline of traditional prayer song *ginan*, and the challenge presented by Ismaili novelists, filmmakers, and activists in Canada who have invoked alternative imaginaries.

While the Aga Khan Museum is an international site of public culture developed to reflect a global diaspora of faith and culture, Satwinder Bains reflects on the process of creating a very local diasporic space of oral history and volunteer practice. *When Old Becomes New and the Telling is Re-Told: Sikh Stories Within Museum Walls* offers a lyrical exploration of what it means to be a stranger in a new, sometimes hostile land, and the dedication of individuals to recognize, preserve and present pioneers' stories in a new museum space. Like Karim, Bains stresses the importance of a physically-located religious and cultural centre to this immigrant community, in this case Sikhs from India. Sikh immigrants settled in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia and built a wooden gurdwara (temple) there in 1911. One hundred years later the community chose to retell this story of the past in a unique heritage museum at the historic temple: what

Bains calls a project of "recovered history" that had been rejected and "untold, unheard or unseen" in the mainstream Canadian narrative. Personal experiences, emotions and narratives once silently protected in the private memories of pioneers and their families, have now entered the public sphere through oral histories and exhibits at the Sikh Heritage Museum. Bains charts internal and external debates about subjectivity and meaning-making, colonialism and racism, private and public culture, "collective" memory, and the distinctive experiences of community members newly introduced to the idea of an archive as a site of communal renewal and rebirth. The emphasis here is less about remapping of space but more the construction of a wholly new place, and the assertion through self-representation of voices hitherto unrecognized in Canada. Whether such new spaces may be seen as a further reproduction of the limitations effect of multicultural nationalism, detailed by Gordon-Walker in Chapter One, or as evidence of strong agency in a shared public sphere, remains to be seen as this site evolves.

Julie Nagam writes that such assertion of voice, in this case by artist-advocate Jeff Thomas, is essential to recognizing alternative stories, ways of thinking, and senses of heritage that will remap Canadian spaces. In *Charting Indigenous Stories of Place: An Alternate Cartography Through the Visual Narrative of Jeff Thomas*, we return to arts practice as important to the assertion of alternative experiences of space (as seen in Kearns & Peters' generative "place-stories" and Luka's "creative citizenship"). In this case, Nagam argues that the embodied practices and knowledge of Indigenous artists reveal concealed geographies that challenge and contradict myths of settlement entrenched in colonial narratives. She inspects the works of Haudenosaunee artist Jeff Thomas who reworks "Indian" stereotypes using whimsy to draw attention to the presence of Indigenous people in the landscape of Toronto. By visually re-placing Indigenous people within photographs of present-day Toronto, Thomas suggests new ways of thinking about the alternative Indigenous stories, relationships and experiences that are embedded in the landscape, and are still a vital part of city space.

The final chapter in this volume takes us to an event in Canadian history when voice, art, memorialization and public space came together in an expression of public culture and politics. In the weeks following the August 2011 death of Jack Layton, the federal Official Leader of the Opposition in Canada, mourners transformed the public square in front of Toronto's city hall into a vast memorial site, covering the surface with chalk art and tributes. In her chapter *Performing Sidewalk Chalk Politics: A Memorial for Jack Layton in Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto*, Brittany

Ross-Fichtner examines the ways that chalk enabled a playful, theatrical and ephemeral space for the performance of alternative forms of political engagement by those marginalized by dominant discourses. These multilingual and visual messages appeared and reappeared despite rain throughout the week as people wrote and rewrote postings, captivating the media in Toronto, Canada, and throughout the world. While these acts of public culture temporarily interrupted the rising conservative political dominance at the federal and municipal levels, the right-wing press attempted to ridicule their spectacularity and theatricality. The chalk drawings call attention to the forms in which the past is passed on to future generations. Like any historical event, or the lives of any human, there is the inevitable disappearance, like the chalk itself, to be recalled in memory and restaged in heritage. Ross-Fichtner argues that the power of the chalk memorial also lay in its facilitation of an interactive and communal experience for members of the public, who gathered, organized and shared affective expressions in this public space. Her example demonstrates a form of public culture and use of public space within which strangers are brought together to confront the complexities and uncertainties of human life and death. This diverse community mobilized semblance and difference, permanence and ephemerality, to renew and remake a "public connectedness" and "world-making" that Hannah Arendt valued so highly (Simon & Ashley, 2010).

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PART ONE

CONTESTED AND EXCLUSIONARY PLACES

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROCESS OF CHOP SUEY: RETHINKING MULTICULTURAL NATIONALISM AT THE ROYAL ALBERTA MUSEUM

CAITLIN GORDON-WALKER

Many of the papers presented at the Diverse Spaces conference highlighted possibilities for creating spaces of community or considered the articulation of community identities and perspectives. In this chapter, I consider several approaches to these endeavours within the context of a mainstream, provincial-level, state-sponsored museum. More specifically, I describe the creation and development of what began as the Folklife program and has become the Cultural Communities program at the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in Edmonton, Alberta, as well as one of its recent projects, a small temporary travelling exhibition. This display, titled *Chop Suey on the Prairies: A Reflection on Chinese Restaurants in Alberta*, was first shown at the RAM in 2010 and subsequently travelled to various smaller community museums around the province for a period of almost two years. An expanded version of this exhibition opened at the RAM in April 2012 for one year, and it is intended that parts will be incorporated in future exhibits when the museum's new facilities are built (Tzang 2011).

The Cultural Communities program at the RAM is unique, since no other provincial or territorial museum in Canada has a curatorial department dedicated to the nation's non-Aboriginal minority communities. However, the program also exemplifies the manner in which cultural difference is generally conceptualized and represented within Canadian public cultural institutions. It is, I propose, both symptomatic of, and instrumental in perpetuating, a much broader phenomenon and practice of Canadian multicultural nationalism.

The following critique of the Cultural Communities program at the RAM is therefore not meant as a limited criticism of a particular institution, nor is my discussion of the *Chop Suey on the Prairies* project,

though generally positive, intended as unmitigated praise for a specific exhibition or its approach to representing community. Instead, I am interested in showing how the work of the Cultural Communities program simultaneously reflects, contributes to, and challenges the hegemony of a particular conceptualization of cultural difference in Canada.

I begin this chapter, therefore, by outlining briefly what I mean by multicultural nationalism, focussing especially on its articulation of and through a politics of recognition. I draw attention to the assumptions that are inherent in a multicultural nationalist politics of recognition and argue that, on a basic structural level, such a politics tends to conceptualize cultural difference in terms of discrete reified cultures and to emphasize visible difference and visual practices of representation. On the other hand, a politics of recognition also suggests a potential for dialogism; it both implies a certain kind of limitation to how cultural difference can be recognized and provides the means for disrupting the articulation of particular limits.

After addressing the theoretical literature, I look at the more concrete case of the RAM's Cultural Communities program. I assert that the initiation and organization of this program directly reflect and reproduce the assumptions and character of limitation inherent to a multicultural nationalist politics of recognition. I then moderate my claim by addressing the more practical operation of the program, in particular the efforts of the program's curators to engage in a more dialogic practice of recognition. In conclusion, I suggest that the RAM replicates multicultural nationalism's own contradictory character, both reinforcing the structural limits it imposes and serving as a means through which these limits can be challenged.

Multicultural Nationalism and a Politics of Recognition

The idea of multiculturalism, which has been and continues to be varyingly interpreted, is part of Canada's national identity and culture, incorporated into the way that Canada defines itself both locally and to the world. Whereas difference is sometimes seen as anathema to the establishment and maintenance of a strongly unified nation, Canada claims that it has achieved national unity not only in spite of, but indeed *because of* its cultural diversity. Claims such as these constitute an explicitly multicultural nationalism—a nationalism that is often represented as being especially tolerant and inclusive but that, like any nationalism, is inclusive only up to a point, a point whose specific definition is always changing and contested but whose general character is determined by the basic

assumptions and claims that a specifically multicultural nationalism makes.

One of multicultural nationalism's implicit claims is that a culturally diverse nation is able to reconcile demands for equality and the rights of every individual citizen, with demands for recognition and the rights of every cultural group in the nation. In Canada, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1988) states that the federal government will "ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their cultural diversity." Although common interpretation of official multicultural policy has changed continually since its introduction in 1971 and has recently focused more on fostering integration and inclusive citizenship than on publicly celebrating cultural diversity (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Fleras and Kunz 2001; Kunz and Sykes 2007), this discourse of equality and recognition continues to provide a foundation for Canadian multiculturalism. The website of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, for instance, claims that "Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging" (CIC 2008).

Charles Taylor establishes the philosophical basis for the claim that every individual and every cultural group in the nation can be given equal and adequate recognition in his influential essay, "The Politics of Recognition" (1994). In this essay, he describes a "massive subjective turn in modern culture" that occurred in the late 18th century that led to the development of an individualized sense of identity (1994, 29). Identity came to be no longer defined automatically by social position but rather through negotiation for recognition "in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (1994, 33). Taylor argues that this inevitably led to a universal need and demand for recognition.

Proposing how this demand for recognition can be met within the context of a multicultural state, Taylor (1994, 38) articulates a politics of recognition based on two separate but related principles: one a principle of a universal equality of dignity through which everyone is seen as being equally entitled to an identity; the other a principle of universal difference through which everyone is seen to have an equal right to a *distinct* identity. While negotiation for recognition takes place in both the intimate and public spheres, Taylor focuses on the latter and argues that the two principles of a politics of recognition can be reconciled through a specifically communitarian liberalism that assures equal recognition to

every citizen both as an individual like any other and as a distinct individual whose authentic identity depends, amongst other things, upon membership in a particular cultural group. By extension, this argument claims that every individual and *thus* every particular culture within the nation can achieve public recognition.

The assertion that every individual and every culture within a multicultural nation can be equally recognized therefore makes a claim of representational completeness, establishing its feasibility in principle and making a universal demand for equal and adequate recognition seem sensible. In practice, however, this goal cannot be attained. If a state or any other institution claims to represent the diversity encompassed within a multicultural society, it will always be guilty of the charge that it has failed to do so and that it has left some group out.

In addition to making an impossible claim of representational completeness, the argument that every individual and every culture in a multicultural society can be recognized also establishes a structural assumption that cultures as such can be objectified as precisely delimited units. As Rita Dhamoon pus it with regard to liberal multicultural discourse in general and especially Taylor's communitarian liberalism, the "concept of culture is specifically given meaning in terms of particular ethnic, national, and linguistic groups as discrete and bounded entities" (2009, 20).

This reification of culture, the practice of understanding cultural difference in terms of distinct, cohesive, often static "cultures"—in other words, in terms of cultural *diversity*—has a number of implications. It enables the proliferation of arguments that some cultures are better than others and, more dangerously, that some cultures are inherently harmful and thus outside the bounds of what should be tolerated within a multicultural society. Such arguments are evident in claims that multiculturalism is bad for women because it protects so-called cultures that are alleged to be *essentially* patriarchal and demeaning to women, or that Western military intervention in the Middle East or the banning of women from wearing a *niqab* or *burka* is legitimate because it aims to protect the rights of women purported to be threatened by their own culture (Abu-Lughod 2002).

Even within a peaceful and inclusionary discourse, however, the reification of culture can be harmful. It can lead to the silo-ing of a multicultural society so that a clear distinction is drawn between each so-called culture included within it. In the context of a particular nation-state, this almost inevitably leads to an interpretation of national society that distinguishes between a hegemonic mainstream national culture shared by

the "exalted subjects" of the nation and a series of subaltern "minority cultures" (Thobani 2007; Mackey 1999).[1] While the members of minority cultures are included in the nation, they are nonetheless, in the words of Sunera Thobani, "ontologized as strangers" (2007, 15). This not only sets them off as being always inherently "different," but also positions them in an unequal relationship with the state and with members of a central majority who are authorized as subjects capable of bestowing recognition, while the members of cultural minorities are constructed as being capable only of receiving it (Day 2000; Thobani 2007; Lynch 2011).[2]

The reification of culture prevents the acknowledgement of the intersubjective influence of cultural exchange, of interaction between so-called cultures, or of cultural mixture. Only those who can be identified on the basis of a singular and readily definable "culture" can be easily recognized. This will unquestionably lead to incidents of *mis*recognition, which Taylor argues "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (1994, 25).

Taylor maintains that in order to be properly recognized an individual must be recognized as he or she would recognize his or her own authentic self and argues that this must occur through a process of negotiation and *mutual* recognition. When a politics of recognition is practiced through a communitarian liberalism, however, it implicitly entails the reification of culture and is often transmuted into a politics of identity (Bannerji 2000). At the same time, it often positions the state and the exalted subjects of the nation as active agents capable of giving recognition to cultural minorities without needing to demand recognition in return. As a result, the dialogue necessary for an adequate and mutual recognition often does not occur except on a personal level. That being said, a politics of recognition based upon and fully engaging in a dialogical practice toward the goal of mutual recognition can simultaneously undermine the foundational structure on which a liberal communitarian politics of recognition is based.

Representation, Museums and a Politics of Recognition

Museums offer an ideal place in which to examine a politics of recognition, its inherent limitations and its dialogical potential, first because they are often called upon both to represent a national public and to recognize the value of cultural difference, and second because they are sites of both public representation and public interaction. Museums within a multicultural state often seek to represent both a national community and each of the communities contained within it. They are most obviously

faced with the practical challenges inherent in this goal toward representational completeness and, for the most part, reproduce and illustrate the limitations of a multicultural nationalist politics of recognition articulated in the broader national society. However, museums are also necessarily dialogical, not in the sense of being open and egalitarian spaces of public discussion, but in the sense of being places that are both produced by and productive of dialogue. As a result, while the dialogue that occurs within museums is often constrained (Lynch 2011; Lynch and Alberti 2010), museums also illustrate how the structural foundations of a multicultural nationalist politics of recognition can be undermined and provide opportunities for more dialogical forms of recognition to occur.

When a politics of recognition is articulated within a context of multicultural nationalism through an unequal relationship between those commonly deemed able to recognize and those commonly presumed to only desire recognition[3], it often emphasizes visible markers of cultural difference and focuses on aspects of culture such as food, music, dance and tradition, that are generally presumed to be representative of diverse cultures. The Canadian state, for instance, often seeks to acknowledge "visible minorities" or categorize and recognize individuals as members of particular "ethnic communities" that are often racialized (Bannerji 2000).

Meanwhile, public institutions often represent cultural difference as a visual spectacle of cultural diversity. Folk festivals, multicultural festivals and heritage festivals provide an obvious example, offering a range of different "ethnic" foods and displaying "authentic" or "traditional" performances and handicrafts. The website of the 2012 Heritage Days Festival in Edmonton, Alberta, for example, advertised that 85 cultures would be represented in 63 pavilions and invited potential visitors to "[s]ample culinary delicacies, see creative performances, shop for crafts, artwork, and clothing, or chat with people eager to tell you a little about their cultural roots and their present-day communities in Canada" (Heritage Festival 2012, n.p.).

Public museums often also portray cultural difference in terms of cultural diversity, incorporating representations of particular "cultures" into a national narrative or describing them independently in dedicated exhibitions or separate museums. The Canada Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) in Ottawa, for instance, depicts a Chinese hand laundry; an African-Canadian community schoolhouse that according to the museum's website tells a story "about people, black people, sticking together and succeeding in building a Canadian community" (CMC 2011), and a Ukrainian bookseller and publishers/musical supply shop described on the website as having sold "such items as newspapers, religious goods,

ethnic records and folk art supplies" and catering "to a dozen different ethnic groups […] as a veritable resource centre for cultural survival" (CMC 2010). Both the CMC and many of Canada's provincial museums have hosted exhibitions about specific cultural communities—Ukrainian-Canadians, Italian-Canadians, Vietnamese-Canadians, and so on—while museums such as the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre, the Jewish Heritage Centre and the Sikh Heritage Museum [chapter nine this volume] address particular cultural communities in a more focussed and long-term way.

Together, on a structural level, these exhibitions and museums contribute to and help reinforce a multicultural nationalism that claims to be able to represent every individual and every cultural community within the multicultural nation, buttressing the perception that representational completeness can be achieved and that cultural difference can be understood in terms of a finite series of discrete and bounded cultures. In doing so, they uphold and legitimize the more widespread distinction between a majority national culture and various cultural minorities that implies an unequal relationship in which minority cultures are constructed as objects demanding or receiving recognition from the nation. They present a spectacle of reified cultural difference as a series of seemingly definable bounded cultures.

In many cases, however, museums incorporate extensive historical and cultural research into their exhibitions, integrating personal stories and social and political histories rather than only displaying ostensibly representative cultural traditions and objects. The Chinese hand laundry exhibition at the CMC, for example, includes an original documentary sharing interviews with individuals who worked in the hand laundering business and their children. The schoolhouse exhibition specifically represents Toles school and tells a story about a single community formed in Amber Valley north of Edmonton by African-American immigrants to Alberta in the early 20th century. And the Ukrainian booksellers and publishers/musical supply store represents a particular business founded by Frank Dojacek who immigrated to Winnipeg from what is now the Czech Republic in 1903. Each of these exhibitions is displayed as being "representative" of a particular culture, but also provides more precise historical context. Entire exhibitions and museums dedicated to singularly-defined cultural communities often relate even more detailed and complex interpretations of history and culture.

Moreover, having been forged though dialogical engagement, museum exhibitions often present diverse perspectives, encouraging visitors to also engage in a varied dialogue. They might explicitly seek to challenge the