MOVING FORWARD:

THE “SAVE THE KOGAWA HOUSE” CAMPAIGN AND
RECONCILIATORY POLITICS IN CANADA

by

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This paper examines the symbolic implications of preserving Canadian author Joy Kogawa’s childhood home in the name of “reconciliation.” The house features prominently in Kogawa’s acclaimed semi-autobiographical novel *Obasan*, based in part on her experience of Japanese Canadian internment during World War II. From 2003 to 2006, the house was poised for demolition until a non-profit land trust secured the house’s protection through a campaign guided by ideals of “hope, healing, and reconciliation.”

In the current global climate of redress, the oft-invoked terms “reconciliation” and “healing” are increasingly evacuated of meaning, and are consequently dismissed simply as empty rhetoric. I sought to determine how these terms operated in the context of the Kogawa House. In order to assess the site’s capacity to engage reconciliatory ideals, I consulted and analyzed fundraising materials published by campaign organizers, letters of support from the public, and relevant media reports.

I argue first that the real-world history of internment converged conceptually with *Obasan*’s fictionalized telling of these events so that the house and Kogawa herself became cognitive metonyms for the larger injustice. As a result, collective/national healing and reconciliation could be metonymically enacted through more familiar modes of interpersonal reconciliation. For example, Kogawa’s long-awaited “homecoming,” a deeply meaningful moment for the author herself, could become a gesture of symbolic restitution for all Japanese Canadians’ lost property.
The second argument central to this thesis is that the historically dark period of Japanese Canadian internment, and its legacies, was made more intelligible and coherent for various stakeholders through the overlapping narratives constructed around saving the Kogawa House. I contend that what was at stake in this heritage preservation project was not only post-war relations between Japanese Canadians and the nation that betrayed them, but also the dominant Canadian narrative of multiculturalism—that Canada is a country that embraces diversity and upholds human rights. This reconciliatory project maintained the coherence of this vital Canadian myth.

I conclude by claiming the Kogawa House as a successful model for community-based projects aimed at sustainable reconciliation, where ongoing engagement with past injustices is vital to deterrence and non-repetition of future ones.
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DEDICATION

For all those who endured.
CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION

Please be informed that … your property … is in course of sale at a price equal
to that placed upon it by an independent appraiser.

While it is not necessary that the title be available in order to complete the
sale it is preferred that it be surrendered to the Registrar of Land Titles.

(Kitagawa 193)

born-again house
dream-come-true house
love that endures house
once-upon-a-time house
Momotaro-come-home house
I-love-everyone house

Marpole house

as the heart flies
straight home
home

(Kogawa “happy birthday” 164)

Many variations of the “Momotaro” Japanese folk-tale referenced in Joy Kogawa’s poem
“happy birthday dear house” have been passed down for centuries, although the basic
story elements have remained the same. An ageing couple that has for years longed for a
child is miraculously bestowed with a son. One day while washing clothes by a river, the
woman encounters a giant peach floating downstream; she and her husband are
astonished when the over-sized fruit splits open to reveal a beautiful baby, whom they
name Momotaro (“peach son”). As a young man, the wise and courageous Momotaro
decides he must leave his family for a short time to confront aggressors from a coastal
island who have, for many years, robbed and killed the people of his own land. With the
help of a small cadre of animals he befriends on his journey, Momotaro is ultimately victorious. Having avenged his people, he returns home to care for his parents, bringing peace and stability to his homeland.

Kogawa’s allusion to the Momotaro tale economically expresses a constellation of narrative elements—the joys of homecoming; the reconstitution of family; the significance of place; rebirth; redemption—that parallel the admittedly fairy-tale-like “story” of the real Marpole house to which the poem is dedicated. This small Vancouver house was at the centre of a highly publicized heritage debate that engaged people across Canada. The early twentieth-century bungalow, unremarkable in most ways, has become for many a potent symbol of the injustices perpetrated against Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. The house at 1450 West 64th Avenue was the childhood home of author Joy Kogawa, who wrote the acclaimed 1981 novel *Obasan*, a semi-autobiographical account of a Japanese Canadian family’s wartime uprooting, internment, and forced relocation to sugar beet fields in Alberta. *Obasan* offered an eloquent articulation of a Japanese Canadian experience that proved instrumental in the Japanese Canadian redress movement’s early organization and self-identification. The house figures prominently in *Obasan* as the Nakane house, a recurring symbol of all that was lost, and an idealized place to which the character of Naomi Nakane longs to return.

The federal government’s seizure of the “Nakane house” was part of a larger, comprehensive campaign perpetrated against Japanese Canadians that stripped them of rights of citizenship, declared them enemies within their own country, and moved them
away from the Pacific coast to camps in the Kootenay Mountains, where they were 
detained indefinitely without having been charged with any crime. At war’s end, Justice 
Henry Bird coordinated a commission purportedly to compensate Japanese Canadians for 
their material losses, awarding settlements based on government records of confiscated 
property. What the bureaucratic rosters of “safe-guarded” property did not document, of 
course, were the lives and livelihoods attached to these objects and places. For the people 
obligated to forfeit their businesses, homes, and possessions, the loss of physical property 
coincided with the violation of things more intangible and fundamental—dignity and 
humanity, feelings of security, ties with family and community, and a sense of place.

Throughout her adult life, Kogawa herself carried with her Naomi’s wish to return to the 
Marpole house. On a trip to Vancouver in 2003, she discovered that the house was listed 
for sale but was dismayed that the asking price was more than she could afford. Although 
the property was ultimately sold to another buyer, Kogawa’s “discovery” of the house 
after years of being away re-affirmed its symbolic importance for her. A group of friends 
and supporters, who empathized with Kogawa’s longing to “go home,” kept watch on the 
house after its conveyance to new owners. They soon alerted city officials to what 
appeared to be illegal alterations to the structure, thus initiating a three-year campaign to 
preserve the building in Kogawa’s name. A diverse cohort of advocates arranged 
meetings, raised funds, and lobbied politicians to secure a demolition injunction against 
the bewildered new owner who, unaware of the building’s connection to the author, was 
preparing to build a larger house on the site—much like the boxy, two-storey homes that 
have sprung up around it in the last few decades. With the owner’s negotiated
cooperation, the original building was ultimately preserved, sold to the Land
Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC), and in it established an ongoing writers-in-
residence program that hosts “writers of conscience” who address such issues as human
rights and racism in their work.

Throughout the Kogawa House campaign, saving the home was presented in newspapers,
letters to the City of Vancouver, and various campaign documents as a means by which
to right the wrongs of the Japanese Canadian internment—as a means to effect
“reconciliation.” I followed the campaign’s progress through media coverage after 2003,
becoming increasingly intrigued by the emotions aroused by the house and the conviction
of people who championed its preservation. I wondered why the evident enthusiasm for
saving the Kogawa House did not manifest itself similarly for other sites associated with
the history of Japanese Canadians—former Japantown, for instance. Preservation of the
original “boom town” buildings in the Powell Street district—the residential, commercial,
and cultural centre of Japanese life from the first wave of immigrants in the 1890s up to
the 1942 exodus—still fails to garner anything close to the kind of public support shown
the Kogawa House.

The swiftness of public response to the campaign, and the passion evidenced in letters
supporting the building’s preservation, proclaimed the site’s symbolic centrality in many
Canadians’ literary imagination and their understanding of the mistreatment of Japanese
Canadians. To date, however, there has been a lack of critical discourse around the
relatively instant transformation of the Kogawa House from obscurity and invisibility to
resonant touchstone of historical injustices against Japanese Canadians. Indeed, following
the house’s rescue, little public discussion has taken place about what it means to have
saved this relic of Kogawa’s landmark novel in the name of redress and reconciliation.

The notion of “reconciliation” informs many projects with an aim to address the legacies
of human rights abuses, atrocity, or the transition to democracy from autocratic rule—
indeed whenever organized efforts are made to promote “political healing” and to bring
together groups formerly engaged in conflict (Dwyer 92; Daly and Sarkin 183). The
concept of reconciliation is widely invoked in various contexts, yet chronically ill
defined, and sometimes greeted with skepticism that it is little more than fashionable
rhetoric (Daly and Sarkin 3). Admittedly, I, too, had responded to the coverage of the
Kogawa House campaign with some wariness: there seemed to me to be a highly suspect
element of “feel-goodness” permeating the project, which left me wondering whose
interests were being served, and to what ends. What does reconciliation mean in this
context?

This paper is written with an aim to identify what about the Kogawa House allowed it to
be so easily constructed as a reconciliatory space. In order to bring something to bear on
this complex site of memory, I will critically assess its symbolic representation in
documents drawn from the “Save the Kogawa House” campaign, including TLC
fundraising materials, letters from the public, and media accounts. It became clear
through the course of research that TLC’s “key messages” were consistent with
sentiments expressed by many individuals and organizations supporting the campaign.
The ultimate success in preserving the house speaks to the compelling way in which the Kogawa House was cognitively (and socially) constructed. I will locate the Kogawa House within a range of reconciliatory possibilities, thereby lending credence to some of the claims made for it, while opening a space to question others. I will argue that the house could be conceived as a reconciliatory site because it is a space that converges the real world and the fictitious realm of Kogawa’s novel; because it re-animates a narrative of Canadian history already established in the public consciousness; because it closes several “narrative loops” via the emblematic figure of Joy Kogawa, who embodies the multiple personae of activist, victim, child, literary character, and writer; and because it allows for the powerful notion of “homecoming” and for the symbolic return of lost property.

I begin with an overview of the events surrounding the internment of Japanese Canadians, including the longer history of official racism against Japanese Canadians prior to World War II, the dispersal program after the war, calls for redress, and the eventual settlement with the Mulroney government in 1988. I then proceed to a synopsis of the events surrounding the near demolition of the “Kogawa Homestead” and the steps that were taken to eventually save it.

Throughout, I ground my investigation in analysis of letters written by individuals and groups to the City of Vancouver concerning demolition of the house; press releases and promotional material from the Land Conservancy of British Columbia; and articles published in newspapers and online. I draw on these diverse sources in order to identify
key themes demonstrating the various ways that the house was conceptualized and represented within different contexts by different claims-makers.

I conclude by discussing how it might be possible to apply the findings of this specific case study to other sites and environments as we, as Canadians, delve deeper into more organized redress projects, and seek to secure symbols that lay the groundwork for reconciliation, in whatever terms. There is little doubt that these situations will grow in urgency as more groups and individuals become more vocal, organized, and assertive in their calls for acknowledgement and reparation. By unpacking this site’s unique resonance, I hope to contribute to discourse surrounding the role of place and built space in memory practice in this current “age of apology.”
CHAPTER TWO | INTERNMENT AND REDRESS

Time heals the details, but time cannot heal the fundamental wrong. My children will not remember the first violence of feeling, the intense bitterness I felt, but they will know that a house was lost through injustice. As long as restitution is not made, that knowledge will last throughout the generations to come … that a house, a home was lost through injustice.

— Muriel Kitagawa¹
(qtd. in Miki “Life and Times” 54)

In this section, I provide a detailed account of the Japanese Canadian internment in order to convey the scope of their mistreatment during the war, and to demonstrate how the actions taken against them can be seen as the culmination of pervasive anti-Asian sentiment that permeated mainstream Canadian society since the arrival of the first Chinese labourer in the mid-nineteenth century. This overview will establish a framework for looking at the Japanese Canadian redress movement of the 1980s, and ultimately the significance of the Kogawa House campaign, against this historical backdrop.

The first half of my historical overview focuses primarily on Japanese Canadians’ loss of property and their forced eviction from the coast of British Columbia. Of course, these are just two inter-related aspects of a broader, more complex, Japanese Canadian experience during the war period; however, it is not my wish to present this entire history. Rather, my intent is to foreground property as a way to enter into a discussion

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¹ In the preliminary pages to Obasan, Joy Kogawa expresses her indebtedness to the writings of Muriel Kitagawa, a second-generation Japanese Canadian woman who contributed to the English-language Japanese Canadian newspaper the New Canadian in Vancouver. Her extensive letters to family, friends, and government officials, in which she documented the treatment of Japanese Canadians after Pearl Harbor, were the source of much of the fact-based material in Obasan.
about the significance of the Kogawa House as a physical object and a site tied to this complex history. Familiarity with Japanese Canadians’ material losses will help contextualize the “repatriation” of the Kogawa House and the “return home” of Kogawa herself. The second half of this section outlines the chronology of events leading to the Japanese Canadian redress settlement in 1988.

* * *

Part 1: Disruption

When Japan launched its surprise attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, there were approximately 23,000 Japanese Canadians living in Canada: 6,000 Japanese nationals; 3,000 Japanese-born naturalized Canadian citizens, and 14,000 Canadian-born citizens of Japanese ancestry (Patton 7). The majority—seventy-five percent—of Japanese Canadians at this time were naturalized citizens or Canadian-born Nisei (Kobayashi and Miki 16). Ninety-five percent of Japanese Canadians lived in the province of British Columbia (Kobayashi and Miki 18). The majority of Nisei at this time were fundamentally “Canadian” in speech, manner, and dress, having been born and raised in Canada and educated at English schools in BC (Adachi 235). Most had never set foot outside of Canada, let alone been “back” to Japan.

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2 Japanese Canadians refer to each successive generation by a unique name. One who was born in Japan, and later came to Canada is a member of the Issei generation. The Canadian-born children of Issei parents are Nisei, while their children are Sansei. Fourth- and fifth-generation Japanese Canadians are Yonsei and Gosei.
The lives of Japanese Canadians were changed irrevocably by Japan’s unexpected declaration of war on the United States. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, there was widespread speculation in Canada that such a sophisticated, coordinated military assault must have involved a network of spies. Many feared that a similar attack on the west coast of the continent was imminent (Patton 14). By now, Japan was officially an enemy of Canada, making it increasingly difficult for Japanese Canadians to live comfortably alongside their Caucasian neighbours. The palpable anti-Asian sentiment following Pearl Harbor was not unprecedented, however.

An “Oriental problem” was plainly announced in 1901 census data. Approximately ten percent of the residents of British Columbia were Chinese and Japanese, two groups believed to be notoriously difficult to assimilate into white society (Patton 14). After Canada joined Confederation, measures were put in place to curtail Asian immigration—Chinese in particular—through measures like a head tax for males entering the country, and denial of franchise. Despite the legal hassles, Asian immigrants continued to come to Canada for work opportunities. Once landed in Canada, Asian migrants were treated as second-class citizens—paid poorly, barred from most professions, and prohibited from voting.

The racist ideology that informed Canada’s political stance at this time permeated mainstream society. In discussing British Columbians’ resentment of Japanese immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century, Janice Patton notes that it was understood that the “Japs” had taken over the fishing industry; that they reproduced at an
astonishing rate; that they were reckless and criminal, untrustworthy, opportunistic, and only loyal to the Japanese homeland (19).

In 1907, race riots began to erupt in Vancouver, sparked by the employment of seemingly vast hordes of Chinese workers on large railway projects throughout the province. This year also saw the highest influx to date of Japanese immigrants (Adachi 63), whose increasing numbers precipitated the organizing of a mass anti-Asian rally in Vancouver on 7 September 1907. Trade unions, veterans, and religious groups were among supporters and attendees who expressed a shared vision for an exclusively white Canada (Barnholden 32). Incendiary speeches began on the grounds of City Hall near Main and Hastings, which ultimately incited a raucous and violent march through Chinatown on Pender Street to Japantown in the Powell Street district. Angry rallyers smashed windows of Chinese- and Japanese-owned businesses before police were called in to quell the disturbance (Barnholden 33–35; Adachi 63–85). By 1908 restrictions were placed on the number of Japanese male labourers allowed entry to Canada, despite Japan having a standing treaty with Britain that permitted any Japanese national to enter the British Empire. In order to assuage the fears of those unnerved by a rising “yellow tide,” the Canadian Commissioner to Japan, Rodolphe Lemieux, entered into a “gentlemen’s agreement” with the Japanese government that would cap the number of male labourers emigrating from Japan to Canada—four hundred per year (Miki Redress 22–23).

On 12 August 1907, Vancouver established its own “Asiatic Exclusion League,” modelled after those already operating in Seattle and San Francisco (Barnholden 32; Miki Redress 21).

Ironically, Japanese women could still freely immigrate, which sparked an upsurge in the number of “picture brides” coming to marry Japanese men in Canada. Shortly thereafter, the demographic structure of the Japanese Canadian community in British Columbia began to change as young families started having
Another measure to stave the influx of Japanese and Chinese immigrants came in 1910 when then Deputy Minister of Labour William Lyon Mackenzie King, who had been appointed to oversee two royal commissions handling post-riot damage claims, drafted an amendment to the Immigration Act that allowed for a “suitability clause.” Certain kinds of immigrants deemed to be “unsuited” for Canada—like Asians, for example, who were believed to be by nature ill-suited to Canadian winters—could be denied entry to the country at the discretion of immigration officials (Miki Redress 23).

In 1937, Japan invaded China, prompting new fears in Canada about the “enemy within”; many wondered if the “Japanese” in Canada would be loyal to their “homeland” and its imperialistic ambitions. Many Canadians had little doubt there were traitors among them. Audrey Kobayashi argues that this kind of resentment and suspicion toward Japanese Canadians was well-entrenched for decades prior to the internment. The international conflicts involving Japan in the thirties, and ultimately the outbreak of World War II, simply offered a convenient rationale for implementing formal policies to restrict the Japanese Canadians financially, limit their movements, and suppress their culture. Indeed, many regarded the war as an opportunity to eliminate the Japanese presence from Canada altogether (par. 3).

children. Not unexpectedly, this demographic shift elicited a new racist perspective on the Japanese—the “Orientals’” latest strategy to overrun Canada involved producing many children, not simply populating the country through immigration (Adachi 85).
Immediately following the attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Canadian government began to take steps in response to this new perceived threat. On 7 December 1941, under the War Measures Act, Order-in-Council PC 9591 extended provisions in the Defense of Canada Regulations so that Japanese nationals living in Canada were obligated to enroll with the Register of Enemy Aliens by 7 February 1942 (Adachi 200). Japanese Canadians were largely unprepared, however, for further amendments to this regulation made in the coming weeks and months. On 16 December 1941, mandatory registration was extended to all persons of Japanese ancestry, regardless of citizenship (Adachi 200). This shift was pivotal for Japanese Canadians. It became abundantly clear that, in legal terms, “race” could now supersede citizenship.

On 14 January 1942, Order-in-Council PC 365 designated a 100-mile “protected zone” eastward from the BC coast. Male Japanese nationals were evicted from the zone to road camps on the Alberta-British Columbia border. Naturalized Japanese Canadians and Canadian-born citizens were exempt at first from this “temporary measure” (Kobayashi and Miki 22). However, on 26 February 1942, an order-in-council was passed under the War Measures Act to intern all persons of “Japanese racial origin.” In one fell swoop, Order-in-Council PC 1486 erased the rights of citizenship for Canadian-born Nisei and naturalized Issei (Adachi 227). Prime Minister Mackenzie King made the announcement that all Japanese Canadians would be removed from the coast of British Columbia as

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5 The War Measures Act, passed as a federal statute in 1914, conferred extraordinary powers upon the Governor in Council in the event of “war, invasion or insurrection, real or apprehended.” The act transferred the powers of Parliament to the Governor in Council or to the Cabinet, thereby creating a system with fewer checks that made Cabinet less accountable to Parliament for its conduct (Kobayashi and Miki 25).
expeditiously as possible. Subsequently, on 4 March 1942, the BC Security Commission was established to carry out the “evacuation” of all people of “Japanese racial origin” from the 100-mile “protected zone.”° Families often had less than twenty-four hours to collect belongings and arrive at an appointed location for transfer to Vancouver. The so-called Custodian of Enemy Alien Property, another government body, tended homes, businesses, and possessions left behind.

In the early days of the relocation project, families were housed communally in unused horse stalls at Hastings Park in Vancouver, which had been reconfigured as a transit camp for detainees on their way to the BC Interior. Communal living, which for some lasted several months, afforded little comfort and no privacy (Kobayashi and Miki 27). Men deemed strong enough to work were sent to labour camps on the Prairies and in Ontario, while their families were moved to isolated internment camps, away from the “protected zone” (Patton 7). Ten main internment camps were either created from the ground up or resurrected from abandoned mining towns (Patton 10): Tashme (near Hope), Lemon Creek, Greenwood, Slocan, New Denver, Popoff, Bay Farm, Roseberry, Sandon, and Kaslo (all clustered in the Kootenays in southern British Columbia, near Trail). There were also five self-supporting “relocation centres” in the Lillooet area.

° The Canadian government employed the euphemistic term “evacuation” to describe the relocation of Japanese Canadians. For two reasons, words such as “internment” and “incarceration” were avoided, accurate though they may have been. First, the government wished to cast itself in a paternalistic light. Racial tensions ran so high in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that the BC Security Commission expressed concern over violent retribution against Japanese Canadians—lest they be “evacuated” to the safety of remote towns in the Rocky Mountains. This was evidently false benevolence, since evacuees paid their own way, built their own lodging, and were left to fend for themselves under harsh conditions. The second reason was because the Geneva Convention stipulated nations could not legally intern their own citizens; the necessity of evacuating Japanese Canadians from potential threat meant Canada was not contravening international law (Sunahara 66).
created for a select group of middle- and upper-class Japanese Canadians who were not considered a national threat by the BC Security Commission, and who could afford to “buy their way in.” These Japanese Canadians were free to leave the camps (but were forbidden to take employment). Families at these more comfortable relocation centres were required to pay for their own transportation and had to support themselves, but were allowed to remain together—a luxury denied the majority of Japanese Canadians.

Many families, distressed at the prospect of being dispersed to different camps, or having the men sent away to do road work (leaving the women to care for the children and the elderly), took advantage of another option made available through provincial governments in Manitoba and Alberta; families could remain together if they agreed to relocate to sugar beet farms in the east. Whole families travelled by train to small, rural Prairie towns where they were selected by farmers looking for help in the fields (Omatsu 76). Ironically, the same Canadian government that deemed “Orientals” unsuited to Canadian life enthusiastically promoted to farm owners the availability of cheap labour, and the inherent adaptability of Japanese Canadians to farm life.

The relocation of Japanese Canadians from their homes and businesses was fundamentally tied to another major government project: the confiscation of Japanese Canadian assets (made all the more straightforward by the interment program). Fishing boats were among the first property seized. Immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, vessels from along the BC coast were confiscated under a reactionary order by the RCMP, incited by false rumours that many Japanese Canadian fishermen were actually Japanese naval officers assigned spying missions in Canada (Patton 21).
The entire Japanese Canadian fishing fleet was rounded up less than forty-eight hours after Pearl Harbor (Adachi 228). The government soon realized that having all of the Japanese vessels out of service put the province’s fishing industry in jeopardy. Consequently, on 13 January 1942 Order-in-Council PC 251 was issued so that the boats could immediately be put back into service—now with non-Japanese crew. To the satisfaction of many white British Columbians, the confiscation of the Japanese Canadian fishing fleet ostensibly took care of a long-standing issue that had been a thorny one to resolve—the domination of the coastal fisheries by “foreigners.” The BC fishery was now effectively in the hands of Caucasian fishermen.

The dispossession program was overseen by the MP for Vancouver Centre, Ian Mackenzie, who was also minister responsible for pensions and health (Sunahara 101). In April 1942, Mackenzie visited Vancouver and made the following proclamation in the Vancouver Province: “It is my intention, as long as I remain in public life, to see they never come back here” (qtd. in Sunahara 101). In making this statement, Mackenzie conceded that one of the primary aims of liquidating property was to discourage Japanese Canadians’ return at war’s end.

Although the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property was established early on to oversee the possessions of displaced Japanese Canadians, this bureau did not, at first, have the power to sell them without consent—this required a special order-in-council under the War

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7 The same day, Order-in-Council PC 288 was released commanding the liquidation of selected vessels at lower-than-appraised value, with the proceeds going to the original Japanese-Canadian owners (Adachi 229).
Measures Act (Sunahara 104). On 19 January 1943, Order-in-Council PC 469 empowered the Custodian to auction off items held in trust at prices far below market value (Kobayashi and Miki 42). There was additional pressure from BC politicians to push through the sale of Japanese property. Vancouver’s city council urged the Custodian’s Vancouver representative, G.W. McPherson, to liquidate the Powell Street district, which had been the centre of Japanese Canadian commerce and community life in Vancouver up to the relocation. The Canadian Pacific Railway was interested in possibly redeveloping the area as an industrial site (Sunahara 105). Several Japanese-owned buildings in the district were re-purposed after the Japanese Canadian community vacated; the iconic Japanese Language School on Alexander Street, for instance, was occupied by the Armed Forces from 1942–47, and then later sold to cover expenses (Japanese Language School website “1941–1952”).

Japanese Canadians were permitted to return to the coast in 1949; however, by then there were no homes or businesses for them to go back to. Moreover, the social fabric of the community had largely disintegrated as a result of the enforced dispersal program, which left small pockets of Japanese Canadians scattered across the provinces. Many Japanese Canadians now wished to assimilate as best they could into Canadian society, and take advantage of full rights of citizenship—including the right to vote—which had only recently been granted (Kobayashi par. 2). Many pursued quiet lives, and, among the ageing Issei especially, it was uncommon to speak at length about the experiences of internment.
Part 2: Coherence

Indeed, silence defined the decades following the Second World War. The once closely-knit Japanese Canadian community now consisted of fragments of disconnected families dispersed across the country. Many of the original Japanese Canadian organizations, such as the Japanese Canadian Citizens’ League (JCCL) had disbanded, and new ones that emerged, such as the National Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association (NJCCA)—aimed at ending racial persecution—failed to garner substantial support from Japanese Canadians who had, by and large, turned away from politics (Omatsu 95).

There was one early attempt at contending with the injustices suffered by Japanese Canadians during World War II. Following a precedent set by the United States, on 18 July 1947 Canada set up the Bird Commission to investigate Japanese Canadians’ wartime property losses. The Commission’s 1950 report recommended that the federal government pay out a total of $1,222,829 to 1,434 Japanese Canadian claimants—approximately ten cents paid for every dollar lost (Omatsu 75). However, few Japanese Canadians protested the “low-ball” compensation and the red tape involved in filing a claim; many wished to simply move on, assimilate, and to begin to participate in the “new” post-war nation as full citizens (Kobayashi par. 5).

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8 Although the Bird Commission was an early project aimed at some concept of “restitution,” there was no recognition of loss of dignity, trauma, broken families, loss of ties to place and community, or decreased income resulting from interrupted education. Furthermore, there were restrictions on who was qualified to make claims to the Japanese Property Claims Commission: approximately one in four people didn’t qualify—those who lost property before the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property was appointed in March 1942 were ineligible, for example. Those who were eligible to seek compensation were required to demonstrate fair market property for what they had lost. Only if there appeared to be a discrepancy between paid-out amounts and market values could an individual appeal for higher compensation (Miki “Life and Times” 53).
The earliest signs of a nascent redress movement came in 1976–77, the centenary year of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada, Manzo Nagano (Daniels 373). Concurrent with Japanese Americans’ calls for redress in the United States, the NJCCA formed a reparations committee (Kobayashi and Miki 64). On both sides of the border, community activists—among them many Sansei university students born after the evacuation—argued that both a formal apology and monetary compensation were necessary. In honour of the centenary of Nagano’s arrival, a group called the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project (JCCP) mounted a photo exhibition titled “A Dream of Riches,” which encouraged renewed interest in Japanese Canadian culture and identity. Some time later, in 1981, the JCCP formed a redress committee aimed at galvanizing support for redress within the Japanese Canadian community and at educating other Canadians about this cause (Kobayashi and Miki 65). Members of the JCCP Redress Committee secured some high-profile media interviews that helped bring the redress message into public consciousness and to Japanese Canadians at large. Audrey Kobayashi notes how a fundamental shift began to take place at this time: the long-harbourted shame and silence among surviving Issei and Nisei was gradually supplanted by indignation and conviction. This “awakening” provided the impetus for an ad hoc delegation to visit Ottawa in 1980 in order to present the redress issue for the first time as a human rights issue (Kobayashi par. 8). Within the Japanese Canadian population, the openness towards seeking a formal redress proposal grew between 1980 and 1984, although it took several years and much debating to come to some agreeable terms for this proposal.9

9 There was disagreement about the kind of redress that should be sought. Respected Issei leader George Imai, for instance, who headed the National Redress Committee (NRC) under the National Association of Japanese Canadians, had already begun campaigning for a $50M settlement for the group, without having
By summer 1982, the highest profile Japanese Canadian organization, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), started speaking publicly about the imperative of redress (Daniels 373). At a NAJC conference in September 1983, which was intended to be a forum to present and adopt the $50M proposal for group compensation, many delegates from various Japanese Canadian centres finally spoke out in disagreement, and the proposal was ultimately defeated (Kobayashi and Miki 70). In an effort to bring about some consensus, a work-study group was formed called the Sodan-Kai, which directed itself toward opening dialogue in the community and finding some common ground about the possibility for an organized redress campaign, and the kind of redress that would be appropriate (Omatsu 102, 184). A growing schism emerged between Vancouver-based NAJC president Gordon Kadota and the chair of the NRC, George Imai, in Toronto. While Imai appeared to be inclined to unilateral action, with little community input, Kadota sought a more cooperative, collaborative approach to drafting a redress proposal. Many observers hoped that Winnipeg-based redress activist Art Miki might bring together the fractured organization—otherwise, the possibility of a national redress movement was in jeopardy (Kobayashi and Miki 71). Miki was narrowly elected president of the NAJC in January 1984. Soon after, the NAJC passed three

broadly consulted about this or having received approval to move forward with such a proposal (Kobayashi and Miki 67). In fact, Imai circumvented an investigative project by NAJC president Gordon Kadota that involved touring Japanese Canadian centres across Canada to seek input about how to compile a cohesive policy proposal (Kobayashi and Miki 70). Imai’s pre-emptive “leak” to the Toronto Star that a $50M settlement was imminent in fact incited many previously reticent Japanese Canadians to come forth and lobby for community consultation and a re-prioritizing of the demand for individual compensation from the government (Kobayashi and Miki 71).

10 Joy Kogawa was one of the work-study group’s five members.
resolutions that established a framework for pursuing redress; in fact, these key principles carried redress through to the final settlement in 1988:

[T]he NAJC seeks official acknowledgement from the Canadian government of the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians during and after World War II.

   Whereas the internment, exclusion and exiling of Japanese Canadians violated individual human rights and freedoms and destroyed the fabric of the community, the NAJC seeks redress in the form of compensation.

   Moreover, the NAJC seeks review and amendment of the War Measures Act and relevant sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms so that no Canadian will ever again be subjected to such wrongs. (qtd. in Miki Redress 167)

In 1984 the government-appointed Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society tabled a report in the House of Commons called Equality Now! The report recommended that the government officially acknowledge the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians and seek to redress the wrongs—this arm’s-length report effectively substantiated the basic position of the NAJC (Kobayashi and Miki 72). Then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau famously dismissed the need for such measures, advocating instead that Canada seek to be “just in our time,” because there is no way a nation can “rewrite history.” Trudeau expressed concern that redressing wrongs perpetrated against one group effectively sets an impractical precedent for dealing with injustices committed against other groups throughout history, perhaps “beginning with deportations of the Acadians” (Daniels 374). In a heated debate in the House of Commons with opposition leader Brian Mulroney in April 1984, Trudeau proclaimed, “I don’t think it’s the purpose of government to right the past … It cannot rewrite history. It is our purpose to be just in
our time” (Vancouver Sun, 29 June 1984). However, Trudeau’s position does not suggest how we could be “just in our time” without having gone through appropriate processes to address past wrongs.

In response to Trudeau’s comments, Mulroney later stated that if he were Prime Minister, Japanese Canadians would be compensated, without question (Daniels 374). Mulroney’s verbal jousting with Trudeau, which took place during Mulroney’s last days as leader of the opposition, may have been political showmanship on the eve of an election, but in it was a promise to Japanese Canadians they would not soon forget. The Conservatives won the fall 1984 election by a huge margin. On 21 November 1984, the NAJC released a brief called Democracy Betrayed: The Case for Redress. In this document, using files released in the 1970s, the NAJC showed that against the recommendations of the RCMP, who perceived no credible military threat from Canada’s resident Japanese population, Cabinet pushed ahead with the forced removal of the community and disposition of their property. In short, the motivations were racist—not in the interest of national security (Omatsu 129; see also Sunahara). The brief also detailed the central tenets of the NAJC’s redress position, and formally requested that negotiations begin with the federal government (Miki Redress 168; Kobayashi par. 6).

Once in power, however, the Conservatives quickly retreated from their commitment to Japanese Canadians in a move that suggested the disingenuousness of their earlier claims. Multiculturalism Minister Jack Murta promptly expressed his intention to settle the redress issue quickly and decisively (Kobayashi and Miki 79). The unilateral manner in
which Murta evidently wished to proceed ran counter to the basic principles of the NAJC, which advocated for negotiated, bilateral proceedings on the redress issue. The NAJC’s concerns over Murta’s approach resulted in a panel of officials representing the minister (Kobayashi and Miki 79). On 15 December 1984, the NAJC and Murta’s team agreed to proceed with negotiations. Soon after “negotiations” began, however, it became clear that the meetings were in fact simply “consultations” and that the government intended to push things through in order to meet an arbitrary resolution deadline of 29 January 1985. The NAJC flatly rejected this timeline, as well as the unilateral structure imposed on the meetings (Kobayashi and Miki 82–83; Miki Redress 272–73).

Eventually, the first official offer to the NAJC came from Murta himself, on 18 January 1985. It included an official apology and a commitment to a $10M race relations foundation, $6M of which would come from public funds (Daniels 375). This offer was not even in the range of the $25,000-per-survivor “ballpark figure” the NAJC had tabled in the beginning. The NAJC also held steadfast that any acceptable agreement would be negotiated bilaterally. John Turner and Ed Broadbent (then opposition leaders for the Liberal and New Democratic Parties, respectively) assured the NAJC they would not support any unilateral settlement pushed through by Murta (Kobayashi and Miki 84). Murta swiftly suspended negotiations shortly after the NAJC declined this first offer.

At this juncture, the NAJC debated how best to proceed in future negotiations, and determined that going forward they would seek only a “single package” redress settlement: they agreed that acknowledgement could not be offered on its own as a kind
of preliminary step toward redress, with monetary compensation to follow. Such an
“incremental” arrangement, of course, might result in promises of monetary
compensation left unfulfilled, and the larger human rights message lost in the shuffle.
The NAJC stood firm that a financial settlement, concurrent with an official apology and
revision of existing statutes, was fundamental to their appeal.

In August 1985 Murta was replaced by the Minister of Sports, Otto Jelenik, who assumed
a very uncompromising stance in terms of redress, at one point proclaiming that the
“majority of Canadians [do not wish] to use taxpayer money to pay the Japanese
Canadians” (Kobayashi and Miki 88). Jelenik summarily dismissed the findings of a
report published by the consultancy firm Price Waterhouse, which the NAJC had
engaged to prepare an estimate of financial losses of the Japanese Canadians as a result of
the government’s actions during World War II. In 1986 dollars, the sum was near $450M,
not taking into account such things as the effects on potential income caused by
disruptions to education (Daniels 375).

In July 1986, the NAJC was pleased to learn that the inflexible Otto Jelenik had been
replaced by David Crombie, by now the third Minister of Multiculturalism since the
Tories had been elected to power. Crombie appeared, at first, to bring with him a more
sympathetic approach, preferring to hold informal meetings with the NAJC’s negotiating
committee. He seemed open to the NAJC’s ideals for a fair and just settlement. He
softened on the “ultimatum-style” deadlines of his forebears, expressing a wish to have
something in place, roughly, by spring 1987. Unfortunately, Crombie advised the NAJC
that the government would still prefer to dispense a group settlement, either administered by the NAJC or a federal department, which ran contrary to one of the NAJC’s fundamental aims—individual compensation.

Gradually, Crombie’s commitment to a just settlement faltered as he became increasingly vague about what a reasonable agreement would look like from his perspective (Kobayashi and Miki 103). On 12 March 1987 Crombie eventually doubled the existing “Murta” offer to $12M for a race relations foundation; an agreement to look at the War Measures Act; and an official acknowledgement. He still balked at the idea of a $400M settlement with payouts to individuals. Finally, his offer was delivered to the NAJC in explicitly “take-it-or-leave-it” terms.

The NAJC rejected David Crombie’s offer on 17 May 1987. In a letter to Crombie, NAJC president Art Miki sharply criticized him for repeatedly failing to offer appropriate compensation to individuals. Miki dismissed Crombie’s offer by saying, “A settlement offer that amounts to approximately $50 per affected individual in 1945 dollars belittles the significance of the issue” (Kobayashi and Miki 105). The last meeting between the NAJC negotiating committee and Crombie took place on 11 July 1987. Crombie remained steadfast, refusing to concede anything in terms of individual compensation—he admitted he did not believe Japanese Canadians even deserved compensation. Japanese Canadians, like all Canadians, Crombie argued, suffered during the war. His lawyer and advisor, Ron Doering, agreed and went so far as to suggest the NAJC had no legal case, since the actions carried out against the Japanese Canadians happened under
the War Measures Act, and were legal at the time. The only case the NAJC could make was a moral one—in other words, Doering argued, the NAJC didn’t have a leg to stand on (Kobayashi and Miki 106). After three successive ministers had failed to come to an agreement with the NAJC, many Japanese Canadians became disillusioned with the process (Kobayashi and Miki 106). Negotiating members were also increasingly aware that elder Issei were passing away, and that many more might not live to see any resolution of the redress issue.

In their chronicle of the Japanese Canadian Redress movement, *Justice In Our Time*, Cassandra Kobayashi and Roy Miki describe how the NAJC received an unexpected boost from Crombie’s obstinacy. Because the minister insisted on treating Japanese Canadians as one indistinct group warranting a single lump-sum payment, rather than as individuals deserving of individual payments, he invoked the same logic at the core of the original injustice. Crombie’s position implied that Japanese Canadians could be defined by a single characteristic—race—and that they should thus be treated indiscriminately by the same legal hand. Consequently, the entire premise of the NAJC’s campaign was brought into sharp focus for the public—redress was an issue of justice and human rights. How could a government that acknowledged “violation of individual rights not offer compensation on that basis”? (Kobayashi and Miki 107). Thus public opinion swung in favour of the NAJC’s calls for individual compensation in the aftermath of Crombie’s final refusal. However, *community compensation* was still integral to a fair package; funding was needed to repair the social fabric of the Japanese Canadian community, which had been severely damaged by the dispersal program after the war, the tendency
toward assimilation, and the selling off of Japanese cultural centres and churches by the Custodian of Alien Enemy Property (Kobayashi and Miki 107).

After four years of unsuccessfully negotiating for a settlement that included individual compensation, in fall 1987 the NAJC embarked on a new strategy—it solicited public support from outside the Japanese Canadian community, from “mainstream Canadians” who were sympathetic to the cause, and who understood the human rights implications of the NAJC campaign. A series of public rallies was planned across Canada, which would culminate in Ottawa.

Just before the 14 April 1988 rally on Parliament Hill, Gerry Weiner quietly replaced David Crombie as Minister of Multiculturalism. It was Weiner who would prove, eventually, to be instrumental in bringing an agreeable settlement to fruition. The Parliament Hill rally in Ottawa attracted hundreds of protesters, many of whom were former detainees. In his first public appearance since replacing David Crombie, Multiculturalism Minister Gerry Weiner addressed the crowd, reiterating the previous offers made to the NAJC. However, he also publically committed to reopen talks with the organization, which signalled a positive development. The rally received huge media coverage. The NAJC distributed a pamphlet widely at the rally entitled “Justice in Our Time”—a sharp rebuke to Trudeau’s comments made at the inception of the redress movement, when he advocated that Canadians endeavour to be “just in our time,” given the impossibility of changing history.
On 15 June 1988, the NAJC and Weiner met for the first time, and during this conversation Weiner conceded the possibility of individual compensation. Brian Mulroney had apparently approved proceeding with a mind to “all aspects” of redress with the NAJC. Once the American redress bill was ratified on 10 August 1988, Multiculturalism critics Sergio Marchi and Ernie Epp challenged the Tories to make good on Mulroney’s pre-election promise of compensation for Japanese Canadians. Consequently, a secret meeting was arranged in Ottawa for 25 August between the NAJC strategy committee and Gerry Weiner and a panel of his advisors (Kobayashi and Miki 135). Two days later, a deal was hammered out, after seventeen hours of negotiating, which Brian Mulroney would sign in the House of Commons on 22 September 1988.

The terms of the final settlement included acknowledgement that the treatment of Japanese Canadians during the war violated present-day understanding of human rights; a commitment to non-repetition of the injustice; formal recognition of the cultural contributions of Japanese Canadians to Canada; a $21,000 per-survivor reparation payment; $12M in funding to support Japanese Canadian cultural organizations; $12M for a new race relations foundation; clearing of the names of individuals falsely charged under the War Measures Act; and the granting of citizenship to individuals deported to Japan or who had citizenship status revoked (Miki Redress 9). The settlement responded to a long-standing need for redress, but of course it did not bring the issue to a definitive “conclusion.” In fact, the formal recognition that Canada had wronged its citizens of

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11 The NAJC strategy committee included Art Miki, Roger Obata, Roy Inouye, Bryce Kanbara, Audrey Kobayashi, Cassandra Kobayashi, Roy Miki, and Maryaka Omatsu. Weiner’s panel included Dennison Moore (Chief of Staff), Alain Bisson (lawyer from the Department of Justice), Rick Clippendale (advisor), Anne Scotton (from Multiculturalism), and Minister of State Lucien Bouchard.
Japanese ancestry created a context in which, over a decade later, the campaign to save the Kogawa House was generated. It is to this campaign that I will now turn.
The campaign to prevent the demolition of the house at 1450 West 64th Avenue and to transform it into a writers’ retreat can be seen as a kind of grass-roots legacy project stemming from the 1988 settlement, and ideals about equality, justice, human rights, and reconciliation contained within it. The campaign spanned nearly three years, defined by two peak periods of campaign activity—fall 2003, and September 2005 to May 2006—with an interim span of relative latency. The first period focused on raising money to purchase the house, and then, once it was sold to another buyer shortly after the committee’s formation, to securing civic heritage status for it so as to regulate alterations and deter its demolition. The second round of activity had a primary goal of purchasing the house to halt demolition once the new owner had applied for a city permit to do so, because there was no official heritage status in place that might protect it. The following overview provides a chronology of the home’s transformation from a very personal project for Joy Kogawa to one in which the public at large became increasingly invested.

During a visit to Vancouver at the end of August 2003, Joy Kogawa drove by her childhood home and discovered that it was currently up for sale. Since her family’s forced eviction from the house in 1942, she had wished to return; in her words, “the longing for that house was forever … I always wanted to come home” (Hutchison A6). In fact, decades earlier, she had written to one of the house’s many successive owners to enquire about purchasing it, but received no reply. In this sense, the beginnings of the “campaign” can be understood to have started with Kogawa’s very early—and
persistent—wish to repatriate the house for her family; it was this personal yearning for a homecoming that gave rise to the Kogawa Homestead Committee, an ad hoc group of the author’s friends and colleagues that formed in response to the news that the house was once again up for sale. The committee was motivated by the larger symbolic implications of such a return home for Kogawa, now that it was plausibly possible for her to do so, if only in a public, not personal, capacity, and by what its members perceived to be the social, cultural, and historical heritage value of the site for the city of Vancouver and for Canada. A fundraising and public awareness campaign began in earnest. Until now, the house had only “existed” for the public as a somewhat non-specific site within *Obasan*. The committee solicited support for the actual site by emphasizing its connection to the literary work with discourse that bridged the fictitious realm of the novel with that of the “real world.”

On 27 September 2003, a public open house was arranged through the listing agent as a fundraiser and literary event around which to promote the cause. Dozens of people turned up to hear Kogawa read passages from *Obasan* and to speak about the home’s significance to her. Despite this first promising burst of support, the house was purchased shortly thereafter, on 15 November, by Su Shen, who intended to rent the home as an investment property. With the house now unavailable for purchase by the committee, the group focused instead on securing heritage safeguards for it from the city. The longer-term goal of acquiring the house remained, however.
The Kogawa Homestead Committee kept close watch on the house throughout fall 2003 while its members investigated having the site added to the Vancouver Heritage Register as a category “A” structure, which would have impeded, though not restricted entirely, its demolition as long as it remained listed. At the end of November, members realized that Shen had begun renovations, so they contacted the Vancouver Heritage Commission.

City planner Terry Brunette met with the owner, while building inspectors issued a stop-work order because no permits had been obtained for any alterations—the heritage value of the home notwithstanding. Unaware of the house’s history, Shen had begun upgrading the building in order to make it more comfortable and energy efficient. At this meeting, the city proposed a collaborative working relationship with her that would respect her rights as a property owner, while supporting heritage retention measures that would reassure Kogawa “advocates” who intended to ultimately acquire the home, should it ever again be put on the market (Gill R3). Although the original doors and windows had been removed by the time city planners intervened, Shen offered to donate them to the city for safekeeping.

By the end of 2003, the media had started to pick up the story. Maclean’s featured a short article on the Kogawa Homestead Committee’s campaign titled “‘That’s Obasan’s Home’” (Wickens 36). The headline captured how the site had begun to take on multiple associations for the public; not only was this the home where celebrated author Joy

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12 The Heritage Register includes three main categories of heritage significance for buildings, streetscapes, and landscapes: A, Primary Significance (in terms of style, character, or association with a historical person or event); B, Significant; C, Contextual. Category A structures require an assessment report on retention options and approval by the city’s director of planning before a demolition permit will be issued (City of Vancouver Heritage Register).

13 The Heritage Commission is an adjunct heritage advisory body to Vancouver City Council.
Kogawa spent part of her youth, it was also “Obasan’s,” a claim that reflects two subtly distinct, yet overlapping, interpretations of the house. First, Obasan was the stoic aunt of character Naomi Nakane: in Kogawa’s novel, young Naomi ends up living with her aunt (Obasan) in the family home in Marpole when her father is suddenly required to report for mandatory labour, and her mother is in Japan. Thus, when Maclean’s refers to “Obasan’s home,” it is to the fictitious home where the character Obasan moved in, to watch over the Nakane children. But this house is also the house of Obasan, the literary work itself. In other words, it isn’t simply the house lived in by a fabricated character—it has an important association with a canonical Canadian novel. It belongs to the literary world, of which the novel’s legions of readers comprise a large part.

The Kogawa Homestead Committee’s wish to have the house listed on the Heritage Register did not materialize. City planners determined that since the owner was evidently appreciative of the home’s heritage value, and was open to a collaborative, informed approach to pursuing renovations, they would not recommend assigning official heritage status to the site at this time. It seemed the house was not in imminent danger (Brunette). Shortly thereafter, the campaign, such as it was, wound down in terms of holding public events, organizing fundraising, and actively soliciting press coverage.

The second wave of campaigning began in September 2005 when the Kogawa Homestead Committee was notified of impending demolition and development applications for 1450 West 64th Avenue. The owner of the property had been unsuccessful in renting it profitably, so she had decided to tear down the existing
structure and build a new, larger home on the site to move into herself. The renamed Save the Kogawa House Committee promptly resumed the campaign with the goal of buying out the owner before she could tear the house down. The Vancouver Heritage Foundation joined up with the committee in order to coordinate fundraising and lend support to the campaign from a recognized heritage body.  

At a Vancouver City Council meeting on 3 November 2005, senior planner Gerry McGeough presented an administrative report in which he recommended that the house and fruit trees on the property be subject to temporary protection under the city charter for 120 days—the maximum time allowed for municipal heritage preservation efforts. He also recommended that the building’s present owner be commended for her cooperation. McGeough advised that the owner’s architect was scheduled to submit an application for development and demolition permits on 2 November, and that the planning department would be obligated to issue them unless council intervened. McGeough’s report described how due to the (negative) media attention directed at the owner, which was becoming increasingly stressful for her, Shen supported McGeough’s recommendation in hopes that she could sell the house at market value to the committee. Representatives from the Save the Kogawa House Committee made presentations to council on the site’s heritage significance before Kogawa turned up at the last minute and

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14 The Vancouver Heritage Foundation began in 1992 as a municipally governed charitable heritage advocacy organization before shifting to governance by an elected board comprising private members.
15 Naomi’s recollections of a cherry tree growing in the yard of the Marpole house figure prominently in *Obasan* as a symbol of her idyllic childhood home. A dilapidated and diseased cherry tree still grew on the property when the campaign began; on 1 November 2005, a cutting from the tree was planted on the grounds of Vancouver city hall in commemoration of “internment … and the outstanding contributions of Japanese Canadians to [Vancouver]” (Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell qtd. in Mickleburgh S1).
closed the meeting by reading a passage from *Obasan* in which the adult Naomi Nakane wistfully recalls her childhood house.\textsuperscript{16} The meeting adjourned with members of council personally donating over $500 to the campaign and passing the demolition-stay unanimously, effective 30 November, one day before the demolition permit was to take effect.

On 2 December 2005, the Land Conservancy of British Columbia (TLC), a non-profit land trust, announced it had negotiated with the Save the Kogawa House Committee to lead the fundraising campaign. Working to acquire and protect the Kogawa House was the organization’s first Vancouver-based project.

Throughout the spring of 2006, the campaign maintained its fundraising efforts, but fell far short of its $1.25M goal by the time the 120-day demolition permit was to run out.\textsuperscript{17} To buy the campaign more time, in a gesture of good faith, on 15 March Shen offered to extend the demolition-stay thirty days beyond the 120 days allowed in the city charter. On 25 April 2006, an anonymous donation of $500,000 materialized, which allowed the committee to purchase the house and begin plans for heritage restoration and the establishing of a writers-in-residence centre.\textsuperscript{18} On 17 September, a public event was held at the Kogawa House, the first since its acquisition. At the celebratory event, donors were honoured, the house’s survival was toasted, and Joy Kogawa read from *Obasan*.

\textsuperscript{16} Save the Kogawa House Committee members present were: Diane Switzer, Vancouver Heritage Foundation; Heather Redfern, Alliance for Arts and Culture; Todd Wong, Save the Kogawa House Committee; committee spokesperson Ann-Marie Metten; Marion Quednau, Writer’s Union of Canada.

\textsuperscript{17} By 24 April 2006, donations totalled $225,000.

\textsuperscript{18} The donor was revealed in April 2008 as Nancy Ruth, a senator, member of the Conservative Party of Canada, and longtime advocate for women’s issues and human rights.
CHAPTER FOUR  |  ANALYSIS

In the following analysis, I describe the key factors that contributed to the Kogawa House being conceived as a site of healing and reconciliation, and specifically what was meant by these terms. The analysis will locate the Kogawa House within a broad range of reconciliatory possibilities, and it will also unpack the process by which, for some people, the house transformed into a potent reconciliatory symbol.

The Time is Right: The “Age of Apology”

The Kogawa House became available for purchase at a time when the sentiments in this country, and elsewhere, were dramatically inclined towards reckoning with the past: the reconciliatory bent of the Land Conservancy’s “Save the Kogawa House” campaign reflects a sensitivity to this social and political climate. The last twenty years have been characterized as a global “age of apology” (Daly and Sarkin 3; Brooks 3) in which concerted efforts have been made for former antagonists to work toward some measure of peaceful co-existence and to improve their relations in the wake of war, violations of human rights, and injustice. There has been, in the words of Susan Dwyer, a “frenzy to balance the moral ledgers” (91).  

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19 Julie Fette suggests the following factors have been instrumental in the emergence of this global tendency toward apology at the end of twentieth century: “a new international focus on morality; a revised understanding of universal human rights, state sovereignty and international law; a willingness of state actors to show feelings of caring and regret and to view apology not as a weakness but as a manifestation of strength; the globalization of memory in the post-Cold War era; as well as increased demand for recognition by past victims” (qtd. in Barkan and Karn 259).
The historical wrongs toward which these calls for apology, redress, and reconciliation have been directed are diverse: the sexual exploitation of Korean “comfort women” by Japanese military personnel during the Second World War (Hicks qtd. in Brooks 122); the complicity of the Vichy France government in Nazi persecution of French Jews (Fette qtd. in Barkan and Karn 259); the disastrous effects of Western colonialism and the slave trade on Africa (Howard-Hassmann and Lombardo qtd. in Gibney et al. 216); the post-genocide tensions between ethnic Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda; the “stolen generation” of Aboriginal children in Australia; the political and social challenges in post-Apartheid South Africa. In Canada, this reconciliatory trend has recently culminated in the 2008 apology by the federal government for the physical and sexual abuse of First Nations children at government-run “residential schools,” which were intended to eradicate native culture, and the settlement of the Chinese “head tax” case (prior to entry to Canada between 1885 and 1923, Chinese immigrants were required to pay a flat fee per “head”).

The Kogawa House campaign, launched in the midst of these cases, and against this backdrop, expressed principles of “hope, healing, and reconciliation.” In an information package from January 2006, potential donors were asked to “Save the Historic Joy Kogawa House; Reconcile Past Wrongs—Bring Hope.” Themes of reconciliation and healing were reiterated throughout spring 2006 in a series of press releases and in various

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20 The emergence of a reconciliation “movement” in South Africa in the 1990s is regarded as a watershed moment for “apology politics” around the world (Govier 9).

21 See Matt James for his unpacking of the “robustness” of the Head Tax apology in comparison with apologies extended to other groups in Canada (150).
media interviews with Kogawa herself. The information kit also included the fundraising goals, an organizational overview, the history of the injustice against Japanese Canadians, a short biography of Joy Kogawa, and excerpts from Brian Mulroney’s 1988 apology speech in Parliament. In citing Mulroney, TLC positioned the campaign as a project morally consistent with this political milestone—and in so doing proclaimed the preservation of Joy Kogawa’s childhood home as something of not only local, or community, but also national import.

Other claims in the information kit are less clear: “As a result of the book, the historic Joy Kogawa House has become a significant representation of the forgiveness of historical wrongs and the healing of our nation” (TLC donor brochure). This statement rings with idealism and hopefulness, but is somewhat clouded by the fact that these claims are not grounded in the narrative. The house’s symbolic representation of forgiveness as a “result” of Obasan, as the statement suggests, would require themes of forgiveness and national healing in the novel itself. There is no evidence of this in the text. (Naomi Nakane doesn’t come to any personal resolution where the loss of her family homestead is concerned, nor does she ever return to it—at least in a physical sense, and she revisits it in her mind with great hesitation.) I speculate that it was closer to the intent of the campaign to propose that the house could serve as a symbol of forgiveness, should enough donors come forth to save it. Given the uncertainty of the building’s fate in January 2006, the house also could represent a symbol of renewed injustice or Canadians’ ambivalence toward history. If the house’s transformation into reconciliatory symbol had
yet to be realized, then certainly the TLC was making a call to action—yet it failed to articulate all the necessary conditions for such a transformation.

The pamphlet goes on to advise potential donors that they “have the opportunity to give the gift of hope.” However, it is unclear whose hopefulness this might be and what it is based on. Will there be hope where there had been none before? Could this house offer hope to those who envision a nation in which all cultures are respected? Would there be hope that the Canadian government will never again infringe upon its citizens’ human rights? In the tri-partite slogan “Hope, Healing, Reconciliation,” who is being healed, who is being reconciled? We should bear these kinds of questions in mind as we try to come closer to understanding the specific dynamics at play in the Kogawa House project.

The opacity of these aspects of TLC’s campaign message reveals the difficulty in articulating a clear, concise definition of reconciliation, despite (or as a consequence of) how often the term is invoked (Daly and Sarkin 3; Dwyer 92). In making these observations, I am neither disparaging the TLC nor suggesting that the reconciliatory basis for the Kogawa House campaign was misguided or strategic “marketing.” Rather, I draw attention to the inherent ambiguity of reconciliation in hopes that what follows might help position the Kogawa House within a broad range of reconciliatory practices—and potentially be useful in other contexts. As Crocker suggests, scholarship should not overlook the kinds of reconciliation projects underway in mature democracies, because they may have much to offer emerging democracies and conflict-ridden societies—the
study of which is currently more in “in fashion”—as they progress through successive stages of reckoning with their pasts (40).

Reconciliation between individuals, as Trudy Govier points out, is a familiar concept to anyone—the mending of friendships after disagreements, the working through of marital problems (10; see also Dwyer 93). However, the simplicity and clarity of this supposedly accessible concept becomes increasingly difficult to apply to cases involving more people and more complex circumstances and historical events. In order to investigate the conceptual phenomenon of reconciliation and what it entails on a larger scale, I begin with author Paul Lederach’s definition, which can apply equally to quite grievous harms as well as lesser injustices. In Lederach’s view, reconciliation can be understood as the “[opening] up the social space that permits and encourages individuals and societies as a collective, to acknowledge the past, mourn the losses, validate the pain experienced, confess the wrongs, and reach toward the next steps of restoring the broken relationship” (qtd. in Daly and Sarkin 180). This definition begins to articulate some of the different dimensions of reconciliation for the parties involved. It also suggests that reconciliation occurs in successive (or overlapping) stages, with some contingency existing between them. Trudy Govier elaborates on this temporal, or multi-stage, aspect of reconciliation by suggesting there is ten-point spectrum of possibilities that ranges from emotionally

22 When speaking of national reconciliation, Crocker identifies three general nation “types.” “Mature democracies” include Canada, Germany, France, Switzerland, for example; fledgling/post-conflict democracies include Cambodia and Rwanda; conflict-ridden societies currently include Indonesia and Peru (39–40).
rich (“thick,” in her terms) to emotionally “thin.” At the thin end of the spectrum, little attention is paid to feelings and attitudes, because institutional reform and the cessation of violence are priorities. Moving toward the thick end, there is a greater emphasis on the dynamics of the relationship between the constituents—ideals of truth, remorse, forgiveness, and healing emerge as priorities and aims (Govier 13). Undoubtedly, the achievement of “thick” aims is quite challenging without having first secured the “thinner” fundamentals. This spectrum offers us a framework to begin plotting the Kogawa House as a reconciliatory project, although the specific case to which I apply Govier occupies a relatively narrow range of possibilities. In this specific context, there is no goal of ending physical violence (there is none); radical governmental change is not needed (Canada is a stable democracy); and trials or public tribunals need not be held (the 1988 settlement addressed accountability, to some extent, by the federal government’s taking responsibility—if not for any “crime,” at least for a lapse in moral judgment). Thus the reconciliatory capacity of the Kogawa House certainly involves emotionally “thick” possibilities. By using this spectrum, we can see how the time was

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23 Govier’s spectrum moves from emotionally “thick” reconciliatory possibilities (near 1.) through more thin possibilities (near 10.). “1. Reconciliation is unity; 2. Reconciliation is harmony; 3. Reconciliation is healing of individuals, of individuals and relationships; 4. Reconciliation is forgiveness, following on remorse and apology; 5. Reconciliation is the building of decent relationships; 6. Reconciliation is truth acknowledged; 7. Reconciliation is restorative justice involving remorse on the part of the perpetrators and reparations for victims; 8. Reconciliation is retributive justice, requiring the punishment of offenders; Reconciliation is democratization, requiring the development of legal, electoral, and parliamentary institutions; 10. Reconciliation means that people have stopped using physical violence against each other” (13). David Crocker also discusses reconciliation in terms of relative thinness and thickness: a basic, “thin” conception of reconciliation means non-violent co-existence; thicker, “more robust” understandings of reconciliation involve “forgiveness, mercy (rather than justice), a shared comprehensive vision, mutual healing, or harmony” (54).

24 In some contexts—Rwanda and Germany, for example—retributive justice (the eighth point on Govier’s scale) is not feasible because legal systems are not in place, or the magnitude of the crimes render it impossible to adequately punish those responsible. Often the number of people involved in the historical injustice makes it impractical to prosecute (Dwyer 99). Thus, thicker ideals of reconciliation emerge by default, and are pursued more earnestly, in the absence of legal alternatives.
particularly “right” for the Land Conservancy campaign, not only in the sense of this being a global “age of apology,” but specifically because the groundwork for such a symbolic gesture was laid by legal and institutional changes, and official acknowledgement and compensation had already been offered to victims. There might have been less room for, or receptiveness to, such a symbolic project without the fulfillment of these prerequisite stages. Furthermore, the project could have been greeted skeptically if there were no previous political measures in place to substantiate it, thus limiting the campaign’s chances of success.

Content Analysis

I have described how the political currency and rhetorical attractiveness of “reconciliation,” and the ubiquity of its involvement in various post-conflict contexts, renders the term ambiguous—as is the case, relatively speaking, with the TLC campaign, in which notions of national reconciliation were invoked without their being fully “unpacked.” Consequently, the concept of reconciliation, as it relates to the Kogawa House, is left open to be invested with the public’s understanding of it. I suggest one of the reasons the concept “works” in so many contexts is its ability to accommodate multiple, and sometimes contradictory, readings.

The diversity of possible public interpretations is registered in the body of letters supporting preservation of the house, the majority of which, notably, were written prior to

25 Full rights of citizenship, including franchise and freedom of movement, were granted to all Japanese Canadian citizens in March 1949 (Adachi 344).
the Land Conservancy’s involvement. These letters presented an opportunity to better understand public associations with the site, particularly since this was a grass-roots “community” project, and my goal for this paper is to explain the site’s larger symbolic resonance—not just for Kogawa herself, but also for the many people who advocated for its preservation—and the public discourse that was being constructed around the site.

Through a content analysis of the material available to me, I determined a set of recurrent key categories of commentary that began to give a picture of how this site was imagined. I tagged correspondents’ comments about the Kogawa House as they related to the following seven main themes: Joy Kogawa; Obasan; justifications for preserving the house; possible uses for the house; the correspondent’s self-identification; potential consequences of demolition; and specific beneficiaries of preserving the house.

Content analysis “is a continuous and iterative process … [T]wo key stages characterize its course. The first requires managing the data and the second involves making sense of the evidence through descriptive or explanatory accounts” (Ritchie and Lewis 219).

The letters were dispatched in response to two peak periods of concern over the fate of the Kogawa homestead—in late 2003 when the house came up for sale, and in late 2005 when Shen applied for demolition approval. I obtained the letters for the content analysis from the Historic Joy Kogawa House Society, which maintains an archive of correspondence compiled throughout the campaign (included in this archive are photocopies of many letters written directly to Vancouver City Council urging a demolition injunction); I also downloaded a selection of letters from the Kogawa Homestead Committee’s website (the majority of these letters were written in 2003, at the beginning of the first wave of the campaign); the TLC publicity materials were provided at my request from the organization itself. In order to bring some order to what was at first a rather unwieldy body of material, I worked within Ritchie and Lewis’ (2003) framework of analytical hierarchy, which manages the transformation of data into more meaningful groups via “conceptual scaffolding”: the process involves indexing data, rather than coding them, and moving up the “ladder” from raw data to descriptive notations/annotations to explanatory accounts (212–18). This methodology allowed me to organize a large sampling of data and distill it down to smaller, representative sub-sets suitable for analysis. With the index established, I determined seven key themes in the material, including: the frequency with which correspondents referenced certain subjects, and the contiguity between these subjects, which were my criteria for determining dominant trends in the material. For example, any reference to Joy Kogawa went into the “Joy Kogawa” category, and was tagged specifically as “former internee” or “activist” or “literary figure”—and I noted when several characteristics were used to refer to Kogawa within the same sentence. Any mention of a reason to preserve the house fell to the category “Preservation Justified.” I could include sub-tags, such as “link to internment period” or “link to important author.”
I became aware that correspondents often discussed the house’s significance in terms consistent with reconciliatory ideals at the thick end of Govier’s spectrum—though the term “reconciliation” was never invoked explicitly. Advocates proposed that the house become an education centre to teach children about racism and multiculturalism. Some argued that configuring the house as an education centre might ultimately deter future injustices. Other correspondents imagined a museum-like space for remembering Japanese Canadian history and celebrating contemporary Japanese Canadian culture. Or was this a healing space? A sanctuary for fragile memory? All of these examples demonstrate ideals of “unity,” “relationship-building,” “truth,” and “healing” that Govier describes at the emotionally thick range of reconciliatory possibilities (13).

Evidently TLC was attuned to prevailing public sentiment when planning the fundraising and public awareness campaign, which did not begin until December 2005; TLC’s promoting the project as one of “hope, healing, reconciliation” was a “logical” extension of how it was, by and large, already imagined by the public (at least the “public” who lobbied). In short, the public, or a particular motivated constituency, at any rate, was “ready” for this kind of project.

After examining the recurrent references across both the correspondence and the campaign materials, I began to discern two processes (or mechanisms) at the core of this project that facilitated the Kogawa House being taken up as redress symbol. A combination of factors lent the project a certain idealism and comprehensibility. For the public, there was a kind of “rightness” about this particular project that is evidently
absent in other sites, like Japantown, for instance, the British Columbia ghost towns hastily reconfigured to house internees, or the “transit camp” that was Hastings Park in Vancouver.  

*Not Either, but Both: Multiple Convergences at the Kogawa House*

The first transformative process was one of *convergence*. Over the course of the campaign’s three years (2003–06), Joy Kogawa and Naomi Nakane, the fictitious character in *Obasan* based on the author’s experiences, merged symbolically as a singular, all-encompassing figure; the real house at 1450 West 64th also coalesced symbolically with the one recalled by Naomi in the early part of the novel. This process occurred for three interdependent reasons. First, *Obasan* is a semi-autobiographical account of Kogawa’s childhood experiences of the internment, though it is primarily a work of historical fiction—a literary genre that presents and interprets historical events through fabricated narrative. Historical novels are distinguished by a wealth of historically accurate detail and “authentic” characters (Sarricks). Although *Obasan* obviously fulfills these criteria, it cannot be considered historical fiction in the purest

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28 In December 2007, the City of Vancouver sought proposals “to work on a study of the historical and cultural context for the Powell Street area commonly known as Japantown in the Downtown Eastside Oppenheimer district (DEOD)” (City of Vancouver “Historical and Cultural Review”). Projects aimed at revitalizing Japantown, which also must contend with how to account for history in the built environment, are largely off the public radar.

Notably, a debate ensued in 1987 when the JCCA proposed a commemorative plaque for the entrance to Hastings Park. The board of the Pacific National Exhibition (formerly Hastings Park) refused, since they wished not to remind patrons of this particular history of the site, which was now an entertainment and events venue (see Kobayashi and Miki 155).

29 The historically accurate portrayal of events is foregrounded by Kogawa’s acknowledging “the Public Archives of Canada for permission to use documents and letters from the files of Grace Tucker, T. Buck Suzuki, Gordon Nakayama and, in particular, Muriel Kitagawa, whose material was used freely” (Kogawa *Obasan* v).
sense, since definitions of the genre (including Sarricks’s and the one outlined by the Historical Novel Society) typically stipulate that the writer approaches the historical episode or period through research, not lived experience, and that many decades intervene between the events portrayed and the work’s publication (Historical Novel Society “Defining the Genre”). This is not the case with *Obasan*, a book deeply invested with the author’s own experience and memories. Although the book is written in the first person, the Nakayama family is to some degree incorporated into the text, and the basic elements of the plot have been taken directly from Kogawa’s life, the bulk of the narrative is fictitious. Thus, *Obasan* cannot be considered an “authentic” memoir, either. By virtue of its hybrid literary form, the novel inhabits a kind of interstitial space where the boundaries between Joy Kogawa and Naomi Nakane, and between the textual house and the one that faced demolition, are apt to blur in the minds of readers and the public.

The blurred boundary between the real and the literary realms was, on many occasions, “played up” during the course of the fundraising campaign. Michael Posner, for example, profiled Joy Kogawa and the Land Conservancy’s project in a *Globe & Mail* article titled “Restoring a Book to Life.” Without Posner having to elaborate this headline any further, we easily infer that this project of “restoration” reflected both a real-world architectural

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30 One such fabricated plot element is Naomi’s separation from her mother when Mrs. Nakane must tend an elder in Japan. Stranded there by the war, Naomi’s mother is in Nagasaki on 9 August 1945 when the United States bombs the city, and she is left disfigured until her death shortly thereafter (thus she never returns to Canada, leaving her family to wonder about her fate). Kogawa foregrounds the fictional dimension of *Obasan* in the preface by saying, “Although this novel is based on historical events and many of the persons named are real, most of the characters are fictional.” In responding to Kogawa’s disclaimer, Arnold Davidson clarifies that “[a]lthough Naomi’s own story is not literally true, the experience portrayed in the novel happened. […] The history on which this novel is based is documented in the Public Archives. If you doubt it, you can check it out for yourself” (25).
heritage concern and a desire to safeguard this textually constituted site. Understandably, for Kogawa herself, the Marpole house and its fictionalized representation were not entirely discrete entities either. Early in the campaign, Kogawa solicited an intervention by Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell in the fate of the cherry tree growing on the rear property line of the Kogawa House. Kogawa describes:

“In this November as I watch the yellow and red and orange cherry leaves fall, leaving the branches naked for winter, I am emboldened to make this one request—that the wounded old cherry tree in the alley, behind [1450] West 64th Avenue, be designated a symbol of friendship, healing and peace. The tree plays a pivotal role in both the forthcoming new version of Naomi’s Road, the children’s novel, and Naomi’s Road, the opera commissioned by the Vancouver Opera Company. (Kogawa Letter)"

The second reason for this conceptual convergence relates closely to the first. Obasan became a canonical first telling of Japanese Canadians’ experience during the war (Miki 201), and was instrumental in articulating a voice for the redress movement. Writing prior to the 1988 settlement, Gary Willis locates the book’s political significance in its publication “at a time when the question of reparation to Japanese Canadians was beginning to receive exposure in the press” (Willis). Obasan, which is fundamentally a work of fiction, was taken up as the defining account of the Japanese Canadian internment and its aftermath. Although other non-fiction books dedicated to the internment, such as Ken Adachi’s The Enemy That Never Was (first published in 1976) and Ann Sunahara’s The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War (1981), were truly foundational historical texts, and were published before the release of Obasan, it is Obasan that is most associated with
“breaking the silence” on the mistreatment of the Japanese Canadians during the war, “setting the historical record straight,” and providing clarity and impetus to the redress movement. Russell Rose locates the pivotal difference between these texts in their contrasting modes of telling: Adachi and Sunahara offer dispassionate, objective recounting of historical events, whereas Kogawa presents a fictional work that attempts to enact historical experience, to bring the internment to life through imagined characters and invented story. Moreover, as with all fiction, there is rhetorical impact in the way the story is told—that is, in its constructs, such as point of view, the structure of the narrative, the central metaphors which inform it and, ultimately, the presence or absence of closure within the narrative. (218)

There is something inherently contradictory about Obasan being the singular account of the internment, given Kogawa’s postmodernist grappling in the novel with the paradox of writing and remembering history, and the impossibility of determining objective “fact.” Nguyen points to recent criticism of Obasan that “highlights the indeterminacy of truth and the impossibility of gleaning objective knowledge from history and experience” (174). A postmodernist position, which Kogawa clearly assumes in the writing of the novel, would be skeptical of any narrative or account that attempted to claim absolute truthfulness or objectivity. Kogawa is very self-conscious about the instability and shifting nature of memory and the writing of history; she deliberately “draws” Naomi in such a way that the character’s recollections are piecemeal and incomplete.

31 See Goellnicht (“Minority History”) for his discussion of what seemed to be unanimous critical praise for Obasan and its revealing of historical “truth.” He points, however, to the tensions in the book between historical telling and personal telling, and details how Joy Kogawa problematizes, through Naomi Nakane’s ambivalence toward the past, and uncertainty about her own memory, the reconstruction of history through language.
As a result of the novel’s widespread critical acclaim and popular appeal (and its agency in the early stages of the redress movement), Joy Kogawa became familiar to the public as a prominent author-activist—and victim—and thus inseparably associated with the work. At a time when redress organizers were trying to galvanize support within the fractured, and largely silent, Japanese Canadian community, Kogawa would read passages from *Obasan* at meetings and events to promote dialogue among reticent former internees (Kobayashi and Miki 66). *Obasan* was likely better suited to this particular task than more straightforward historical texts, such as Sunahara’s or Adachi’s, which, though they recounted the political events for the first time, and plainly indicted the bureaucrats responsible, did not offer any “model” by which individuals might begin to reckon with this history on a personal level. Kogawa’s novel combined a factual account of the internment with an accessible narrative in which the protagonist—unmistakably modelled on Kogawa herself—eventually brings herself through silence and evasiveness into language, and thus to a greater resolve to confront the past. Naomi’s personal transformation is presaged in a prose-poem epigram preceding the first chapter of the novel:

*There is a silence that cannot speak. […] The word is stone. / I admit it. / I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. […]*  
*Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech there is in my life no living word. […] If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? (Kogawa *Obasan* vi).*  

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32 There is something eminently “readable” about Naomi—we empathize with her as a character; her pain becomes our pain. It is easier to enter into the history of the Japanese Canadians through an empathetic understanding of one character than it is through a more straightforward historical text that can potentially be read as indicting the reader.
In analyzing Naomi’s first (silent) encounter with Rough Lock Bill, who asks her what she is good for if she doesn’t speak or write, Goellnicht remarks that it “appears that without the discursive power of language there can be no communication, no knowing, no identity, no self as a linguistically constituted subject. We must narrate ourselves into history or be doomed to extinction” (“Father Land” 125). It was exactly this kind of transforming of Japanese Canadians from the objects of history, to subjects and agents—through language and discourse, Kogawa asserts—that was critical to the redress movement. Roy Miki recalls organizing events in the early eighties at which Japanese Canadians where encouraged to articulate their memories and experience through language. Through these encounters “the connections between the personal and the social, the individual and the collective, could become the medium of another identity—[...] ‘a redress identity’—produced through the language of the [National Association of Japanese Canadians]” (Redress 253).

In a gesture that affirmed the book’s pivotal role in achieving government acknowledgement of the injustice, a section of Obasan was read to Parliamentary members during the official apology proceedings in the House of Commons on 22 September 1988; later that day Kogawa praised the settlement agreement on national television (Goellnicht “Minority History” 306). Although she was not a member of the NAJC negotiating committee, Kogawa was evidently recognized by the press and the public as central to the movement—thus her opinions on the agreement, which had been so long in coming to Japanese Canadians, were deemed prescient and “newsworthy” (on par, one could say, with those of NAJC president Art Miki).
Finally, I attribute this symbolic convergence to TLC campaign discourse, which emphasized equally the site’s historical and literary significance. TLC explained in a multi-page information kit provided to potential donors that “Joy Kogawa was one of the many children born in Canada to have their homes seized during this dark time in Canada’s history. Years later she captured her experiences in the award-winning book, *Obasan*, a novel that describes her childhood home in Vancouver.” This short passage touches on the multiple, overlapping associative aspects of the Kogawa House: it identifies Kogawa’s public status as author, and ties this persona to her younger self, who experienced first-hand discriminatory measures against Japanese Canadians; it connects Kogawa’s real-life experiences with a canonical literary work (and in so doing reaffirms the factual basis of the fictitious novel); and it concludes by re-connecting the larger history of the internment and dispossession, as presented through Kogawa’s witnessing, to a very specific, tangible piece of this history—the Nakayama homestead in Vancouver. The house is thereby situated not only in Kogawa’s personal history, but also Canada’s national and literary histories.

The same TLC document includes two verbatim excerpts from Brian Mulroney’s 1988 apology speech in Parliament, indicating they are “from Joy Kogawa’s novel *Emily Kato*,” the author’s redress-focused 2005 sequel to *Obasan*. Of course, the passages originate in the speech itself, not *Emily Kato*—really a secondary source that quotes Mulroney. Although the Prime Minister’s speech could have been referenced directly, this inverted construction proclaims not only the political relevance of Kogawa’s work,
but also the inseparability of Canadian literary and political history in the context of this project.

Given that the campaign was called “Save Historic Joy Kogawa House,” one could have reasonably expected the cover of the information package to depict the building itself. The Land Conservancy opted, however, to use the photograph taken by Hal Roth in the Toronto CN Rail yard for the ubiquitous Penguin edition of *Obasan* instead—a prudent design decision, in fact. The image of the young girl peering through the fogged train window is no longer juxtaposed with the book title, and the publisher’s marketing tagline (“A moving novel of a time and a suffering we have tried to forget”) is exchanged for TLC’s “hope, healing, reconciliation” slogan, which is stretched across the weathered window frame. In using this photograph, TLC capitalizes upon people’s established associations with the book as well as the added impact of giving a “face” to the campaign. Is this the face of Joy Kogawa? Shifted into this new context, the image offers multiple readings. We cannot help but infer this is not a case of either Naomi Nakane or Joy Kogawa, but both. Through the preservation of this house, the girl in the photograph—Joy, Naomi, or any of the “many Japanese Canadian children”—might be healed. As the photographer recalls, “This award winning photo was shot on location in a CN Railway yard. The art direction was to shoot on a grey overcast day with the young

In the Penguin tagline, who “we” are is undefined, suggesting that this willed forgetting might characterize both Japanese Canadians and Canadians collectively.

The Roth photograph has been incorporated in the cover design for the majority of Penguin printings. The first edition by Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd., which had relatively limited distribution, combined an “image” of Japanese script with a short (English) passage from the text. Admittedly, a photograph of the house itself would have been less compelling on the cover of the TLC brochure; its architectural significance never figured in the campaign, and the house lacks the evocativeness, humanity, and “recognition factor” of the image of “Naomi.”
girl looking for her parents out of the train window” (Hal Roth Photography Inc). Based on the criteria given the photographer, it was crucial to capture the moment of crisis for young Naomi—she is about to leave the security and familiarity of her home and Vancouver, for reasons she does not fully comprehend. From this point on, life for Naomi is difficult and confusing, and she longs to return home. The instant of this photograph represents the fragmenting of her close-knit family, which continues for the rest of the novel. A second reading is also possible. By transplanting the book cover image to this new context, in which TLC actively solicits support to save the old house, the train window easily stands in for Naomi’s bedroom window, through which she could see the cherry tree growing in the yard. By featuring Roth’s photo on the cover of the donation package, TLC not only reiterated the convergence of the author with her fictitious representation, but also proclaimed that an enduring situation of crisis might be brought to resolution through the preservation of this house.

In letters to Vancouver city council in objection to the building’s pending demolition, correspondents frequently expressed these same interrelated associations of the house, and the indeterminate boundary between Joy Kogawa and her fictitious progeniture.

From Patricia Rowe’s letter of 31 October 2005:

This is to request a ‘stop demolition[‘] on the former home of Joy Kogawa (Nakayama) and to request that the house be preserved as a heritage site. I think this should be done in honour of Joy Kogawa and her parents and of the Japanese Canadian community. This home is part of the novels for which she has become one of our best-known writers. The house is part of an epic period of Canadian history of World War II and its aftermath. It is a reminder of
In her letter, Rowe establishes the house’s connection to Kogawa’s literary persona—and punctuates this identification by underlining it. She then immediately clarifies that Kogawa is also, by birth, a Nakayama—the family displaced during the internment (her adult and childhood selves integrate here by receiving equal recognition). She specifically names the potential beneficiaries of saving the house: Joy Kogawa, her parents and the Japanese Canadian community. Finally Rowe states that the house is connected to both Kogawa’s literary works (which have contributed to her status as a respected author) and to the real-world historical events in which the young Joy Nakayama was implicated.

Kogawa’s embodiment of these multiple personae was enacted on several occasions. At the 3 November Vancouver City Council meeting that passed the demolition injunction, Kogawa read a passage from Obasan in which Naomi Nakane recalls fragmentary memories of her childhood home. In doing so, Kogawa effectively inhabited the character of Naomi, giving voice to her in a manner that rendered the woman’s recollections interchangeable (or inextricable) with the author’s own—Kogawa astutely made a

35 This particular letter was handwritten in all capital letters. For ease of reading, my transcription follows conventional sentence-case rules for capitalization. The underlines appear in the original.
36 Notably, other Canadians don’t appear to factor in this correspondent’s imagining, except for the implicit reference to a collective “we” who consume Kogawa’s literary production.
37 Consider another letter of 1 November 2005 to Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell and city council, from George Payerle: “Since Joy Kogawa is one of Canada’s most respected writers, and since not only her ethnicity but her life’s work are bound up in the WWII internment of Japanese Canadians which has been recognized by all levels of government and almost all Canadians as a shameful episode in our history, it is clear that the City of Vancouver should ensure preservation of her childhood home, rather than overseeing its destruction.” The correspondent suggests that the concomitance of Kogawa’s literary production and her personal experience—that they are “bound up”—warrants preserving the house (we infer that Payerle sees the house as integral to both of these) (Payerle).
personal plea for her childhood home by foregrounding its literary significance through the voice of *Obasan*’s fictitious protagonist. Kogawa had in fact “performed” this role before at the public event on 27 September 2003, which was the first time she had been back to the home since her family’s relocation in 1942. In what Glenn Deer describes as a “textual baptism of the home’s authenticity” (129), Kogawa gave voice to Naomi’s reluctant memories in the small living room of the “Nakane” homestead itself; thus, “the intertwining of Naomi Nakane’s and Joy’s childhood self became complete, confirmed by the convergence of author, text, and place, and by the witnessing presence of the hundred people crammed in the room” (131). Throughout the campaign, Kogawa also reverted back to her “self” on numerous occasions, such as when she expressed to supporters her *personal* gratitude for their efforts, and what it meant for *her* that the house had been preserved. In the Land Conservancy’s first press release after taking over management of the campaign, Joy Kogawa is quoted as saying, “I am so touched by the way the community has rallied to protect this house that holds such symbolic importance for me—and for so many others. […] I just wonder when I’m going to wake up from this dream of miracles” (TLC “Campaign is Underway”).

*One for All and All for One*

The conceptual convergence of Joy Kogawa and Naomi Nakane, and of the real and textual houses, facilitated a second transformative process in which these “merged entities” became emblematic symbols around which a *particular* modality of reconciliation could be enacted—specifically, one engaging the dynamics of
interpersonal reconciliation as a proxy for group reconciliation (which is far more
difficult to imagine enacting). I will return to this hypothesis shortly. This second
transformative process I have identified entails conceptual metonymic “shifts”—an idea I
have drawn from the basic principles of cognitive linguistic theory. In one of the
foundational works in the field, Lakoff and Johnson argue that humans’ understanding of
the world is primarily metaphorical and that our perceptions, experiences, and interactions
are shaped almost entirely by metaphorical constructions (3). They contend that the
ubiquity of rhetorical expressions in everyday language reflects how our most basic (and
complex) concepts are structured; metaphor, and all its nuanced derivations, then, are not
simply superfluous turns of phrase, but rather cognitive processes (244).

Lakoff’s classic example of conceptual metaphor is the construction argument is war. In
order to better understand the concept argument, we conceive of it in terms of another
entity: war. The tangibility of war—the ease with which we can conjure images of
battlefields, physical combat, and opposing factions—allows us to map this cognitive
understanding to the relatively less tangible concept of argument. That we conceptualize
one mental domain by corresponding it to another (in this case, verbal altercation to
military engagement) is evidenced by the intelligibility of linguistic expressions such as,
“Your claims are indefensible,” “He attacked every weak point in my argument,” and

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38 I have given myself license to make admittedly pedestrian forays into linguistic theory. One of the key
premises of the theory around which my argument revolves, author George Lakoff contends, is the
“everydayness” of metaphorical thought (Lakoff’s key book-length text is Metaphors We Live By), and he
encourages us to understand its general applicability in non-theoretical contexts. This is not to suggest that
the blurring/convergence I observed could not be interpreted through a number of other interpretive
frameworks. I tended towards language-based theory and literary theory because so much of what I
observed in terms of discourse around the Kogawa House ties back to the novel. The entire project had a
profound “literary sensibility.”
“His criticisms are right on target” (Lakoff and Johnson 4). These phrases are so easy for us to “decode” because, according to Lakoff and Johnson, human cognition is predisposed to operate figuratively. Of course, some theorists have pointed out the limitations of Lakoff’s theories of conceptual metaphor. Murphy, for example, points to the contradiction that Lakoff argues for metaphors structuring everyday life, yet he invariably resorts to linguistic examples to prove the case (Murphy 183). Nevertheless, cognitive linguistic theory does offer some useful tools for attempting to understand why the Kogawa House became such a powerful symbol.

The asymmetry in the example above—where argument is understood through correlations to war, but war is not understood through correlations to argument—is typical of conceptual metaphor: this uni-directionality stems from the tendency of target domains to be more abstract and incomplete than the source domains that help make them sensible (Gibbs “Why Many Concepts” 311). In other words, there is no practical reason for us to map abstract concepts to concrete ones for the sake of understanding. Given the difficulty in explaining anger as a concept, we instinctively, and unconsciously, create comparative constructs in order to render the abstract idea of anger more tangible. How easily we process the cognitive metaphor anger is heated fluid in a container (Gibbs Poetics 9) is obvious when we consider the number of ways in which this construction manifests in speech: “He’s about to boil over”; “Don’t push me, or I

39 The kinds of metaphoric understandings that we construct have consequences. The various possible metaphorical constructions for the concept war, for example, can dramatically affect nations’ military conduct. Lakoff points out that if a government conceives of a military attack as “rape,” its diplomatic and/or military actions might be very different than if war is understood as “a threat to our security” (Lakoff and Johnson 243–44).
might explode”; “I could see the steam coming out of Rodney’s ears.” The permutations of this conceptual construction are endless—and we have no difficulty inferring the intended meaning of these phrases, since the cognitive construction is a logical one, and the metaphor moves from a more abstract domain to one that is less abstract.

Borrowing from the conclusions of cognitive linguists—namely that metaphor offers us possibilities to make the abstract more tangible, the unfamiliar familiar, and the complex more simple—I turn now to the metaphoric sub-category of metonymy, a related cognitive operation fundamental to our interpreting the everyday world (Radden and Kövecses 18; Gibbs “Speaking and Thinking” 74). We will be closer to an insightful reading of how the ambiguous and ill-defined concepts of healing and reconciliation came to be understood in the context of the Kogawa House by considering the various modes by which metonymy produces meaning.

Let us first discern how metonymy is distinct from metaphor; both are figurative cognitive processes aimed at related entities, but their mechanisms are quite different.

Whereas metaphor seeks to render one concept better understood through its comparison

40 There is much disagreement among linguists and cognitive psychologists as to whether metonymy should rightly be considered a sub-category of metaphor, or whether its distinct mechanics render it independent from metaphor. Some linguists have not simply argued for a sharp distinction between the two, but moreover that metonymy is, in fact, the trope that predominantly shapes our understanding of the world. Taylor contends, “metonymy turns out to be one of the most fundamental processes of meaning, extension, more basic, perhaps, even than metaphor” (qtd. in Pauwels 256). Implicit in my introducing metonymy via a summary of conceptual metaphor is my concurring that they are interdependent, and often operate simultaneously within certain conceptual constructions. I also included conceptual metaphor at the beginning of this discussion because its basic premise—that metaphor is a cognitive process—opens up the possibility of interrogating other figurative devices (such as metonymy and synecdoche) for what they might reveal about the way we make sense of the world (as I have done with the present analysis of the Kogawa House).
to another concept (which is usually from another “domain”), metonymy is a *substitutive process* that articulates contiguities between related entities (from within the same domain). One easily perceived aspect of a concept or domain is taken to stand in for another aspect of it. Warren reiterates this distinction; although metaphor is characterized primarily by “X is *like* Y” constructions, the “ability to access an entire state, situation or object from the mention of some part is … the hallmark of metonymic thinking” (Warren 122). The communicative capacity of the simple statement, “Ottawa refused to pass the bill,” for example, relies on conceptual contiguity between the city of Ottawa and the federal government body that is located there; embedded within this construction is a secondary metonym in which the institution stands in for the representatives responsible for political decision-making. This expression does not offer a comparison between Ottawa and the government (Ottawa is not like the federal government, nor is the government like Ottawa), but rather an articulation of a relationship between the two entities based on contiguity. In this case, there is contiguity between a geographic location and the activities carried out there. Baldo contends that whole-part and part-whole metonymic relations are the foundation of most literary, artistic, political, and social representation (Baldo 7). It is this particular sub-set of conceptual metonymy that is most germane to understanding the symbolic transformation of the Kogawa House.

The symbolic resonance of the Kogawa House was facilitated by metonymic conceptual processes in which Kogawa came to stand in as a representative figure of all Japanese

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41 Lakoff and Johnson cite other typical metonymic constructs, such as: producer for product (“I’ll have a *Löwenbräu*”); controller for controlled (“A Mercedes rear-ended *me*”); the place for the event (“*Pearl Harbor* still has an effect on our foreign policy”); and the part for the whole (the Giants need a *stronger arm* in right field) (38–39).
Canadian internees, and her childhood home as representative of all confiscated property. We can be certain that cognitive metaphor is not operating in this context; Kogawa is not like an individual who experienced internment; she did experience the internment. She is one individual among many, and her house is one house among many others that were seized. However, we must consider that the project of saving this one particular house, which was previously owned by one Japanese Canadian family, was framed by themes of national healing, multiculturalism, and righting past wrongs. Letters to Vancouver City Council urging heritage intervention cite beneficiaries of the project as “all of us” or “Japanese Canadians” and often “future generations”—each of these a group or collective. It becomes clear that at least a few cognitive metonymic processes operate here in order for not only campaign organizers, but also the majority of public supporters, to imagine the house having such broad social and cultural ramifications.

We can identify the following whole-part metonymic constructs in this context: an individual member of the group standing for the entire group of former internees; the physical site standing for the events that took place there; and a specific experience of the internment standing for a multitude of diverse experiences. Of course, the Nakayama homestead is as “valuable” as those having belonged to all other Japanese Canadians, and Kogawa’s experience of the internment is as “legitimate” and “authentic” as anyone else’s. However, our tendency to think metonymically and to reason and problem-solve metonymically (Gibbs “Speaking and Thinking” 74) results in Kogawa and this particular house to be understood, to some extent, as more representative of the groups in which they are included. Metonymic thinking often produces such “prototype effects” in which
the most representative “members of any category are termed prototypical members” (Gibbs Poetics 325). Numerous studies in cognition have evidenced this predisposition to prototypical metonymic thinking. Gibbs cites Rosch’s study in which she studied the conceptual category of bird; through participants’ rankings, Rosch determined that the existence of certain exemplary models of bird produce different metonymic understandings. The metonymic relationship between the specific sub-type robin and the general concept bird is stronger than the metonymic relationship between the sub-type vulture and the general concept bird because there is something more salient, in terms of “birdness,” about robins than vultures (or ostriches, or penguins) for the majority of respondents (Gibbs Poetics 325). Armstrong, Gleitman, and Gleitman encountered this kind of prototypical thinking through studies of even and odd numbers; study participants ranked the numbers 2 and 4 as being far more representative of the concept even number than were 806 and 34, although all of these numbers equally satisfy the definition of an even number (276).

At the core of the Kogawa House campaign, there is an assumption of the proto-typicality of Joy Kogawa and her experience of the internment during World War II—otherwise, they would have lacked broader symbolic meaning for the public (and the campaign might have met with less success). As I have suggested previously in this paper, the figure of Joy Kogawa merged with the fictitious character of Naomi Nakane, and the house in Obasan merged symbolically with the one at the centre of the TLC campaign, through Obasan’s hybrid literary form, the book’s status as canonical “first telling,” and the conflating discourse of the TLC campaign. These factors helped establish Kogawa
and her childhood house as exemplars of a diverse, heterogeneous group of cases. Our inclination to seek out such representative “types” in order to render larger or more complex entities intelligible allowed the Save the Kogawa House project to emerge as one of national consequence.

The emergence of a singular figure to represent a larger group of people with diverse perspectives and experiences poses some obvious dilemmas. Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph has examined the memory practice that takes place around Robben Island off South Africa’s south coast. It was here that Nelson Mandela and other anti-Apartheid activists were incarcerated for years. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the prison at Robben Island is where “the ‘new’ nation concretizes itself in a place and congeals around the prison cell of Nelson Mandela” (199). The experiences of this recognizable South African “hero” can potentially form a dominant narrative in which certain incongruous memories become difficult to assimilate. My research left me with the impression of nearly unanimous public enthusiasm for Saving the Kogawa House. I did, however, encounter one dissenting voice that was vehemently opposed to the project. Lois Hashimoto, notably the only correspondent to have actually been detained in one of the internment camps, wrote to Maclean’s magazine to proffer a counter-history. Her letter is reproduced in its entirety below in order to present a drastically different view of what was nearly all around, a “feel-good” project.

In 1962, I made my first return trip to the West Coast from where I had been exiled as an “enemy alien” 20 years before. The most eagerly anticipated part of this trip was to revisit the neighbourhood where I had grown up. With wildly beating heart I looked for a dear little house on the river side of Dyke Road, a
house that was built on logs and floated on the great Fraser River. Alas, it was no longer there, but I was awash in happy memories, and wished all children could know the delights of growing up in a house that went up and down with the tide, and rocked gently when a boa with a powerful motor skimmed by. Joy Kogawa, who assuredly has visited Vancouver numerous times since the war, waited 54 years before revisiting the home where she and her fictitious heroine in Obasan grew up. It was only after she noticed it for sale that the house suddenly acquired a historical significance of such magnitude that a contribution toward its purchase will get you an official charitable donation receipt. It is time for someone to state, no, shout, the obvious truth: Japanese-Canadians were not traumatized, silenced or destroyed by the internment. We are not in need of healing. We survived the racially motivated injustice with courage and patience, a forgiving heart and a good dollop of humour. This Kogawa-initiated effort to create a totally unnecessary, unmerited museum in her own honour is nothing more than a shameless milking of the Internment Cow. (Hashimoto 9)

Hashimoto speaks with great authority, and her allusions to “happy, carefree times in the internment camp,” posted in an online blog, are certainly unique among other published histories. However, it is nevertheless one “authentic” experience. And while we must rightly question her authority to speak for others (as we must Kogawa), it leaves us faced with the inherent dilemmas of how to manage heritage sites that invariably contain multiple, contradictory memories.

**Symbolic Restitution**

*In the morning, will I not find my way out of the forest and back to my room
where the picture bird sings above my bed and the real bird sings in the real*

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The existence of singular, representative entities standing in metonymically for *all* Japanese Canadians and *all* lost property created a framework in which it was possible for the preservation and “return” of the Marpole house to become a gesture of symbolic restitution and collective contrition for past injustice. Once the Land Conservancy had acquired the house outright, it could now be restored to Kogawa in a public ritual that also entailed a personal “homecoming”—a very resonant and symbolically rich concept with universally positive connotations. The public element to this performance was critical; in order for symbolic gestures in the realm of group apology and “reconciliation” to signify, they must be adequately witnessed and publicized, with due attention to ceremony (Gibney and Roxstrom “Status” 928–29). Kogawa’s homecoming warranted a public ceremony that effectively re-consecrated the ground, reconstituted the space both of her own childhood and of the novel *Obasan*, and offered observers and supporters a tangible representation of what restitution might “look” and “feel” like. The ceremonial dimension of Kogawa’s return home at campaign’s end was presaged by the author’s February 2006 visit to David Lloyd George Elementary School in Marpole, where she

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43 Joy Kogawa’s status as a prominent literary figure helped garner ongoing news coverage that kept the campaign in the public eye.

44 We regularly make sense of abstract concepts and entities by relating them to our physical/sensate experience of the world. Again, cognitive linguistics offers us a model for understanding this tendency. Consider the metaphoric construction *time is space*. In order to conceive of the abstraction *time*, which lacks any physical properties, we conceive of it through a domain that *is* physically constituted—*space*. *Space* is a conceptual entity with which we are innately familiar, since we exist in space and engage with the physical world in everything we do. Thus we often use expressions such as, “Going forward, we’ll have a better sense of what the project entails.” Other examples of this tendency to ground intangible concepts in our experience with the physical world include, *Understanding is seeing* (your argument is clear) (Gibbs *Poetics* 312–13) and *purposeful life is a journey* (he’s at a crossroads; she got a head start in life) (Gibbs *Poetics* 153).
attended classes until Japanese Canadian children were prohibited to do so in 1942. The Land Conservancy announced this event in a press release, in which the adult Kogawa would once again “climb the steps of David Lloyd George Elementary” and “enter the school” (TLC “Canadian Author”). The press release thus emphasizes Kogawa’s physical re-enactment of her girlhood journey to school as a symbolic ritual of re-claiming space—and time; Kogawa brought with her the group photo of her grade one class that “she has kept close to her heart for 64 years.”

The restitution of the Nakayama homestead to Kogawa, and her physical return to the space stood metonymically for the more abstract concept of group restitution—something far more complex and logistically challenging. Given the impossibility of restituting Japanese Canadians’ actual property, or the literal homecoming of all those displaced, a $21,000 per-survivor lump-sum payment was negotiated as part of the 1988 redress settlement. This was an important legal measure for acknowledging the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians; that the NAJC had succeeded in securing individual compensation, despite the government’s push for a group payout, was a victory. However, these kinds of financial payments are by nature arbitrary and abstract. In the wake of large-scale human rights abuses, it is rarely possible to assess compensatory amounts on a case-by-case basis; typically an appropriate “average” amount is negotiated or a calculation based on a limited set of factors is used to determine payout sums. Offering equal payments to victims is a fair and expeditious strategy for dispensing financial compensation, but one that cannot take into account the particulars of each case. In light of the impossibility of literally “changing the past” (such that other forms of compensation, like monetary
payouts, become necessary), it is easy to see how the Kogawa House offered appealing redress possibilities.

Saving Kogawa’s childhood home presented the opportunity to enact two rarely possible ideals of reconciliation that went beyond arbitrary compensation for injustices suffered. First, though the implications of the project were much larger, the kind of reconciliation that took place inside the “four walls” of the house was face to face—in effect, an interpersonal dynamic of reconciliation (and forgiveness?) was enacted in proxy for community reconciliation. Of Nicholas Tavuchis’s four primary modes of apology (*one to one; one to many; many to one; many to many*) (48), apologies from *the many to the many* (i.e. national) are the only ones in which “individuals do not figure as principals” (98). The configuration of collective apology brings it fully into the “formal, official, and public discursive world” where everything is tendered through proxy representatives. The uniqueness of a many-to-many apology, as Tavuchis goes on to explain, lies in the fact it “is fashioned for the record and exists only be virtue of its appearance on record … That it appears on record is the apologetic fact” (102). In the case of the Kogawa House, the public’s metonymic conceptualizing of the site and of Kogawa herself allows for the possibility of collective apology to exist outside of this strictly discursive realm. Second, in a symbolically potent reversal that came, in some way, closer to “undoing the wrong,” she who was forced to leave was welcomed back, and the actual property that was misappropriated from the family was returned. In this way, the form of compensation was inherently tied—in fact it was indexical—to the injustice perpetrated.
Redemption?

The symbolic righting of the historical wrong, which involved the recuperation of the property by “Naomi Nakane” and the fulfillment of her decades-long wish to return to the Marpole house, reflects an alternate realization of the narrative arc of the novel—and of Kogawa’s own personal narrative. Whereas *Obasan* concluded with Naomi on the wind-swept coulee near Granton, having come to a certain willingness to recollect the painful history, she had never been able to return to Vancouver to obtain the kind of psychological closure afforded by such a homecoming. By endorsing the preservation of the Kogawa House, supporters of the campaign acted in some capacity as agents in effecting an “extra-textual” redemptive ending to the literary work. Participants in the preservation campaign could interpose themselves in the spaces afforded by an unstable narrative that is neither strictly fictional nor purely historical, but what literary theorist Linda Hutcheon has termed “historiographic metafiction” (Hutcheon *Poetics*). A fundamentally postmodern literary form, historiographic metafiction challenges distinctions between the writing of history and the writing of fiction, asserting that neither can lay claim to “objectivity” or to a singular “truth.” Rather, historiographic metafiction is predicated on the multiplicity of possible “truths,” relying on the reader to become “the actualizing link between history and fiction” (“Minority History” 301–02) and to “participate in the fictional process as imaginative co-creator” (Hutcheon *Narcissistic* xi).

In his reading of *Obasan*, Goellnicht draws on Hutcheon when he observes that the “interpenetration of traditional source material for the writing of history (diaries, letters, news accounts) with an obvious fictional narrative produces not an organically whole,
seamless, realistic novel, but a disruptive, or polyphonic, generic mixture” (Goellnicht “Minority History” 288). These disruptions, to use Goellnicht’s term, invite readers to write themselves into the hybrid narrative in such a way that they can claim a political perspective different from that of their forebears, who perpetrated (or at least tolerated) the mistreatment of fellow Canadians. Moreover, in supporting the Kogawa House campaign, advocates could thus assist in bringing about an “ending” that was more palatable, affirming, inspiring, and “hopeful” (perhaps this is the “hope” invoked throughout the TLC campaign?) than the one offered by the book itself.

A Quest for Coherence

The desire to effect this kind of redemptive ending to the “Kogawa story” can be contextualized by Susan Dwyer’s theory of reconciliation—what she terms “reconciliation for realists.” Here I return to one of the central aims of this paper: to determine how the concept of “reconciliation” applies in the particular context of the Kogawa House. Responding to the “heterogeneity” of the concept of reconciliation, Dwyer attempts to articulate a basic, comprehensive definition that might unify a variety of cases (95). It is productive to think of reconciliation, she contends, as the re-establishment of narrative unity and coherence—something that humans are predisposed to seek out (96). The accumulation of all of our past experiences, our interactions with others, and our ongoing engagement with the world comprise the narrative of each of our lives—a narrative that is, for the most part, stable, unified, and coherent (96). Our capacity to function in the world depends upon our “life story” exhibiting a certain
intelligibility and predictability. However, certain events inevitably disrupt the narrative coherence of peoples’ lives, such as “a betrayal among friends” or when “a person becomes the victim of a random crime,” and thus can dramatically challenge deeply held beliefs (96). The betrayed party may have to re-evaluate how she understands the friendship, and the victim of a crime might have to abandon some of the assumptions he had about his personal safety and security. A reconciliatory process, then, involves incorporating and accommodating such disruptions into one’s personal narrative in order to re-establish its coherence (97)—how can new information, insight, or experience be made to fit with one’s existing “story” or self-understanding? Dwyer extrapolates her initial examples, which relate specifically to “micro-level” intrapersonal and interpersonal disruptions, to “macro-level” situations of a community or national dimension. Groups of people and nations have collective narratives (or “stories”) that are also vulnerable to myriad disruptions—social and political upheaval, a government’s crimes against its own citizens, or warfare, for example. Dwyer notes, “the continued well-being, or the very survival of a community or nation, depends upon how it manages to incorporate and accommodate these disturbances and challenges to its prevailing narrative of self-understanding” (98). Although the words “disruption” and “challenge” seem grossly incapable of describing such things as genocide or other large-scale human rights abuses, Dwyer uses them simply as operative terms for the purposes of illustrating her theory.

The internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War introduced the kinds of narrative disruptions Dwyer describes, and to which the reconciliatory focus of
the Kogawa House campaign was directed—though not explicitly. Most obviously, Japanese Canadians’ identification by race, not citizenship, the dispossesssion of their property, their forced relocation, and finally their post-war dispersion left a legacy of incoherent and unstable narratives for many individuals, and for the Japanese Canadian community in general. *Obasan* eloquently articulated these disruptions to narratives of self, family, place, social relations, and legal citizenship status, so that the novel was canonized, as I have argued, as a defining narrative of not only the “facts” but also the subjective experiences of those affected.

We should also consider how the internment imparted, though less immediately, disruptions to one of Canada’s most enduring post-war national myths—Multiculturalism. From the 1960s onwards in Canada, there was an express dedication to promoting cultural diversity, equality, and human rights. Ultimately, these principles were enshrined in federal policy in July 1988 with the Mulroney’s government’s passing of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, a piece of legislation that realized Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s earlier ambitions to formalize Canada’s supposed embracing of cultural pluralism. In October 1971, Trudeau announced in the House of Commons the “implementation of policy of multiculturalism within bilingual framework,” a legal first step in officially recognizing that bilingualism and biculturalism inadequately accounted for Canada’s diverse demographics, and that the limitations of these concepts jeopardized the cultural freedoms of all Canadians (“Federal Multicultural Policy”). Since that time, principles of multiculturalism have informed many official policies and programs, and
have often been invoked in order to proclaim Canada’s break with discriminatory attitudes evidenced in its past.45

The disruptions wrought by the internment, and by the failure of “Canada” to publically acknowledge the injustice for decades, could be accommodated by a three-step process that Dwyer argues must take place in any reconciliatory context (and which can be seen as under-pinning the Kogawa House campaign). First, the parties involved must have a clear view of the historical facts. Second, there must be a clear articulation of a range of interpretations of these events. Third, the parties must determine a limited sub-set of mutually acceptable interpretations that allows each of them to incorporate the event into their respective narratives. This requires varying amounts of revision to the pre-existing narratives (Dwyer 100).

45 Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s official apology to Chinese head tax survivors in June 2006 is one such example of the rhetorical capacity of the multiculturalism narrative to mark this shift. Harper began the speech by saying that the “Canada we know today would not exist were it not for the efforts of … Chinese labourers” and that “these Chinese pioneers became involved in the most important nation-building enterprise in Canadian history—the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.” While Harper was ostensibly speaking, at first, about Canada Chinese immigrants’ contributions of labour, he equivocates these later in the speech to the cultural contributions “the broader Chinese-Canadian community” makes today (thus reiterating the Canada-as-mosaic principle underpinning multiculturalism). Harper also points out that although the Chinese head tax was “a product of a profoundly different time, … we [Canadians] feel compelled to right this historic wrong”; such “decency,” Harper explains, “is at the core of the Canadian soul.” The speech concludes with the contention that Canada’s “sorrow over the racist actions of our past will nourish our unwavering commitment to build a better future for all Canadians.” Several claims are thus made by this speech. First, Canada’s, and Canadians’, attitudes towards race and culture are fundamentally different now than they were 100 years ago. Second, from our present-day multicultural perspective, we realize the full scope of the injustice perpetrated against Chinese immigrants, and we regret it. Finally, our understanding of the Canadian nation—and of “ourselves”—depends on “righting the wrong”; Harper, in fact, cites our “collective responsibility” to do so. Harper argues, however, that the passage of time and a shift in collective ideology means Canadians aren’t literally “responsible” for the injustice (“This apology is not about liability today: it is about reconciliation”); Canadians’ responsibility lies in upholding the values of multiculturalism in order to “build a better future” (all quotations from “Address by the Prime Minister on the Chinese Head Tax Redress”).
The 1988 redress settlement between the federal government and the NAJC, which followed closely on the heels of the new Multiculturalism Act, was a landmark political event that decisively attempted to bring the history of the internment into line with the dominant multiculturalism narrative that had emerged in the ensuing decades. The facts of the internment had begun to come to light through the work of historians in the 1970s, and a growing sense of injustice and determination to seek compensation among Japanese Canadians followed in the 1980s. Japanese Canadians’ personal narratives of self were disrupted by questions such as, “If I committed no crime, why was I treated like a criminal?”; “If I was a citizen of Canada, who is accountable for taking away my rights?” In order for the Japanese Canadian community to make “narrative sense” of the event, those who were responsible actually had to take responsibility for it and publically acknowledge the that the internment was motivated not by wartime necessity but by racism. Conversely, “Canada,” confronted with the bare facts of the internment, and a compelling case that it had perpetrated a grave injustice against its citizens, could incorporate this dark history into the nation’s current self-understanding not only by taking responsibility for the past, but also through various legal and symbolic measures, for “putting things right” in the present. Thus, the public commitment to “put things right,” which is founded in the principles of multiculturalism, thereby safeguards (if not re-affirms) the centrality of multiculturalism mythology in Canadian “life.”

46 In this case, the federal government had to assume some responsibility for the actions of its legal predecessor.
47 In Mulroney’s words on 22 September 1988, “…to put things right between [Japanese Canadians] and their country; to put things right with the surviving members of the Japanese-Canadian wartime community of 22,000 persons; to put things right with their children, and ours, so that they can walk together in this country, burdened neither by the wrongs nor the grievances of previous generations” (qtd. in Kobayashi and Miki 143).
It was clear that the ideals of multiculturalism were at the core of Mulroney’s highly rhetorical apology speech in the House of Commons on 22 September 1988. I include a somewhat long verbatim passage below to suggest how reaching an agreement with the NAJC on this particular historical “disruption” was so crucial not only for Japanese Canadians, but also for Canada at large. What was at stake was one of Canada’s most salient national myths. What did it mean for Canada if it did not work to “put things right” with the Japanese Canadians?

Mr. Speaker, not only was the treatment inflicted on Japanese Canadians during the War both morally and legally unjustified, it went against the very nature of our country, of Canada. We are a pluralistic society. We each respect the language, opinions and religious convictions of our neighbour. We celebrate our linguistic duality and our cultural diversity. […] That is the kind of country we want to leave our children, the Canada of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the new Official Languages Act and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. A Canada that at all times and in all circumstances works hard to eliminate racial discrimination at home and abroad. (qtd. in Kobayashi and Miki 144; emphasis added)

Supporters of the Save the Kogawa House campaign were evidently alert to how vital the multiculturalism narrative is to Canada, and that it was potentially jeopardized by the home’s pending demolition. What seemed for many people to be the inherent “rightness” of saving the Kogawa House ties to a notion of “Canadianness” and, by extension, their self-identification as embodiments of Canadian spirit and values. The potential demolition threatened to complicate, to some degree, the national narrative coherence achieved by the 1988 redress settlement. In fact, a key point in Mulroney’s official apology speech was “solemn commitment” to “Canadians of every origin that such
violations will never again in this country be repeated” (Kobayashi and Miki 144). Should the demolition have ultimately gone ahead, a kind of symbolic injustice would have been perpetrated very much like the original; Kogawa would have been prevented from returning to the home she longed for (because others were making decisions about the property).

Before TLC had even signed on with the campaign, before it had released its fundraising materials that explicitly referred to “nationhood,” “diversity,” and “multiculturalism,” members of the public had already shown support for the project by writing letters to campaign organizers and the city invoking these same ideals. Preserving this house was tied, intrinsically, to preserving multiculturalism for two reasons. First, saving the Kogawa House thwarted a further injustice (demolition of a culturally significant

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48 The Kogawa House campaign was unsuccessful in securing any local or federal government funds for the project. On 24 January 2006, the Department of Canadian Heritage wrote to the Save the Kogawa House Committee, advising it “does not have any programs that could provide support for the type of endeavour that you describe” (Rouleau). When researching this paper, I was surprised to learn that the campaign relied entirely on private donations. Given that the 1988 settlement specifically allocated funds to establish a government-run Race Relations Foundation “to foster racial harmony and cross-cultural understanding” (Kobayashi and Miki 144), was the Kogawa House project not entirely in keeping with these ideals? Responding to what she, too, sensed as a disconnect between rhetoric and practice, Cynthia Flood wrote a letter on 25 October 2005 (recipient not specified) in which she stated, “[T]o me, it’s incomprehensible that senior governments have not stepped forward with a cheque-book in hand. […] The complete lack of positive government response suggests that racism against the Japanese is still at work. What other explanation is there?” (Flood).

49 With sensitivity to its symbolic implications, City of Vancouver heritage staff ultimately turned down an early proposal to move the Kogawa Homestead to city-owned property on Marine Drive (a cheaper option than purchasing the house in situ). In the 31 October 2005 administrative report presented to city council on 3 November 2005, Gerry McGeough made it clear that “[p]reserving the house on another site would be akin to relocating Anne Frank house to another site in Amsterdam. The authenticity and social/cultural context of the historic place would be dramatically lost. Furthermore, relocating the house is reminiscent of the initial, tragic relocation of the Kogawa Family” (McGeough 2). Many realized the symbolic significance of the house remaining in its original location, effectively proclaiming its right to be part of the neighbourhood.

50 In the promotional package prepared for would-be donors (and later press releases), TLC explains that the intended writer-in-residence program at the house will “[enable] new writing about human rights and our evolving multicultural and intercultural society that makes Canada unique in the world (TLC “Public Reading”).
landmark); preservation efforts were, in a sense, measures to pre-empt potential narrative destabilization. Sensing the various overlapping consequences of demolishing the Kogawa House, Gloria Montero wrote to city council urging the home’s protection. She explicitly referenced how the destruction of this house would be profoundly at odds with Canada’s multicultural image. As Montero explained,

> The real fabric of Canada’s much-admired multicultural community needs meaningful “monuments” like this home, which represents a significant and relatively recent part of Canada’s history. By maintaining the Kogawa House and using it as a centre for on-going cultural activities Vancouver City Council will show the world that its much-touted multiculturalism is alive and genuine and responsive to its community. (Montero)

Second, there was widespread support among letter-writers for repurposing the house as a centre for “writers of conscience,” who, through their work, could further interrogate issues of race, persecution, and multiculturalism. The house’s potential as a “productive space,” with a specific human rights mandate, seemed perfectly consistent with ideals articulated in the redress settlement about education and deterring future injustice. Gloria Sawai, a writer herself, expressed to the Kogawa Homestead Committee that she saw “the possibility of renewal and hope in such a use for this house” (Sawai).
CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the primary aims of this thesis has been to determine how “reconciliation” applies specifically to the Land Conservancy of British Columbia’s successful “grass-roots” campaign to “Save the Historic Joy Kogawa House.” This was a heritage preservation project constructed around a loosely articulated concept of this oft-invoked term. Seeking to locate this project more precisely in a broad range of social and political processes understood to be “reconciliatory” in post-conflict contexts, I first determined that the “time was right” for such a project. The implementation of certain fundamental components of redressing the historical injustice against Japanese Canadians had already taken place. The securing of legal reform, official acknowledgement and apology for the injustice, and financial reparation opened up spaces in which more “emotionally rich,” community-based projects could be organized that moved “reconciliation” further along the spectrum toward “thicker” ideals—unity, harmony, possible forgiveness, and mutual respect between the parties involved. An endeavour like protecting the Kogawa homestead grew naturally out of “official” redress, offering the possibility to re-affirm the ideals and accomplishments of the 1988 settlement with the Canadian federal government. Thus I see this project as a successful model for fostering sustainable reconciliation and ongoing improved relations between former antagonists. Here, I take the position that reconciliation is an ongoing and open-ended process—not a finite one. To see reconciliatory processes as conclusive, or neatly contained, is to wrongly assume
that we can, with any certainty, “turn the page” and move on. In conceiving reconciliation as an ongoing, dynamic process in need of nurturing and vigilance brings us closer to something fundamental about reconciliation—its dedication to never repeat the injustice and to “never forget.”

I have also emphasized the significant role of place in this particular reconciliatory project. Of course, because what was so integral to the injustice inflicted was the disruption of Japanese Canadians’ sense of place, its symbolic reconstitution in the context of the “Save the Kogawa House” campaign is particularly fitting. But moreover, the Kogawa homestead offered a physical site to which the abstract ideas of reconciliation could be attached and better understood. As a heritage preservation project, it is one that looks not only at the past, but also to the future. Here I assume a stance toward heritage preservation that sees historical buildings and sites not simply as “reminders of the past” or “connections to history” but as potentially dynamic, powerful spaces that are also forward-looking. In the days immediately leading up to Vancouver City Council’s decision whether or not to prevent the home’s demolition, Toronto resident Paul Yee wrote Mayor Larry Campbell urging a stop-work order. His words aptly summarize a central theme of this thesis: “The built environment of the past is particularly fragile. [...] This is an occasion when delicate human memory requires the solid three-dimensional frame of a house to endure and to flourish” (Yee).

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51 In a rhetorical move that can only be interpreted as Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s insistence that this would be the “last word” on the issue, he opened his 22 June 2006 Head Tax apology speech with the phrase, “Mr. Speaker, I rise today to formally turn the page on an unfortunate period in Canada’s past (“Address by the Prime Minister on the Chinese Head Tax Redress”).
Figure 1.
Japanese Canadians’ fishing boats impounded on the Fraser River.
Photo: Dominion Photo Co. Courtesy Vancouver Public Library (26951).
Figure 2.
A man presents a small package as a train carrying Japanese Canadians departs Vancouver.
Photo: Province newspaper. Courtesy Vancouver Public Library (1385).
Figure 3.
View of Lemon Creek Camp.
Courtesy Rare Books and Special Collections, UBC Library (JCPC 31.010).
Figure 4.
View of Tashme (?) Camp.
Courtesy Rare Books and Special Collections, UBC Library (JCPC 30.013).
Figure 5.
1450 West 64th Avenue, Vancouver (The Historic Joy Kogawa House).
Author photo.
Figure 6.
The Historic Joy Kogawa House, back view.
Author photo.
Figure 7.
West 64th Avenue, contemporary context.
Author photo.
Figure 8.
West 64th Avenue, period context.
Author photo.
Figure 9.
Cover of the fundraising brochure from TLC (ca. January 2006).
Courtesy the Land Conservancy of British Columbia.
Figure 10.

*Obasan* cover, Penguin edition.

Courtesy Hal Roth Photography Inc.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


TLC, see Land Conservancy of British Columbia.

Wickens, Barbara. “‘That’s *Obasan*’s Home.’” *Maclean’s* 22 December 2003: 36.


APPENDIX | NOTES ON ARCHIVAL MATERIALS CONSULTED

i. Letters to Vancouver City Council and to the Save the Kogawa House Committee are archived with the Historic Joy Kogawa House Society. I obtained them from Executive Director for the Society, Ann-Marie Metten.

I consulted forty-four letters (the majority of which were e-mails or faxes) written to the City of Vancouver in the week prior to the city council meeting on 3 November 2005, when the issue of the demolition injunction was presented. All forty-four letters urged council to prevent the house’s demolition. The majority of these letters were written by individuals.

I also consulted a file containing fourteen letters written directly to the Save the Kogawa House Committee, the majority of which were from organizations. Organizations that lent their official support to the efforts of the Committee included:

- Canadian Authors Association (Vancouver Branch);
- The Canadian Museum for Human Rights;
- The Land Conservancy of British Columbia;
- The League of Canadian Poets;
- The National Association of Japanese Canadians;
- The Periodical Writers Association of Canada;
- The Writers’ Union of Canada.

ii. I downloaded approximately twenty pieces of correspondence relating to the early (2003) stages of the campaign from the Kogawa Homestead Committee website, in the “Letters from Friends” section <http://kogawa.homestead.com/Letters.html>. Some letters were duplicates of correspondence directed to Vancouver City Council in fall 2003, during the first “peak” of advocacy activity. Organizations that lent their official support to the efforts of the Homestead Committee included:

- Edmonton Japanese Community Association;
- The Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association;
- The National Association of Japanese Canadians;
- The National Nikkei Museum and Heritage Centre.

iii. Digital copies (in PDF format) of original promotional materials from the Land Conservancy of British Columbia were obtained by request from Vancouver Regional Director Tamsin Baker. See the TLC website for contact information <http://www.conservancy.bc.ca/>. I consulted fifteen Kogawa House-related press releases from the TLC website as well (see Bibliography for details of those cited).