

YELLOW EARTH AND FUTURE GENERATION:
CORRELATIONS IN BRITISH EAST ASIAN AND ASIAN CANADIAN DRAMA

by

PARIE PUI YEE LEUNG

B.A. (Hons.), National University of Singapore, 2004
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 2007

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

October 2015

© Parie Pui Yee Leung, 2015

Abstract

Since 1995 and 2002, London's Yellow Earth Theatre (YET) and Toronto's fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company have been producing work under the identity labels of "British East Asian theatre" and "Asian Canadian theatre" respectively. Emerging out of different socio-cultural contexts, the companies have nonetheless produced plays that address similar themes around mixed-race identities, immigration, and the experiences of first- and second-generation East Asians living in Britain and Canada. Despite burgeoning research on Asian Canadian theatre and British Chinese culture—developments that echo the pioneering directions of Asian American theatre scholarship—studies have tended to focus exclusively on cultural work produced by East Asian artists within the national boundaries of America, Canada and Australia. Inspired by two emotionally charged events that I attended in Toronto and in London that drew attention to the parallels between ethno-national theatre produced in different western cultures, this thesis investigates the background, mandates, and key works of two leading theatre companies in order to compare their dramatic strategies. Using data from published and unpublished scripts, published reviews and interviews, archival video where available, and the companies' press and public material through their websites, this thesis argues that comparing theatre companies across ethno-national contexts can reveal insights about how familiar dramatic strategies such as the absurd, fantastical, spectral, and audience interaction, have additional import in identity-centred work.

Preface

This dissertation is the original, independent work of Parie Pui Yee Leung.

Some ideas on David Yee's *lady in the red dress* discussed in Chapter Four have previously been incorporated into the paper, "Drama as Surgical Act: Operative Realism and the Chinese Canadian Redress" (pp163-181) by the author, published in *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre* (2012), edited by Roberta Barker and Kim Solga.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
 Chapter One Introduction	 1
1.1 An Uneasy Witness	1
1.2 The Links and Germinations of British East Asian and Asian Canadian Theatre	5
1.3 Review of Prior Research	15
1.3.1 Asian American Theatre Scholarship	16
1.3.2 Asian Canadian Cultural Space	19
1.3.3 The British East Asian Context	23
1.3.4 Hybridity	29
1.4 Issues and Frameworks: “Ethnic” Cultural Work	31
1.4.1 Visibility and Stereotyping	32
1.4.2 Issues and Frameworks: Multiculturalism	37
1.4.3 Issues and Frameworks: Interculturalism	39
1.5 Overview of Chapters	42
 Chapter Two Visions and Voices: The Founding of Yellow Earth Theatre and fu-GEN Theatre	 46
2.1 Yellow Earth and fu-GEN: Two Companies Born in Difference	48
2.2 Naming and Branding: Cultural Shorthand or Representational Shortchange?	55
2.3 Domestic, Diasporic, Transnationalist: Varied Approaches and Perceived Cultural Quality	71
2.4 Yellow Earth and fu-GEN: Repertoires	85
2.5 Shorthand	91
 Chapter Three Reforming Bodies: <i>Play to Win</i> and <i>Banana Boys</i>	 94
3.1 David Tse’s <i>Play to Win</i>	97
3.2 Leon Aureus’ <i>Banana Boys</i>	99
3.3 Troubled Bodies	103
3.4 Dramatic Themes – Bodily Reform Through Kung Fu and Revamping	109
3.5 Filling the Hollow	133
 Chapter Four Haunted Bodies: Spectral Agents in <i>58</i> and <i>lady in the red dress</i>	 138
4.1 Philippe Cherbonnier’s <i>58</i> – yan wai you yi/ meaning lies beyond language	141
4.2 David Yee’s <i>lady in the red dress</i>	147
4.3 Haunted Bodies, Spectral Agents	154
4.4 Voices of Racialization	165
4.5 Ghosting and Thematic Connections	173
4.6 Justifying Justice	178

Chapter Five	Demonstrating Bodies: Occupying Audiences in <i>FACE</i> and <i>Brown Balls</i>	184
5.1	<i>FACE</i> – A Background	188
5.2	<i>Brown Balls</i> – A Background	192
5.3	Tales Bodies Tell	195
5.4	Embodying Mixed-Race and Colouration	204
5.5	Live Dramaturgy and Bodies on Display	216
5.6	From Community to the Personal	224
Chapter Six	Conclusion	228
Bibliography	238

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of faculty members at the University of British Columbia's Department of Theatre and Film. For her unwavering belief in me, generosity and her tireless guidance of my research process over the years and across the Atlantic, I would like to thank Dr Kirsty Johnston. I am also deeply grateful to members of my supervisory committee, Dr Siyuan Liu and Dr Jerry Wasserman, for casting such a careful eye over my writing as it developed and helping me improve the structure and quality of my various drafts.

This final version has benefitted greatly from the expertise of my UBC University Examiners, Dr C. W. Marshall and Dr Glenn Deer. I am grateful for their thoughtful questions and suggestions, many of which have helped to enhance the thesis as a whole. I would like to thank my External Examiner, Dr Julie Salverson for asking me to think more critically about what it means to position myself as a witness, and for her insightful suggestions on attending to the stakes that matter. Dr Gaby Pailer, my Dissertation Chair ensured that everything ran smoothly during my oral examination, for which I am thankful.

In completing this research, I am grateful for the support of the Cordula and Gunter Paetzold Fellowship, the Stuart Keate Scholarship, UBC's International Tuition Award and Four Year Fellowships for Ph.D. Students.

My research forays into the field of Asian Canadian theatre began with my attending "GENesis," the first ever Asian Canadian Theatre Conference hosted by Toronto's fu-GEN Theatre. I am indebted to Dr Ric Knowles for seeing the possibilities when I met him at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research conference in 2009 and for inviting me to "GENesis". I am also grateful to the academics and artists with whom I shared many fruitful exchanges during the event. Many thanks especially to Dr Karen Shimakawa, Dr Daphne Lei, Nina Lee Aquino, Leon Aureus, Dale Yim, Marjorie Chan, Simon Johnston, and Eury Chang, whose friendship and intellectual engagement I continue to appreciate.

For allowing me a glimpse into their world and for taking time to meet with me informally to follow up on "GENesis," I would like to thank fu-GEN theatre company members, David Yee and Jenna Rodgers. I am also grateful to Byron Abalos for so generously sharing his script of *Brown Balls* with me.

In embarking on my research in London, I was fortunate to meet Veronica Needa, Artistic Director of True Heart Theatre and one of the original founding members of Yellow Earth Theatre (YET). I would like to thank her for welcoming me so warmly to her company, and for opening the doors for me into YET and the larger British East Asian theatre community. For so readily speaking to me and allowing me to look into their archives, I would like to thank Yellow Earth Theatre company members, Kumiko Mendl, Chris Corner, and Binita Walia.

Many British East Asian artists I met during the event, “Opening the Door: East Asians in British Theatre” were happy to talk to me and share their views. Many thanks especially to David Tse, Daniel York, Lucy Sheen, and Anna Chen.

Some of my ideas on David Yee’s *lady in the red dress* were first formulated when I prepared a paper for the New Canadian Realisms conference organized by Dr Roberta Barker and Dr Kim Solga. I would like to thank them for their advice and suggestions in getting my paper ready for the publication that emerged from the conference. Many thanks also to Dr Natalie Alvarez, who was on my panel and directed me to some interesting lines of thought.

For their good humour, kindness, support, and for sharing my struggles during the graduate research process, I would like to thank Nick Harrison, Alex Ferguson, Allison Leadley and Trish Everett. I am very grateful to Selena Couture and Jocelyn Pitsch for taking the time, at short notice, to help me practice for my oral examination presentation. Their constructive criticisms aided me tremendously on the day of my defence. I also really appreciate the encouraging feedback from Dr Hallie Marshall, who has seen my writing evolve. For their administrative and moral support throughout my years as a graduate student at UBC, I would also like to thank Karen Tong and Jennifer Suratos. Reid Gilbert was a warm and inspiring supporter in my early days as a graduate student. I am grateful to him for taking me under his wing and for steering me toward various publication opportunities.

I have been extremely fortunate over the years to have the love, support, and encouragement of many friends and acquaintances. Gorsharn Toor, Yulia Shtern, and Juliana Loh remain steadfast in their friendship despite the geographical and emotional distances during my writing process. Gordon White, Pauline McCluskey and David Campbell have helped to keep my spirits up in their own special ways. Stephania Schwartz and Amanda Ng supported me when I really needed it in Canada. Elaine Foo and other members of True Heart Theatre Company have spent numerous rehearsals listening to my struggles. I am grateful to Ella and Ram Thapaliya, as well as Lindsey Farrant and her husband, Joe for their heartfelt encouragement over the years. Colleagues and managers at the British Library in London have been understanding and supportive as I prepared for my examination in Vancouver. Many thanks especially to Sandra Pearson, Garry Spence, Leathea Lee, Paget Anthony, Wunmi Odeyingbo, Naima Roshan, Stephen O’Leary, Robert Timson, Gulfraz Yasin, Joe Fallon, Peter Roberts, Edward Horton and Chiara Codeluppi for their humour, concern, and belief in me.

My family has been a constant source of support over the years. I am grateful for the wisdom and understanding of Francis Leung, Brigilda Bolaños, Winnie Chu, Peter Lam, Johnnie, Suzie and Monique Leung, Rita Lai, and Samuel Wong. I remain deeply moved and astounded to have the love, encouragement and shared jocularity of Kirsty Watterson, Simon Coates, Alan Watterson, Therese MacFarlane, Sister Veronica Ann Rowley, Geraldine Rowley, Winifred Price, and Bob. I offer them a big thank you.

This dissertation is for Calum, who has endured, understands, and goes on loving unreservedly. He continues to amaze and inspire me.

Chapter One

Introduction

To witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them, even if that place is simply, for the moment, as an onlooker.

(Etchells 17)

1.1 An Uneasy Witness

In May 2010 and in February 2013, I found myself in different continents, a witness to two emotionally charged events. The former was the occasion of “GENesis,” the name of the first ever conference on Asian Canadian theatre, hosted in Toronto by fu-GEN theatre company—an abbreviated form of “future generation”—in association with Factory Theatre, a strong proponent of the “Canadian [playwriting] voice” since its inception in 1970. Less biblical in appellation but no less evocative, the latter, taking place three years later at the Young Vic Theatre in Southeast London, was a *Devoted and Disgruntled* (D&D) event, an ongoing “self-organizing” conference series established in 2005 by the founders of Improbable, an English theatre company. As implied in its title, the D&D events invite affective engagement with theatre issues, emphasizing personal investment and assuming a position of dissatisfaction often associated with the image of a dedicated artist. The event

itself, paralleling the ethno-racial and national markers of “GENesis,” was entitled, “Opening the Door: East Asians in British Theatre”. Although the events are clearly apart in time and space, being present at both, I discerned a number of correlations: the language of momentousness and monumentality attributed to each, the devotion and disgruntledness of participants, the surge of celebratory feeling, pockets of unrest, expressions of anger, eruptions of tears, the doubts about future changes, and the tentative steps toward grasping agency. Coming away from these events, I felt moved but also weighed down by their significance. While I was struck by the camaraderie within these spaces and times, I also experienced a feeling of unease as I started to assess my “own place” as a witness *to* and *in* these events.

Having been invited to attend “GENesis,” I was struck by how my East Asian appearance seemed to play a part in my being readily welcomed at the event, to the point where I felt as if the artists I spoke to assumed that I understood their struggles. The truth was that until that point, I was not cognizant of the complex issues surrounding Asian Canadian cultural expression. I was looking in from the outside, even as my body gained me entry into an intimate space. While deeply appreciative of what I went on to learn from “GENesis,” my initial position felt voyeuristic. My attendance at “Opening the Door” brought similar sensations. Although many things reminded me of the earlier event in Toronto, I was ultimately both an insider and outsider, not quite a British East Asian theatre-maker trying to be recognized, and yet accepted in that space because I looked a certain way. In the face of often very emotional declarations of personal struggles, I found myself looking on, wondering about my own positionality as an “East Asian” living in both Canada and Britain.

As an “onlooker”—borrowing British writer and performer Tim Etchells’ words—what sort of ethical response should I have to the following *cri de cœur* that Daniel York (a Eurasian actor who has worked in the British theatre industry for over twenty years) drafted as the opening message to participants of “Opening the Door”?

It’s my contention that East Asians are a third class ethnic minority in terms of UK media. I would go as far as to say East Asians are treated almost as a sub species. Reduced to silent and even grotesque stereotypes with no empowerment or presence. Our diversity, our experience and our talents [sic] unrecognised, even our BRITISHNESS such is our status as perennial foreigners, and all too often we are forced to rely on physicality and archaic exotica in order to gain any kind of employment opportunities. (“Invitation”)

Preceding “GENesis,” when the first ever two-volume collection of “contemporary Asian-Canadian drama” was published in 2009, Nina Lee Aquino, then Artistic Director of the aforementioned fu-GEN Theatre, made the following statement in her introduction to the works:

This anthology marks a milestone in our community: we finally have a united, strong, artistic front. It is the acknowledgement that Asian-Canadians do have a form of expression; that we have a culture worthy of being witnessed, learned from, studied

and critically analyzed by everybody—not just our own community.

(Aquino, “Introduction” vii)

How should I respond to such weighty statements? While I felt vulnerable at certain points, I was not what anthropologist Ruth Behar has termed a “vulnerable observer” where the personal stakes for a researcher is high, such as in the example of a professor of psychiatry revealing her own struggles with a manic-depressive illness and being viewed by the academy as having lost her objectivity. As a witness to these two events, I felt that something else was at stake, that of passing up the opportunity to view these contexts comparatively. Given the echoes between the events, I was moved to study them, and even more so as I realized that scholarship on ethno-national theatre tended to be limited to case studies within national borders. As an East Asian who did not have strong identity allegiances to either Canada or Britain since birth, I felt well-placed to conduct this study from another point of view. On one hand, Daniel York’s words remind us of the entrenched backdrop of exoticized imaginings of East Asia and its peoples with which those who now make theatre in the West must contend. On the other hand, do Aquino’s words point to a viable future position to which her British counterparts could look forward? Are these unified fronts and identity-centred forms of expression achievable by York and his imagined community? Is this change in the Asian Canadian context sustainable when the ghosts of visual pasts linger? What is my place in these moments and milestones when as an East Asian migrant, my identity is contained and yet uncontainable under the ethno-racial and national labels that mark the boundaries of these two events?

1.2 The Links and Germinations of British East Asian and Asian Canadian Theatre

The past twenty years have seen a gradual proliferation of work by East Asian theatre-makers based in Britain and Canada¹. Not only do these performances utilize English as the main verbal medium, thus drawing attention to proficiency in each country's official language², their creators also continually emphasize, through the works themselves and through public articulations in print and online channels, a steadfast identification with the British or Canadian "nation". This identification is an uneasy one, however, given that many of the performances reference a sense of nation that has traditionally muted non-white citizens and imagined only pockets of non-white minorities amid a white native majority.³ Although the impact of globalization has led to the adoption of diversity and multiculturalism as officially sanctioned ideologies to manage the influx of people migrating

¹ The term "Asian" is used in Canada to refer to the collective group of people—whether immigrants, their offspring or visitors—with ancestral roots in the Philippines, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and other states in East Asia and Southeast Asia. In Britain, the term "East Asian" has for a long time, been used to designate this same group, whereas "Asian" refers to people of South Asian descent. Since 2011 however, the Office for National Statistics has officially grouped "Chinese" under "Asians/Asian British," while retaining an "Other" box for people of Korean or Japanese descent. Most theatre artists still coalesce around the "British East Asian" label. In this thesis, I use "East Asian" to refer to synonymous groups in Canada and Britain. As Ric Knowles and Nina Lee Aquino remind us, however, the term "Asian," deriving from "Asia," is a "western concept" which "group[s] together ... heterogeneous and often conflicting peoples who, prior to western imperialism (including scholarship), had not seen themselves collectively" ("Introduction" viii).

² Or languages in Canada; its other official language is French.

³ Not limited to "East Asians," Marc Maufort has, for example, written about Argentinian-Canadian playwright Guillermo Verdecchia's groundbreaking 1993 work, *Fronteras Americanas*, Djanet Sears' African Canadian identity in her 1987 play *Afrika Solo*, and Betty Quan's 1995 play *Mother Tongue*, on Asian Canadian identity. Seen through the lens of hybridity, the plays all explore the tensions between a character's identification with the new national home and an ancestral ethnic homeland, often amidst circumstances that call into question ethno-racial issues. ("Multicultural Vistas"). In the British context, Gabriele Griffin (2003), Dimple Godiwala (2006), Dominic Hingorani (2010), along with Geoffrey V. Davis and Anne Fuchs (2006) have written on Black British and British Asian theatre along similar lines.

from other countries—whether as refugees, temporary workers, or soon-to-be permanent citizens—the sense of an “us” against a foreign “other” ineluctably remains.

Located in these socio-cultural contexts, many East Asian theatre artists residing in England and English Canada have found themselves in the situation Daniel York has described in abject terms. Feeling unrecognized for their worth and talent as theatre-makers in an already fundamentally competitive industry, they are further entrapped by the correlation between their racially marked bodies and theatre’s reliance on visual freight, especially in realist or naturalistic productions. In response, some artists have formed collectives around an imagined ethno-national identification, one that insists on their right to belong as part of the national cultural fabric. Pairing an ethno-racial category with a label that identifies them as members of a nation, the artists create tension in the otherwise smooth, homogeneous weft of mainstream representation, showing up as differently coloured threads. This thesis considers the correlations in the works of two theatre companies, Yellow Earth Theatre and fu-GEN Theatre. Just as I had encountered viable contact zones in the two emotionally charged events described at the start, this thesis investigates what happens when we read the plays of these companies, separated by time and space, side-by-side, or in tandem with each other.

Given the intensity of emotions underpinning these companies’ formation and works themselves, I want to draw on the words of race and cultural studies scholar Sara Ahmed, who analyses in her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), what emotions *do*. As she posits, “emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have. Rather it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others” (10). Ahmed

takes the concept of “contact” further, reminding us that when we make contact, we also engage with impressions and impressing. Reflecting on the word “impression” that David Hume has used in his work on emotions, she writes,

To form an impression might involve acts of perception and cognition as well as emotion. But forming an impression also depends on how objects impress upon us. An impression can be an effect on the subject’s feelings (‘she made an impression’). It can be a belief (‘to be under an impression’). It can be an imitation or an image (‘to create an impression’). *We need to remember the ‘press’ in an impression.* It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace. (6)

Ahmed’s conception is important when thinking about the emotionally saturated events of “GENesis” and “Opening the Door”. In their contact with the mainstream theatre industry, East Asian theatre-makers in Canada and Britain have felt the (de)pressing impression of rejection, and have come under the impression that their very surfaces—their ethnically marked physical appearances—have led to their being discriminated against. Identifying themselves as victims of racism and discrimination, as exemplified in Daniel York’s words above, British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre-makers have had to contend with different surfaces and impressions, while they try to create an impression of belonging to their respective national cultures. Indeed, artistic expressions of the lived experiences of minority groups in Britain and Canada have assuredly brought concepts such as ethnicity,

race, and national identity into contact, if not collision with each other. Drafted into YET and fu-GEN's mandates and evident in their productions is an artistic yearning to rectify the voicelessness of people who have suffered under the socio-cultural restrictions created on account of ignorance, hate, and attitudes stemming from a schismatic view of the world. Ahmed's own references to the jingoistic ideology and language of the British National Party (BNP)—a far right political party in the United Kingdom—remind us of real world examples that counterpoint the extreme tones of abjection and language of victimhood that Daniel York employs. The anxieties around upholding a national image, or national culture, emerge due to contact not just with others, but with what is constituted as *the* fearful, invading, foreign and different *Other*. York's statement of dejection foregrounds the argument that race and ethnicity constitute one of the reasons for the relative racial homogeneity of the mainstream, read "professional," British theatre he criticizes, a state which also manifests as a perceived lack of opportunities for actors of "colour". Indeed, as several studies have shown, other ethno-racial groups such as British Asians, African Canadians, Black British, and various other "non-white" groupings have also experienced similar barriers, and therefore turned to creating their own work. While initiatives and funding opportunities have fostered the production of new plays written by "ethnic" writers, leading to what Aleks Sierz has described as part of Britain's New Writing wave, artists of different minority groups have achieved varying degrees of cultural visibility. British East Asian theatre-makers, in particular, have felt excluded from the cultural acceptance of new works showcasing British diversity.

The creation of companies such as Yellow Earth and fu-GEN, then, can be seen as a tactical response to constant yet unsuccessful contact against the "doors" of mainstream

British and Canadian theatre. Faced with rejection or indifference, compounded with the history of racism and its contemporary insidious incarnations, some artists began to create their own opportunities instead. Banding together, drawing up, and following mandates that underline their allegiance to British East Asian and Asian Canadian communities respectively, the founders of the two theatre companies introduce into their cultural landscapes new stories, representational styles and themes that diversify what constitutes British and Canadian theatre by laying claim to a national identification. Since 2002, Toronto-based fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company⁴ has been “dedicated to the development of professional *Asian Canadian* theatre artists through the production of new and established works” (“About Us: Mandate”, emphasis added). In terms similar to fu-GEN’s mandate, London-based Yellow Earth Theatre (YET)⁵ was established in 1995 to “develop new work by *British East Asian* (BEA) artists and to engage audiences from all backgrounds in this work through public readings and touring productions” (“About: An Overview”, emphasis added).

This thesis investigates the dramatic strategies YET and fu-GEN have deployed in contributing to a vision of British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre respectively. As this thesis will show, their strategies are diverse— animating pluralistic meanings around diasporic experiences, national belonging, transnational affinities and ethno-racial performances. Working within cultural contexts long saturated with deleterious, stereotypical or caricatured perceptions of East Asians, both companies also attempt to displace these

⁴ For the purpose of this thesis, I will be referring to fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company as “fu-GEN” for short.

⁵ For the purpose of this thesis, I will use “Yellow Earth” and “YET” interchangeably to refer to Yellow Earth Theatre.

pervasive representations, replacing them with their own stories and bodies instead.

Fundamentally, the artist-members undertake to wrest creative and representational power for their own “ethno-racial” communities and also for themselves personally.

This representational power, stemming from a longing to be seen and heard, recognized and acknowledged, is seen throughout the plays I discuss in the following chapters. In her work on emotions, Ahmed also reminds us, “the word ‘emotion’ comes from the Latin, *emovere*, referring to ‘to move, to move out’” (11). As she explains, “emotions are not only about movement [because they have the ability to move], they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that” (11). For her, “what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place or gives us a dwelling place” (11). Importantly, she suggests that “emotions may involve ‘being moved’ for some precisely by fixing others as ‘having’ certain characteristics” (11). The inception of British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre stems from the tension that arose when fixed ideas came into contact with the new, unfamiliar, and the “alien”. The bodily surfaces of East Asian theatre-makers fix them as Other in the predominantly white British and Canadian theatrical casting traditions, except for occasional experiments in intercultural productions, well-meaning forays into colour-blind casting, and productions that foreground other specializations such as site-specific work and physical theatre. In Yellow Earth and fu-GEN’s works, there are necessary fixations on identity and identification in specific socio-cultural worlds. Reading the companies’ works together can thicken our comprehension of the phenomena of East Asian cultural experiences in Britain and Canada, and result in a broader understanding of parallel movements across borders and spaces.

As mentioned earlier, both companies mark and market their work under labels that draw attention to ethno-racial and national identification. As evident from York and Aquino's statements as well, strong emotions accompany the impulses behind these types of works. The pronounced tonal and attitudinal variations that open this study exemplify what Asian American performance scholar Karen Shimakawa, at the turn of the millennium, observed of analogous practices in the United States since the late Sixties and early Seventies. Drawing on interviews conducted with founding members of Asian American theatre companies that emerged during that time, she writes:

companies grew out of impulses that were at least potentially in tension with each other from the start: on the one hand,... the goal was to put 'our' [Asian American] stories on stage, to set the record straight about the history and lived experience of Asians *in America*, 'our' Americanness as well as 'our' cultural uniqueness; on the other hand, the objective was to combat racist casting practices that barred Asian American performers from the roles dominating the mainstream stages (i.e., the historically 'white' roles comprising the theatrical canon). ("Asians in America" 285)

According to her, "these competing agendas still trouble the contemporary field of Asian Pacific American performance"⁶ ("Asians in America" 285). Ineluctably, British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre-makers, like York and Aquino amongst others, face similar

⁶ As Shimakawa explains, she uses the term "Asian American" when referring to "institutions and identity-formations from the 1960s and 1970s". "Asian Pacific American" is a more contemporary" (explicitly marked) inclusive and pluralist" designation that includes Pacific-Islander Americans ("Asians in America" 297).

issues in their own cultural and artistic contexts, combating exclusionary casting practices while working to assert vocal, physical and diegetic presences in their national theatrical landscapes.

Despite fu-GEN and YET's disparate geographical bases, specific contexts, varied histories, and founding artists' backgrounds, both companies have produced works around similar themes. Some of these include explorations of East Asian male culture, socialization and social mobility in urban settings, parent-child conflicts within immigrant families underpinned by patriarchal or matriarchal power relationships, plays inspired by real historical and contemporary events, and performances that foreground the lived experiences of individuals affected by their ethnicity and racially marked bodies in Western nation states. Bringing together different skills from their theatre training, the artists in these companies have produced performances in a variety of ways, including the use of filmic media on stage, intercultural collaboration, multiple languages, solo performance, direct audience address, and martial arts, amongst other styles and devices. At this point, it is important to acknowledge that the enumerated themes and approaches are by no means completely representative of British East Asian theatre or Asian Canadian theatre on the whole or even of each company's oeuvre. However, recognizable parallels between the companies' dramatic choices in some of their formative productions suggest that there are broadly analogous East Asian experiences in each context. Indeed, in reference to the difference between working with mainstream companies and Asian American theatre companies, playwright Philip Kan Gotanda has said,

Working with an Asian American theater company is like
working with family, where everybody has shorthand.

Everybody has gone to some degree through the same experience.

So you have a common vocabulary, history.

(qtd. in Lee, *A History of* 145)

Although his frame of reference is much smaller and delineated by the specific ethno-national border of Asian American theatre, this vocabulary and “cultural shorthand” also seem to pervade both companies’ works despite their obviously different national contexts. In both cases, the companies’ mandates also indicate that they share similar missions, to foster and produce new works by emerging playwrights under their specific identity rubrics, as well as to challenge and break down stereotypes long embedded in their respective socio-cultural contexts.

This thesis sets out to answer, then, using YET and fu-GEN as case studies, a number of questions. What are some of the common vocabularies or shorthands in each company’s mandates and key works despite their different contexts? What kinds of plays have fu-GEN and YET programmed and produced? What kinds of surfaces and impressions, recalling Sara Ahmed’s ideas, do we gain by reading these companies’ works together? Using published and unpublished play texts, video archival footage where available, data collected from the companies’ websites, theatre reviews, online forums, press interviews, as well as my own notes from attending events related to British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, I delineate three key ideas. One, despite the parallels in creating “ethno-national” drama, both companies define their own idea of it differently. Thus, while YET has a transnationalist focus and their branding could be seen as reliant on a visibly “East Asian” aesthetic, fu-GEN’s image is contemporary and neutral; their logo is a neutral green circle against a white background, compared to the yellow and red logo of YET, with the Chinese character for

“yellow”. Two, despite their different national contexts, both companies have created plays that share similar dramatic forms and themes. Three, as I discovered in the course of my research, there are multifarious positions that trouble the unifying implications of identity labels such as “British East Asian” and “Asian Canadian”. Indeed, the works themselves do not always fall neatly into predetermined categories. I therefore argue that reading *Yellow Earth* and fu-GEN’s works together allows us to appreciate their remarkable similarities as well as respective approaches where their paths have diverged.

Indeed, despite their different contexts, the two companies have embarked on remarkably similar artistic trajectories. Aside from creating new opportunities for themselves and other artists, the founding members also deploy East Asian bodies on stage. Their casting choices and scenographic emphases on East Asian bodies aim to counter the lack of such casting elsewhere as well as a kind of offensive Asian minstrelsy. For example, in such early productions as *Ah Sin: The Heathen Chinese* (1877) written by Mark Twain and Bret Harte, “the Anglo-Chinese play” *Mr Wu* (1913) by Maurice Vernon and Harold Owen, and the musical *Miss Saigon* (1989) by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, East Asian characters have appeared.⁷ Often heavily stereotyped and played by white actors in “yellow-face” make-up, including what has been deemed the offensive taped-back eyes, the legacy of such performances and the entrenched notion of theatre as “play-acting” and “costume-donning” mean that ethical questions such as the racism underlying these representations are left unaddressed and even denied. *Yellow Earth* and fu-GEN offer audiences a broader understanding of East Asian experiences, along with different textures of “East Asian” culture through a range of plays that present varied East Asian bodies on stage, along with

⁷ Canadian-born Shakespearean actor Matheson Lang, British actor Jonathan Pryce, and Charles Parsloe played Mr Wu, the Engineer, and Ah Sin, respectively.

the consequences of their contact and collisions with various forces of opposition. In doing so, they sometimes draw upon some of the pervasive stereotypes and traditionally demeaning representations that already ghost the stage; in this case, however, they do so in order to subvert and reclaim them for their own purposes. As will be seen in my formal analyses of the companies' plays in chapters two to four, bringing the two companies' works into contact through a comparative lens helps create new surfaces, shaping different ways of thinking about theatre that engages with ethno-racial and national identity issues. In both cases, after an initial phase of organizational development—eight years for fu-GEN and thirteen years for Yellow Earth—there have been leadership changes and, in line with that, an updating of each company's creative direction. For the purpose of this thesis, I am focussing on the companies' germinative stages and so have chosen to study their earlier works.

1.3 Review of Prior Research

Although this thesis investigates Asian Canadian and British East Asian theatre as practised by artists who founded companies in the major cities of Toronto and London, theatre created and labelled according to this “ethno-national” nominal structure is neither new nor unique to East Asian theatre-makers in these nation states. The presence of “non-White” ethnic minorities in Canada and Britain has led to a range of cultural production and attendant scholarship on Black British (D. Osbourne et. al. 2005, Dimple Godiwala 2006), British Asian (Dominic Hingorani 2010), African-Canadian (Maureen Moynagh 2005), and Latina/o-Canadian work (Alvarez 2012, Wasserman 2002) amongst other identity configurations. In terms of East Asian theatre emerging out of major Western nation states,

the labels “Asian American theatre,” “Asian Australian theatre,” “Asian Canadian theatre” and “British East Asian theatre” have seen varied degrees of currency in both artistic and academic circles.

1.3.1 Asian American Theatre Scholarship

Generally speaking, research on “homegrown” East Asian theatre in the West would be remiss if it did not acknowledge the groundbreaking scholarship already done by Asian American theatre and performance scholars. Galvanized by the civil rights movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Asians in America banded together to fight for social-political rights for “Asian Americans.” With the imagining and manifesting of “Asian America,” Asian Americans also sought to express themselves culturally, with theatre as an important outlet. Aside from a number of Asian American play anthologies, the field has also seen a range of research studies, covering diverse aspects of the Asian American theatre phenomenon. *A History of Asian American Theatre* (2006) by Esther Kim Lee is a seminal text tracing the history and development of Asian American theatre practice. As Lee herself explains, given her own training in theatre history and historiography, “[she] wanted to know about the most basic facts of Asian American theatre; about causes and effects, the progress, and stasis, of its history; and about how the history should be researched and told” (2). In doing this survey of Asian American theatre, Lee covers several areas: early theatrical activities by Asians in America, the experiences of Asian actors in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, the history of the first four Asian American theatre companies, the impact of second wave Asian American playwrights, alternative practices such as solo

performances, as well as the *Miss Saigon* casting controversy. From numerous interviews conducted with Asian American theatre artists, Lee observes that “because of theatre’s inherently collaborative nature, each artist’s career was linked to numerous others” (3). In writing this study, she acknowledges her own interpretive role in constructing this version of Asian American theatre history, as well as the impossibility of a “truthful,” stable account. Along similar lines, I am also cognizant that my identity as an East Asian (e)migrant has also impacted the way I interpret the companies’ plays and mandates.

Coming from a more interpretive reading around dramatic texts themselves, Josephine Lee’s earlier work *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (1997) “teases out the shared strategies by which plays and playwrights make performance, dramatic form, and audience response inseparable from the meaning of race and ethnicity” (1). As Lee explains, she is careful about “resist[ing] readings of plays as mirrors of real lives, social behaviours, or historical events,” asserting, instead, the importance of “describ[ing] how race is constructed and contested by theatrical presentation” (6). Vigilant about not creating an “alternative canon” (6), she explains that she is “concerned with the collective nature of the practice and meaning of drama,” that is, “what ... work[s] reveal about the shared assumptions and understanding of race and ethnicity” (7). By focusing on the group impact of a range of playwrights, she also sees her study as “tak[ing] the pressure off any individual work to be the quintessential Asian American play in some multicultural syllabus” (7), something which David Henry Hwang—author of the Tony Award-winning *M. Butterfly*—has experienced. Some of the strategies she identifies include the political potential of theatrical realism when viewed in relation to the plays’ “positioning of imagined ‘ethnic’ spectators” (27), the construction of “masculine

identifications...within parodic and self-conscious contexts that allow more than one kind of viewer identification and spectatorial pleasure” (29), the disruptive nature of stereotypes (30), the “strategi[c] formulating of the past” in Asian American history plays (30), and the exploration of the ‘self’ of characters “in tension with forces that seek to reduce them to labouring bodies, statistics, or profit margins” (31). In her epilogue, Lee lists several areas that she had not been able to attend to and that would benefit from scholarly attention. One of these is a comparative study. As she elaborates, “the theoretical approaches and critical issues of [her] book and others help describe and interpret how dramatists of color have presented the performances of race and ethnicity. It would be most productive to extend some of the insights found in these studies to a comparison of how other ethnic and racial minorities, as well as Asian Americans, ‘stage’ themselves” (219). In line with this, this comparative study between Yellow Earth and fu-GEN also explores how British East Asian and Asian Canadian artists stage themselves in particular material and socio-cultural contexts.

Tackling some of the same issues and plays as the other two scholars, Karen Shimakawa offers a compelling theoretical framework for viewing the performativity of Asian Americanness. In her seminal work, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (2002), she draws on Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection to suggest that “Asian Americanness functions as *abject* in relation to Americanness” (3). Citing Kristeva’s definition, Shimakawa writes that *abjection* is “both a state and a process,” as well as “the means by which the subject/‘I’ [in this case, Americanness] is produced: by establishing perceptual and conceptual borders around the self and ‘jettison[ing]’ that which is deemed objectionable [in this case, Asian Americanness so that] the subject comes into (and

maintains) self-consciousness” (3). In her study, then, she characterizes Asian Americanness as a “constantly shifting relation to Americanness, a movement between visibility and invisibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation” as “enacted by and on Asian Americans” (3). Analyzing the theoretical possibilities of several texts in performance, she works through how Asian Americans have staged and shaped their subjectivities by engaging with and being constituted by the shifting “frontier” (3) of the process of abjection.

These three scholarly texts inform the way I have approached my studies on fu-GEN and YET in trying to analyse how their works engage with ethno-national identification, racial representation, and the idea of a shifting “frontier,” which, recalling Sara Ahmed’s surfaces, is created when groups make contact and emotions are rife. This thesis attends to the public narrative concerning how the two companies were formed, analyzes the plays’ main formal features and dramatic effects, and also assesses the companies’ broader expressions of national belonging and community formation.

1.3.2 Asian Canadian Cultural Space

In the Canadian context, three texts also stand out as important groundwork for the field, although they are by no means the only works that have contributed to scholarship in this area. In 2007 for example, sociologist Xiaoping Li published *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism*, a study on what she calls the “discourse or a ‘socio-cultural movement’ created and participated in by Asian Canadians who have attempted to affect the world through their cultural practices” (1). For her, the “living embodiment of Asian Canadian cultural activism comprises a community consisting of scholars, university

students, self-made or professionally trained artists, and community activists” (2). Using a primarily ethnographic method, she “located potential interviewees”—including filmmakers, dancers, and theatre artists—who are part of this community and gave them a vocal presence in her book through the publication of the full transcriptions of her interviews with a select number of research participants. The first part of her book traces, describes and analyzes the reasons and contexts for the emergence of what she sees as a grassroots-based activist movement that led to the development of cultural production by artists of the community. The second part of her work consists of twenty records of her conversations with her interviewees. Her book is important not only as a resource containing primary materials for future researchers, but also for its delineation of how Asian Canadian political consciousness emerged in Toronto and Vancouver in the early 1970s. There is also an account of how these “cultural activists,” as she perceives them, engaged with different identity labels, from the ethnic-specific “Chinese-Canadian,” to the pan-ethnic “Asian Canadian”; from hyphen to no hyphen, and so on.

Another text is Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel’s collection of essays, edited for Volume 14 of the series *Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English*. Entitled “*Ethnic, Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre* (2009), the “volume traces some of the critical histories of theatre in Canada that [have] represented...communities and collaborations [under those stipulated categories] since the late 1980s” (Knowles and Mündel “Introduction” viii). Not strictly in reference to “Asian Canadian” work, this is a compilation that includes earlier essays as well as more current research on theatre in Canada addressing the “negotiation of differences and identities among First Nations, between First Nations and settler/invasor cultures, between the two so-called ‘founding cultures,’ and among successive

waves of migrant and displaced populations” (vii). In terms of identity categories, this collection covers a wide range including black-Canadian, Italian-Canadian, Chinese-Trinidadian-Canadian, African-Nova-Scotian theatre, and First Nations theatre-makers. Recalling its predecessor, the “Theatre and Ethnicity” issue of *Canadian Theatre Review* edited by scholar Natalie Rewa in 1988, Knowles and Mündel acknowledge its significance but also point out how it is “of its time” in its framing of how theatre might “reflect” or “acknowledge” an off-stage reality. Noting the shift in the way theatre scholars now view performance, they observe how “we might be less inclined to consider what is *reflected* or *acknowledged* than what is produced through performance, whether that is understood to be new, negotiated, and hybrid diasporic subjectivities, racist stereotypes, or exotic orientalist fantasies” (vii). In this way, the editors share similar assumptions with Josephine Lee as mentioned earlier. Of particular importance also is their assertion that non-white, non-French, and non-Anglo cultural groups in Canada have historically been grouped together and positioned as “foreign” to a specific vision of the nation’s ideal constituent race. Knowles and Mündel argue that this perspective is manifested in the unfair “amateur status” applied to the work of groups institutionally recognized as “outside of the ‘charter’ cultures of French and English,” which have, in contrast, been recognized as “vibrant *cultures*” (viii). Consisting of nineteen articles, the collection covers the conceptual areas around border identities, translation, diaspora, nation, racial hybridity, storytelling, as well as intercultural and indigenous performance.

The third and most recent text is the award-winning edited collection entitled *Asian Canadian Theatre: New Essays in Canadian Theatre*, edited by Nina Lee Aquino and Ric

Knowles (2010). As the first volume of the new book series,⁸ *New Essays on Canadian Theatre* (NECT), this publication includes contributions from scholars⁹ and artists who attended GENesis: [the first] Asian-Canadian Theatre Conference held in Toronto in May 2010, sponsored by fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company and the University of Guelph. In fact, according to Knowles and Aquino in their Introduction, both the volume of essays and the conference were intended to inaugurate Asian Canadian theatre and performance studies as a scholarly field (vii). Importantly though, Knowles and Aquino assert that the term does not ‘delineat[e] ...any obvious or pre-existing entity in the world’ (vii). Instead, “it is constituted as an object in discourse by the very acts of founding theatre companies, holding conferences, and publishing books that adopt and map a certain body of work and a certain set of practices as their terrain, giving the field that name” (vii). Noting how the label “Asian Canadian” is a “relatively recent construct” when compared with the more ethnic specific “Chinese Canadian,” “Japanese Canadian,” “Korean Canadian,” and so on, Aquino and Knowles aver that “the performativity—that is, the at once performed and formative function—of Asian Canadian theatre and performance is currently crucial” since the recent identity label is “arguably still under construction” (viii). Similar in some sense to how Xiaoping Li has created a space for artistic voices in *Voices Rising*, this volume also contains short contributions from artists who were on artist panels during the conference.

⁸ Some sections in the paragraphs on this text have previously been published in “Taking Root, Routing Talk: Charting the Terrain of Asian Canadian Theatre,” my review of this book in *Canadian Theatre Review* 151.

⁹ Karen Shimakawa was a keynote speaker at the conference, which I also attended. While there I presented a paper entitled “Dramatizing Cuisine: The Ethnic Playwright’s Food Challenge in *Miss (Orient)ed*, *Mom, Dad, I’m Living with a White Girl*, and *Paper Dolls*.” The paper focused on the meanings of food and identity in three plays.

1.3.3 The British East Asian Context

In Britain, relatively little has been written on “British East Asian” theatre. As mentioned earlier, just as Knowles and Aquino have noted, this type of ethno-national theatre is “constituted as an object in discourse” (vii) and, for a long time, there were no concerted pan-ethnic coalitionist efforts to really imagine and address “British East Asian” cultural production. Indeed, the five founders of YET—David Tse, Tom Wu, Kwong Loke, Kumiko Mendl and Veronica Needa—were arguably the earliest ones to use it in their mandate in 1995. After stepping down as Artistic Director in 2008, David Tse became Creative Director of Chinatown Arts Space— a non-profit arts organisation—serving to “champion British East Asian (BEA) performing and visual artists, and address the significant gap in provision for this sector in the UK” (“About Us: Chinatown”). In this way, just as Knowles and Aquino state in the Canadian context, the concept of British East Asian identification is an ongoing discursive activity. While fu-GEN’s “Asian Canadian” label—also used to categorize a genre of poetry and literature—has strong roots in the 1970s during an era of cultural activism and identity politics, Yellow Earth’s “British East Asian” appellation has only recently been promulgated due to a casting controversy leading up to the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of the *Orphan of Zhao*.¹⁰

¹⁰ According to the Cast and Creatives listing for the production on the RSC’s website, Chris Lew Kum Hoi played the ghost of Dr Cheng Bo’s son and doubled as a puppeteer for the show’s Demon Mastiff puppet; Siu Hun Li was also a puppeteer and doubled as a Guard; and Susan Momoko Hingley played the Princess’ Maid. Aside from these actors, the company also cast Moroccan-born actor Youssef Kerkour as Captain of the Guard and Black British actor Joan Iyiola as the third puppeteer. The production featured a “Demon Mastiff” puppet that required three puppeteers, reminiscent of the Japanese Bunraku form. White actors were cast in all the other roles including the leads. The casting decision caused an uproar and several artists with East Asian heritage led the way in using social media to express their frustration, thereby gaining some visibility that put pressure on the RSC to give an official statement to defend its choices. From this incident, eleven artists went on to create “British East Asian Artists”—a group with a website and Facebook page that traces the unfolding of the controversy and which seeks to maintain an

In their 2012 production, often known as the “Chinese *Hamlet*,” the Royal Shakespeare Company cast only three East Asian actors out of a total of seventeen roles. This incident strongly echoes the casting dispute for a production of *The King and I* in New York in 1968. In her book, *A History of Asian American Theatre*, Esther Kim Lee describes a similar situation where “out of nine Asian parts in the musical, eight were cast with Caucasian actors” (30). This decision led to protests and picketing by Asian American actors who wanted to draw attention to this particular tradition of casting in which the acting body is complicated by questions of ethnicity and inclusion. Moreover, complex issues arise with regard to choice of repertoire. When YET performs Shakespeare, it is automatically assumed to be an intercultural production. When companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company “borrow” the *Orphan of Zhao*, however, they use their freedom of artistic licence, without the need to justify their choices. Following on from this catalytic event, three decades later, British theatre producer Cameron Mackintosh faced similar opposition for his decision to cast British white actors in yellowface makeup in his musical, *Miss Saigon*. Although Lea Salonga, a national of the Philippines was cast as the female lead, British actor Jonathan Pryce played the half-Vietnamese and half-French Engineer. As Lee elaborates in her book, when the show was transferred to Broadway in 1990, Mackintosh wanted to keep his original cast members, including Pryce (183). This decision caused major protests and debates; the Actors’ Equity Association refused a permit for Pryce to reprise the role in New York, and Mackintosh threatened to cancel the show. Whereas “Asian Canadian” has been used as a socio-cultural category to refer to visible minorities perceived in relation to Canada’s demography, population and policy of official Multiculturalism, “British East Asian” has not

ongoing vocal presence. The group also includes Amanda Rogers, an academic, and Broderick Chow, an artist-scholar.

been picked up as a socio-cultural label around which people might self-identify outside of the arts. Instead, terms such as “East Asians” and especially “British Chinese” and “UK Chinese” are more commonly used, thereby reflecting also the ethnic sub-hierarchies within East Asian minority groups in the United Kingdom. The relative currency of the above labels is evident on numerous Internet discussion sites, which sociologists David Parker and Miri Song have determined, “facilitate self-expression” and in so doing “have generated an unprecedented public discourse about British Chinese life” (589) otherwise absent in terms of “print and broadcast media” (588).

Accordingly, scholarship so far for homegrown East Asian theatre in Britain includes Lia Wen-Ching Liang’s doctoral thesis, “Assembling Differences: Towards a Deleuzian Approach to Intercultural Theatre” (2009), in which she parses two of YET’s work through the concept of deterritorialization, and her article, “Negotiating New Terrains: Yellow Earth Theatre’s *Lear’s Daughters* and *King Lear*” (2009), published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*. In the former, using the philosophical ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari such as “assemblage,” “becoming,” and “deterritorialisation,” Liang argues for a new way of reading intercultural theatre that veers away from arguments about a piece’s cultural authenticity. In framing plays as ephemeral, unique moments, she also suggests that theatre should not be seen as a socio-cultural mirror, but an expression in time and space. Using three case studies, including YET’s *Lear’s Daughters* and *Play to Win* (which I discuss in Chapter Two), Liang argues that the concept of “assemblage” is useful in that it “would encourage us to forgo concerns over origins and focus on the effects created by the coming-together of heterogeneous elements” (255). This is in contrast with criticisms based on the notion of “hybridity” which tend to focus on where elements originate. In the latter, she

analyzes two of YET's productions around Shakespeare's *King Lear*, discussing how the company has recontextualized the narrative through engagement with Britishness and Chineseness. Liang's suggestions for reading intercultural theatre through Deleuze and Guattari is instructive; however, in the context of this thesis, which is concerned with YET and fu-GEN's ethno-national self-identifications, hybridity remains a useful way of encapsulating the artists' impulses to look back at origins even as they look forward to the future, creating and remoulding a cultural space where East Asian artists could thrive.

Despite the fact that the term "British East Asian" technically covers people from Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, Vietnam and their diasporas ("About Us: Chinatown"), any panethnic coalitionist grouping is bound to experience external as well as internal oppositions. This can be seen in Esther Kim Lee's description of conflict within the first Asian American theatre company in the United States—the East West Players in Los Angeles. Known for its groundbreaking work to forward the cause of Asian American theatre, the company nonetheless faced challenges as it expanded, with its Artistic Director, Mako, being accused of nepotism for casting his own family members and turning the company into a "Japanese American" theatre company rather than a pan-Asian one, based on the company's production output (Lee 52). Writing on this issue in the Asian American context, Yen Le Espiritu has noted,

Even among those who were involved in the Asian American movement, divisions arose from conflicting sets of interests as sub-groups decided what and whose interests would be addressed. Often times, conflicts over material interests took on ethnic

coloration, with participants from smaller subgroups charging that 'Asian American' primarily meant Chinese and Japanese American, the two largest and most acculturated Asian American groups at the time. (Espiritu 51)

This factor also seems to crop up in YET's work, which, though it has included characters or dramas with Filipino or Vietnamese provenance, has tended to be dominated by Chinese voices, even Chinese actors. Amongst the five founders of YET, only Kumiko Mendl is half-Japanese while the rest have some form of Chinese heritage. Indeed, as Parker and Song have observed, British Chinese is the socio-cultural identity label of choice and can be seen in various spaces such as on the website "Visible Chinese," in the recent symposium "China in Britain" (2011-2012) convened by Anne Witchard at the University of Westminster, and the conference "Contesting 'British Chinese' Culture: Forms, Histories, Identities" (2011) at the University of Reading. In her 2003 study of British-Chinese identity as it emerges through the works of six contemporary artists, Diana Yeh argues that "there is no single or definitive 'British-Chinese' identity. Instead, even amongst her six research subjects, there is a "diversity of subjective positions and cultural identities, differing not only in terms of gender and sexuality but in stages towards the resolution of a conflicting identity" (83).

This conflicting identity, between "British" and "Chinese," also pervades my own research on British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, where an ethnic category and a national one are put into play together, resulting in passionate articulations of belonging, discrimination, and victimhood. In these plays, ethnic and national identifications are blurred. Indeed, in the case of British-Chinese identity, Yeh asserts that the qualities of British and Chinese "rest uneasily side by side—there is no fusion, only a duality, a conflict

or an outright refusal to play the game” (83). According to her, “for those who have spent most or all of their lives in Britain, ‘British-Chinese’ consciousness has less to do with the actual ‘homeland’ than the constructions of ‘Chineseness’ circulating in the Western social imaginary. Engagement with the ‘Chinese’ side of the story is severely limited, thus shifting the onus onto the ‘contestation over what it means to be British’” (83). In examining this ethno-national term, Yeh also raises several questions that are pertinent to my investigation:

Does [the term ‘British-Chinese’ when used by artists] refer to a specific identity or a distinctly ‘British-Chinese’ art? Does the hyphenation entail a synthesised hybridity or merely the meeting of two cultures? Or is the term better understood as a category organising a set of common political concerns, or simply as a label designating artists of Chinese descent practising in Britain? (65)

As she also argues, there are multiple subjectivities. The artists she has studied position themselves in different ways, and so do Asian Canadian and British East Asian artists such as the founding members of fu-GEN and YET. I will elaborate on some of these differences in the next chapter. It is important to note the truism, however, that ‘British-Chinese’ consciousness has only emerged in the last few years [when Yeh was writing] with the coming of age of the second generation.¹¹ Like Asian Canadian theatre, then, British

¹¹ Generally, the first generation refers to new immigrants to a country with the intention of settling there. The second generation refers, accordingly, to children of the first generation, born in the new adopted country of residence. The 1.5-generation describes children of the first generation who were born in the original “homeland” and then grow up acculturated in the new country of residence.

Chinese cultural production and British East Asian theatre are “arguably still under construction” (Knowles and Aquino viii).

1.3.4 Hybridity

In the set of questions I quoted from Diana Yeh’s study above, she mentioned “hybridity” in relation to the multiple possible meanings associated with the term “British-Chinese”. Writing in the Australian context, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo also refer to an “Asian Australian hybrid praxis”. In their book *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia* (2007), Gilbert and Lo observe that “the term Asian Australian...foregrounds the suppressed cultural and biological miscegenation that is increasingly demanding recognition as part of the reconfiguring of the national imaginary” (169). In a sense, much of the anxiety around identity and belonging under panethnic coalitionist terms in the Asian Canadian and British East Asian contexts is tied to the (re)valuing of cultural mixing and hybridizing within the rhetoric of an imagined shared nation. Although they acknowledge that “the term ‘Asian Australian’ is arguably problematic,” given that it is a “portmanteau category that could be seen as homogenizing and essentializing” (169), Gilbert and Lo also “maintain that it has political currency within the specific history of postcolonial Australia” (169). According to them, “given that Asians were for many decades typecast in the (white) Australian imaginary as threats to the nation’s sovereignty and racial purity, it is a strategic move to call attention to the commingling of the two apparently antinomic terms and thereby underscore the long history of cross-cultural and cross-racial relations in the region” (169). They suggest, therefore, that “the emergence of

Asian Australian as a category of identification ... marks a shift away from a more established discourse of migration which designates 'Asians' as absolute Others" (170).

To parse this development of Asian Australian performance, Gilbert and Lo employ the concept of hybridity in relation to cosmopolitanism. They differentiate broadly between "happy hybridity"—"a noxious form...found in naïve conceptions of cosmopolitanism, where the term is emptied of its particular histories and politics to invoke instead a model of unbounded culture" with "little sense of tension, conflict or contradiction in cross-cultural encounters"—and "intentional hybridity," a term used by Mikhail Bakhtin in linguistic terms (169). The former, which they note is comparable to what Bakhtin calls "organic hybridity," "contains neither a sense of self-reflexivity nor a sensitivity to the tensions and contradictions of history" (169). Their conception brings to mind some of the criticisms levelled at directors such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Ong Keng Sen, whose respective productions of *The Mahabharata*, *Tambours sur la digue* and *Lear* could be regarded as having appropriated East Asian performance forms such as Kabuki, Bunraku, Kathakali and so on, purely for aesthetic purposes, thereby losing their specific cultural significances. "Transposing [Bakhtin's] linguistic model to culture and society," they also argue that the latter form involves "creat[ing] an ironic double-consciousness, a collision between different points of view, which creates opportunity for political intervention (Werbner 5, qtd. in Gilbert and Lo 169). Thus, drawing from Bakhtin's theory, Gilbert and Lo proffer "a useful dialectical model for understanding cultural interaction: 'an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity' (Young 22, qtd. in Gilbert and Lo 169). Borrowing from their model, in this thesis I will suggest that fu-GEN and YET's works offer instances of both

organic and intentional hybridity. Whether effected within a single character's life or within a larger family or social dynamic, the companies' plays bring to the fore organic hybridity in the form of East Asian as well as Western popular cultural references, while also highlighting intentional hybridity, especially in pressing matters to do with identification and construction of the self in a world where one is not welcomed.

As expressed in the title of this thesis, there are conceptual links between the companies' affiliations with ethno-national identification. Both are engaged in "performatively bring[ing] 'Asian Canadian' [and British East Asian] into *being* as ... categor[ies]" (Knowles "Between Home" 77).

1.4 Issues and Frameworks: "Ethnic" Cultural Work

As can be gleaned from the array of existing research, studies of "ethno-national" theatre tend to take a nationally-centred focus while also following multi-nominal and multi-conceptual trajectories. In this next section, I discuss some of the frameworks scholars have used, as well as delineate issues and assumptions relevant to this thesis. This is, however, not a comprehensive coverage, but a highlight of the most common analytical and contextual frames.

From their very title, Knowles and Mündel already refer to three categories: "ethnic," "multicultural," and "intercultural". Their volume of essays usefully reflects some of the key conceptual frameworks that undergird the scholarship on East Asian ethno-nationally focused theatre, whether Asian American, Asian Canadian or Asian Australian. Regarding "ethnic" theatre and its social corollary—ethnicities and ethnic groups—Knowles and

Mündel highlight the inherent “colouration” that accompanies this label. As opposed to the “‘charter cultures’ of French and English...privileged in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms as institutionally recognized and vibrant *cultures*,” ethnic theatre tended to be regarded as “static,” “folkloric,” even “amateur” (viii). Indeed, as Rita Shelton Deverell—whose 1986 article opens the volume—observes, “many of us make the assumption that performance by whites is the norm” (1). Based on this viewpoint, whiteness is not considered “ethnic” by any means. Writing on this issue, postcolonialism and multiculturalism scholar Sneja Gunew also reminds us, “‘ethnicity’ as a defining category was initially employed as a differential term to avoid ‘race’ and its implications of a discredited ‘scientific’ racism” (16). As she explains,

In Canada, phrases such as ‘visible minorities’ were developed to categorize non-European immigrants who formed part of mass diasporas and neatly encapsulated as well the indigenous groups and those descendants of African slaves who had been an uneasily acknowledged part of the ‘nation’ for many centuries. (16)

1.4.1 Visibility and Stereotyping

This idea of “visibility” is a contentious one and carries different implications for the parties involved. On one hand, “visibility” seems like a viable and beneficial goal for ethnic minority theatre-makers, Asian Canadian and British East Asian included, who desire—as Daniel York and Nina Aquino have expressed—to be recognized and acknowledged.

Returning to Shimakawa's observation at the start, East Asian artists in Western nation states have indeed been fighting for visible representation, arguably in the two senses of the word famously delineated by postcolonial and feminist critic Gayatri Spivak. As she elaborates to Sarah Harasym in the interview transcript, "Practical Politics of the Open End," published in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (1990), the English word "representation" can be thought of in two ways in German. On one hand, *Vertretung* means "stepping in someone's place" (108) or "to tread in someone's shoes, represents that way" (108). As she explains, "[y]our congressional person, if you are talking about the United States, actually puts on your shoes when he or she represents you" (108). In this way, *Vertretung* implies "political representation" (108). On the other hand, *Darstellung* "is to place, so 'placing there'". Whereas *Vertretung* is representing by "proxy", *Darstellung* is more akin to representing by "portrait" (108). This latter form of representation is therefore more about the body and the visual depiction of someone. Crucially though, for Spivak, the two concepts are linked. For example, there cannot be political representation without the identification or delineation of the body or visual to be politically represented. In their "goal ... to put ... [Asian American] stories on stage, to set the record straight about the history and lived experience of Asians *in America*" (Shimakawa "Asians in American" 285), theatre-makers have been representing by *Darstellung*, that is, providing a "portrait" of themselves and their defined constituencies (Spivak "Practical Politics" 108). Further, in trying to "combat racist casting practices that barred Asian American performers from the roles dominating the mainstream stages" (Shimakawa "Asians in American" 285), the artists have also been fighting for political representation, or *Vertretung*. In this case however, they are "treading" not only in other performers' shoes, but also in their own. Just as Shimakawa has

observed the tension between these two “agendas” in emerging theatre companies, Spivak has also noted the “shifting play between the two kinds of representation” (Spivak “Practical Politics” 110). Both kinds of representation are complicit, and feed into each other.

On the other hand, visibility has its own insidious problems. As Peggy Phelan has argued in her landmark work, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), “there is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are some serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal” (6). She asserts,

While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly under-represented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities. (7)

Elaborating, she explains that “visibility is a trap; ...it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, [and] the colonialist/imperialist appetite for possession” (6). Indeed, these have all had historical precedents in terms of the portrayal and propaganda of East Asians. Culturally, stereotypes of Asians abound. Misha Berson, editor of the first anthology of Asian American plays, *Between Worlds* (1990), writes, “for many years, Asiatic people were in the ironic position of being rarely heard from but often seen. The dutiful houseboy and the inscrutable detective, the treacherous Dragon Lady and the submissive China Doll, the all-knowing mystic sage and the bloodthirsty ‘Chink’ and ‘Jap’ charging into battle—these ethnic stereotypes paraded through dozens of American plays, movies, cartoons and television series over the past century” (x). James S. Moy, in his book *Marginal Sights:*

Staging the Chinese in America (1994), critiques these representations further as a practice deeply rooted in a European tradition arising from an “Anglo desire to disfigure Asians” (Wang 150). As Moy argues, in figuring people of “marginal or foreign racial groups” as “othered—that is, not only as different from people in the dominant culture but also as less than completely human or civilized” (1)—dramatists in the western tradition were able to use their objects’ “lack [of essential human qualities]” to “develo[p] ...dramatic conflict” (1). For him, playwrights and audiences had a fascination with racial difference, which, “though sometimes benign, has depended upon a process of fetishization” (1), and also resulted in what he has termed a serial and a voyeuristic gaze (8).

In the Canadian context, Nina Aquino has, in her editorial introduction to her two-volume anthology of Asian Canadian plays, *Love + Relationships* (2009), observed with a twinge of humour that “Asians are known to be a lot of things...mathematicians, the CEOs of corporations ... convenience-store owners...typical nerds...doctors and engineers” (vii). In addition, they are also “submissive, quiet, well-behaved (if bad drivers), intelligent...really good with computers and the violin or the piano. [They] eat rice and really, really hate disappointing [their] parents” (Aquino vii). Writing in 2011 about the Chinese in Britain from 1800 to the present, Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez turn up a no less extensive list. They claim, “the fashionable British view on the Chinese has, over the last 300 years, rung many changes on the bells marked vice to virtue, including (in roughly chronological order): philosopher, tyrant, Arcadian phalansterist, yellow peril, evil genius, opium-victim, drug-peddler, noble patriot, rabble-rouser, wartime ally, Red threat, frugal peasant, blue ant, seaman, landsman, washerman, laundry-lord, pauper-cook, get-rich-quick caterer, inscrutable outsider, benighted illiterate, academic whiz kid, likely member of

the professions and salariat, and (most recently) illegal immigrant and exploited cockle-picker" (21). They argue that "some of the images stem from racist imagining" while "others reflect real transformations over time" (21). However, "not all the stereotypes rolled out over the years have been laid to rest" (21). Instead, "old prejudices are held in reserve, to be dusted off and restored to currency as required" (21). Their view parallels some of Moy's assertions although the latter appears to be even more pessimistic about representation on the whole. For Moy, "a true representation of Asian Americans is almost certain to fail because it does not meet the demand of the Anglo-Americans; and a successful self-representation is bound to be sabotaged by stereotypes" (qtd. in Wang 151). Beyond the *visible* range of historical and contemporary narrative stereotypes enumerated above, there are even more insidious stereotypes affecting Asians wanting to embark on a theatre career, especially as actors. According to Karen Shimakawa, "Asian American performers never walk onto an empty stage...that space is always already densely populated with phantasms of orientalism through and against which an Asian American performer must struggle to be seen" (17). Indeed, fu-GEN and YET are working within a fraught representational context. Further, while the term "oriental" has been repudiated in Canada and the United States, arguably due to Edward Said's monumental work on Orientalism, this label is still freely in use in Britain.¹²

¹² The University of London has a department called The School of Oriental and African Studies. Also, in everyday conversation with several English acquaintances and Taiwanese friends living in London, I have heard the word "Oriental" used to refer to East Asians, with no obvious malice or ill intent. My exposure in North America and Canada to the negative connotations associated with the term, however, causes me great discomfort when I hear it used so freely in the British context.

1.4.2 Issues and Frameworks: Multiculturalism

As mentioned earlier, Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel also refer to “Multicultural Theatre” in their work. Stemming from “immigration and multicultural policies and practices [prior to the late 1980s],” Knowles and Mündel argue that “part of the purpose of official multiculturalism was to take over where restrictive immigration policies left off, when racist restrictions against immigrants of colour were lifted in order to allow for the importation of cheap labour during the economic boom in the 1960s” (viii). In her book *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms* (2004), Sneja Gunew notes how “multiculturalism is often perceived as a coded way to indicate racialized differences” (16). Specifically, for her, “multiculturalism has been developed as a concept by nations and other aspirants to geopolitical cohesiveness who are trying to represent themselves as transcendently homogeneous in spite of their heterogeneity” (16). At the same time, she astutely distinguishes the difference between “state multiculturalism” which “deal[s] with the management of diversity, and the critical multiculturalism used by minorities as leverage to argue for participation, grounded in their differences in the public sphere” (16). Indeed, “minorities use a variety of strategies to overcome the assimilationist presumptions of most state multiculturalisms” (17).

In studies on Asian Canadian theatre, multiculturalism tends to be criticized in terms of its function as a state policy, such as in Ric Knowles’ article, “Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present: The Case of Toronto” (2008). Knowles reminds us that “chief among the policy’s problems are its focus on ‘preserving’ immigrants’ ‘cultural heritage’, its focus on ‘tolerance’ as a marker of Canadian national identity—which posits a

Canadian ‘us’ who generously tolerate an othered, ethnic ‘them’—and its explicit exclusion of First Nations” (167). Additionally, he also notes that “the policy problematically constructs memory in essentialist, static, and nostalgic terms in relation to dehistoricized ethnic ‘homelands,’ atomizing communities of memory into separate ‘ethnic’ enclaves” (167). In *Asian Canadian Theatre*, the volume of essays edited by Knowles and Aquino, several scholars also refer to multiculturalism in terms of an issue that often appears in tandem: the “desire for recognition by ethnic subjects and their subsequent misrecognition by others” (Kim 186). This is often linked to Charles Taylor, who posited that

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence,
often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group
of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people
or society around them mirror back a confining or demeaning
or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or
misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression,
imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (98)

However, in her article, “Performing Asian Canadian Intimacy: Theatre Replacement’s *Bioboxes* and Awkward Multiculturalisms” (183), Christine Kim recontextualizes the traditionally recognised public sphere of multicultural policy to investigate the impact of private space and mundane everyday activities on the understanding of Asian Canadian subjectivities. Facilitated by the production of *Bioboxes*, a show featuring one-to-one interactions between performer and audience in a small cubicle where both persons’ knees could almost touch while they sit face to face, Kim argues that the show “pushes for a

different orientation to bodies in order to make possible a public capable of both intimacy and social change, of speaking one-on-one while being cognizant of the larger structures that shape our interactions, and of responding to the affective and political registers of the everyday” (194). Kim’s analysis is a useful counterpoint to some of fu-GEN and YET’s works, and recalls once again, Sara Ahmed’s concepts of impressions, surfaces, and emotions.

1.4.3 Issues and Frameworks: Interculturalism

The third category Knowles and Mündel mention is interculturalism. In theatre and performance scholarship, intercultural work is usually linked to productions such as Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata*, as well as works by French director Ariane Mnouchkine and Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen. These works have been analyzed using various models of intercultural theatre including Patrice Pavis’ hourglass which provides different filters through which a source culture’s work is processed for a target culture. Criticisms of the directors listed above often refer to the power differentials in their work due to their purported ethno-racial or gender dominance. As such, these directors could be seen as exploitative, appropriating certain Asian performing arts forms for their own artistic ends. This model of intercultural theatre is not as clear-cut when it comes to homegrown East Asian theatre because the subjects here have variedly cultivated relationships with the East Asian homeland and their attendant performing arts forms. Writing on the developmental process of *Jade in the Coal*—a play inspired by early Chinese Canadian experience through the history of Chinese miners who worked in Cumberland, British Columbia—Siyuan Liu

complicates the power-laden critique of intercultural theatre, describing how artists could use Asian performance forms critically for a meaningful dramaturgy. In studying several works in Toronto, Knowles also updates the intercultural framework, reframing it as performing “intercultural memory” (180). Some of fu-GEN’s and YET’s works show complex relationships between Asian bodies, physicality, and ethno-national identification. In the next chapter, for example, I discuss Yellow Earth’s use of martial arts as a major performance aesthetic for one of their earliest theatre productions. Set in contemporary times and aimed at younger audiences, the production draws on Chinese philosophical ideas of inner character development, filtered through the physical demands of martial arts training. The play’s focus on both an individual’s inner qualities and outer manifestations of behaviour brings to mind the complexities of surfaces, especially that of skin—a surface that acts as a physiological protective barrier, but also projects ethnic identity and vulnerability.

Lastly, due to the links between migration patterns and globalization, discourses on diaspora and transnationalism are also key areas that scholars have explored in ethno-national work. In their introduction to *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas* (2005), editors Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee observe the importance of both concepts. As they explain,

In the case of Asians in the Americas, a discourse of diaspora that is deeply grounded in the notion of banishment, exile, and return to a real or imagined homeland must be juxtaposed with transnational practices in everyday life. The concept of transnationalism describes the practice among immigrants of establishing and maintaining kinship, economic, cultural, and political networks

across national boundaries, and the creation of multiple sites of 'home'. (9)

This is an important distinction to which I will also return when describing how fu-GEN and YET have defined their boundaries around Asian Canadian and British East Asian theatre respectively. It is also important to note at this point that I am writing from the perspective of a transnational migrant who is currently living in Britain, while also having temporarily made Canada and Singapore "home". This experience has influenced my choice of a comparative study across national borders. I also identify myself ethnically as a Chinese person born in Hong Kong before the British dependent territory was handed back to China in 1997, although I grew up and was educated in Singapore, which was itself once a British colony. Having participated in official immigration procedures that granted me approval to live, study or work in the three countries listed above, I view national identity as Jen Harvie has noted: a set of activities and rituals I participate in with others, but at the same time, as one complicated by legalistic factors such as obtaining official documentation and proofs of identity.¹³ This is also complicated by political ideology and rhetoric over the preservation of national borders. In this way, I write as an insider when analyzing certain Chinese traditions and meanings, but as an outsider especially around Asian Canadian or British East Asian issues as experienced by 1.5- or second-generation artists. My identity position has, however, furnished me with a different way of viewing Asian Canadian theatre and British East Asian theatre, especially in relation to scholars who write from the position and perspective of a Canadian or British national. Also, I am writing as a student trained in theatre studies, broadly referencing ethno-racial conceptual frameworks as opposed to a cultural studies

¹³ Harvie, Jen. *Staging the UK*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005.

specialist on race, ethnicity, diaspora and transnationalism. My research questions therefore focus on how these concepts have been taken up and cited by fu-GEN and YET's respective artists, particularly with reference to the key productions I have selected for comparative analysis.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

In Chapter Two, "Visions and Voices: The Founding of Yellow Earth Theatre and fu-GEN Theatre," I recount the public narratives concerning how fu-GEN and YET came into being as companies and how their respective socio-cultural contexts have impacted their formation. Based on publicly available materials such as production programs, company mandate materials, company websites, critical press, public blogs, and the companies' own media-oriented documents, I compare "British East Asian" and "Asian Canadian" theatre as imagined, constructed, and articulated publicly by key members of YET and fu-GEN. One main difference, as I will highlight, is how fu-GEN, under Aquino's leadership, has a more "domestic" focus, emphasizing characters who tend to have lived most, if not the whole of their lives in Canada, and who therefore experience the stress of various colliding identities. Indeed, much of the dramatic conflict in fu-GEN's works arises from a void in many characters' lives, where they suffer for not knowing how to be "East Asian" even as they struggle to belong to the Canadian national fabric. Additionally, many of their plays tend to refer specifically to or be set within the city of Toronto, where the company is based. Conversely, YET can be said to have a more diasporic and transnationalist focus. Whereas fu-GEN's characters struggle with knowing how to be or behave as East Asian, the

characters in YET's plays have strong ties to East Asian homelands whether as new migrants, first generation immigrants, or through dual ties to Britain and Asia. As such, many of their early works tend to include a range of subject positions and are not set only in Britain, but also in recognizable "homeland" places such as China, Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam and so on. Both companies have also recently been involved—either as organizer or participant—in events that include major discussions around "Asian Canadian" or "British East Asian" theatre development. The chapter shows that both identifications and discourses are still sources of open discussion at each company.

The next three chapters are comparative analyses of each company's formative works. In Chapter Three, "Reforming Bodies: *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys*," I discuss a theme underlying the formation of these companies in the first place—that not only can people perform themselves into being, they can also self-reform, take on other identifications, create subjectivity through repeated actions and behaviour. Amongst the earliest plays in each company's repertoire, premiering in 2000 and 2004 respectively, both works centre on male characters finding themselves in particular socio-cultural circumstances and trying to break away in order to attain what they perceive to be better prospects. Both plays proffer ways that the characters could reform themselves, thereby succeeding in the game of life. However, things are not that simple. Socio-cultural and material factors stand in the way and lead to different consequences for the characters. These two plays are almost metaphors for YET and fu-GEN's own methods of being and becoming. *Banana Boys* by Leon Aureus is based on writer Terry Woo's novel while *Play to Win* is a new work by David Tse.

Whereas Chapter Three looks at the concept of reforming bodies, ostensibly for the better, Chapter Four, “Haunted Bodies: Spectral Agents in *58* and *lady in the red dress*,” looks at how the companies have approached the staging of contemporary traumatic events that are meaningful to each imagined community. *lady in the red dress* (2009), written by David Yee, Artistic Director of fu-GEN since Nina Aquino stepped down in the same year, articulates the various arguments around the need for Canada to redress officially the discriminatory measures meted out to Chinese labourers who had come to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway in the late 19th century. YET’s *58* on the other hand, written by Philippe Cherbonnier and premiering in 2004, draws from the tragedy that befell fifty-eight Chinese refugees (widely reported in the news as illegal immigrants) who were found suffocated in the back of a lorry at the Port of Dover in 2000. This chapter describes the supernatural devices both playwrights use and how the productions’ polyvocality and dialogical characteristics provide audiences with a palette from which to view the immigrant victims’ humanity. This is in contrast to the various pejorative ways that Chinese immigrants have historically, and even in current times, been represented in national media.

Moving away from dramas centred around a plot, Chapter Five, “Demonstrating Bodies: Occupying Audiences in *Face* and *Brown Balls*,” looks at how each company has engaged audiences in ways that call upon deeper reflections of the body – both their own and the performers’. Written by Byron Abalos, *Brown Balls* (2011) was initially inspired by a scene from *Banana Boys*. Taking on the form of a variety show combined with a parody of academic presentations, the play moves from the objective to the subjective, from communal trauma to individual, personal stories that further explore some of the themes in Aureus’ earlier play, primarily around love and sex when ethnicity comes into the equation. *FACE*,

written and performed by Veronica Needa, was originally commissioned in 1998 by the Hong Kong Arts Festival. YET presented this show in their 2002 season and then toured it again in 2004 and 2005. Primarily a solo, autobiographical performance, Needa's work explores her own identity as a British Hong Kong Eurasian who "passes" for white, and traces her journey in trying to negotiate and come to terms with the two sides of her cultural heritage. Although there are moments of direct audience address in each of the respective companies' other shows, this element is heightened in *Brown Balls* and *FACE* due to their explicit "dialoguing" with and interpellation of the audience. These strategies result in live dramaturgical moments when the audience is moved to consider how specific bodies, including their own, have different socially regarded values.

In the Conclusion, Chapter Six, I will return to the questions I asked at the beginning and describe the cultural shorthand discernible in comparing these companies' works. I will argue that reading these companies' mandates, practices and plays comparatively helps to discern some common kinds of cultural shorthand akin to those Gotanda notes in relation to Asian American theatre above. Common features among the plays produced in each site suggest some key areas of overlap while their distinguishing features point to the particular complexities informing their respective locations.

Chapter Two

Visions and Voices: The Founding of Yellow Earth Theatre and fu-GEN Theatre

We are the future generation of artists...[n]ever mind Asian.

(Richard Lee, qtd. in Yu “A production for”)

I’m tired of the immigrant, F.O.B (fresh off the boat), whiny, weepy, where-do-I-belong stories...[w]e want a funky, active approach to describe our experience. We want to reflect us.

(Nina Aquino, qtd. in Yu “A production for”)

One of the very important things of Yellow Earth from the beginning was to never call it [sic] British-Chinese company, it was always to call it [sic] British east-Asian company and the reason for that is because as an actor, free-lance actor, I am asked to play Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malaysian, Thai, Filipino, anywhere east of India, west of the Americas. (qtd. in Zhao “Interview with Mr. David Tse” 3)

Since 1995 and 2002, London’s Yellow Earth Theatre (YET) and Toronto’s fu-GEN Theatre have been producing work under the identity labels of “British East Asian theatre” and “Asian Canadian theatre” respectively. While a similar ethno-national structure underpins these categorizations, the respective circumstances and impulses for theatre that led to these companies’ formations differ widely. In addition the company’s administrative

structure, financial considerations, artistic direction and political stances also add to the complexity of working in the theatre industry. Importantly, it goes beyond the idea of simply wanting to be on stage as an actor. As Esther Kim Lee observes in the context of the first four Asian American theatre companies, the founders and their boards “had to decide how they wanted to be identified in contrast to other companies competing for the same funding and audiences” (128). Indeed, in the case of the East West Players mentioned earlier, the majority of its productions during the 1980s “reflected the experiences of Japanese Americans, who formed the most reliable subscription base” (128). As she elaborates, “even within this narrow identification, the East West Players had to decide how inclusive or exclusive it needed to be” (128). For example, as she asks, “should it select plays that discuss interracial marriage, for example? What constitutes the category ‘Asian American plays’ or ‘Japanese American plays’?” For her, “such questions were burdened with interpersonal politics that had more influence on season selection than the formal mission statements that embellished grant proposals” (128). This latter observation is instructive as it reminds us that the work that emerges in these contexts is complicated by artistic choices, personal preferences and other unidentifiable issues that do not necessarily support or align clearly with mandates and mission statements. This chapter traces the backgrounds of the companies, outlines their mandates and discusses some of the key differences between their approaches to identity-centred theatre-making.

2.1 Yellow Earth and fu-GEN: Two Companies Born in Difference

In 1989, thousands of young Chinese pro-democracy demonstrators gathered in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China's capital city. This event, which eventually led to what is now known as the Tiananmen Square Massacre, deeply affected David Tse, who had moved from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom with his family in 1970 as a child of six. Describing how he came to be involved with Yellow Earth Theatre, Tse recounted how these "political events going on in East Asia" impelled him to "wan[t] some kind of artistic response to support...our peers—our fellow East Asians who sometimes, perhaps, don't have the same freedoms that we enjoy in the West" ("David Tse: Yellow"). Accordingly in 1990, Tse "organized a rehearsed reading" during which the idea of "Yellow Earth was mentioned" ("David Tse: Yellow"). When the Dalai Lama visited the United Kingdom in 1993, Tse felt again that "the East Asian sector ought to have some kind of voice about [the ongoing situation in Tibet]" ("David Tse: Yellow," "Eclipse Report" 61). Although many actors who have worked with Tse were very keen for a platform to do such work, being unproven and untried both personally and as a company meant that it was difficult for Tse to get funding.

The dream to found Yellow Earth Theatre got a kick-start when Vicky Ireland—who, in 1988, had been appointed as the second Artistic Director of London's eminent children's theatre, Polka Theatre—commissioned Tse to adapt *The Magic Paintbrush*, a Chinese folktale. According to Tse, "the brief was to produce a piece of theatre which drew on the best physical traditions of Beijing Opera" ("Eclipse Report" 61). A workshopping process led to a cast of five including, besides Tse himself, the actors Kwong Loke, Kumiko Mendl, Veronica Needa and Tom Wu. The show did well and as a result, Tse "got [his] very first

grant from London Borough Grants Unit or Scheme” (“David Tse: Yellow”). These five performers, drawn together to create a show with strong Chinese elements, became the founding members of Yellow Earth Theatre in 1995 with Tse as the company’s Artistic Director.

In contrast to the events external to Britain that inspired Tse and others to form YET, fu-GEN drew from the local experiences of Toronto artists pursuing a place in the national cultural landscape. As its website states, “founded in January 2002, fu-GEN is a dynamic group of artists determined to carve out a space in the Canadian cultural landscape for vibrant Asian Canadian voices” (“About us: Company”). The company’s credited founding members are “Leon Aureus, Nina Lee Aquino, Josephine Chim Bertrand, Susan Aceron with Lisa Kim, Charmaine Lau, Ping-Ya Lee, Richard Lee, Hiromi Okuyama, Siu Ta, Ian Wong, David Yee and Dale Yim” (“About us: Company”). Interviewed in 2003, a year after its emergence, Nina Lee Aquino, who had stepped into the role of Artistic Director after Leon Aureus, stated that the company was founded “as a response to the sense of displacement she and other Asian Canadian actors in Toronto were experiencing” (“A Production for”). As she has recounted to various sources, she first realized she had to do something when as a masters student at the University of Toronto wanting to write her thesis on Asian Canadian theatre, she found out that the university’s library “did not even have a category for the topic” (“A Production for”). Aquino conveyed that she “felt awful” about this revelation because it was as if she “didn’t exist” (“A Production for”). Armed with a passion, she proceeded to interview Asian Canadian theatre practitioners Jean Yoon, Terry Watada and M.J. Kang for a paper, concluding that “Asian Canadian artists needed a home, a place to flourish and develop their art and a place that would promote them” (“Between Home” 76).

Meeting like-minded people such as Leon Aureus,¹⁴ who “didn’t have the theatre background” but had “want[ed] to create an artist-based company of Asian Canadians,” the company was born (“Between Home”). Much like the work that first led to YET’s formation, fu-GEN also began with regular play readings, bringing together an increasing number of actors, before the company produced its first full, professional production in 2004, *Banana Boys*, written by Aureus. Although I will analyse the production more fully in Chapter 3, I would note here that the play focuses on the trials and tribulations of five “boys,” whose hybrid “Asian Canadian” identities frustrate their work, love and spiritual lives. It is therefore a fundamentally “Asian Canadian” story, rather than a purely Asian one. In this way, as mentioned in the previous chapter, fu-GEN’s works are more domestically inclined while YET remains open to diasporic and transnationalist influences.

Over the years, Yellow Earth’s mission statements and artistic leadership have evolved. During David Tse’s tenure as Artistic Director, press materials state:

The company produces work that explores universal themes
from an East Asian perspective, celebrating cultural diversity
through an integration of theatre skills from the East and the
West. The range of work covers both new writing and the
reinterpretation of classics, with an emphasis on exploring the
links between contemporary experience and multicultural
heritage. (“58 Programme” Inside back cover)

¹⁴ Leon Aureus wrote *Banana Boys*, adapted from a novel by Terry Woo, for fu-GEN Theatre’s first professional production. The play is published in *Love + Relationships*, edited by Nina Lee Aquino. On his bio page in Volume Two of the anthology, Aureus is credited as “the founding artistic director of The Gum San Theatre Company, which blossomed into the fu-GEN Theatre Company by 2002” (“About Leon Aureus” 199).

As Tse elaborates in an interview with *COVER* Magazine, recurring themes in YET's work "include injustice, violence and miscommunication between the generations, something...influenced by [his] own experience growing up Chinese in the UK" ("Heaven on Earth" 131). Asked if the company ever "touch[es] upon really controversial issues," Tse adds that they have explored "alternative sexuality, racism and bullying in the UK" ("Heaven on Earth" 131). Elsewhere, Tse also asserted that "the dialogue between the traditional and the contemporary is at the heart of Yellow Earth's work, both aesthetically and morally" ("Eclipse Report" 61). Indeed, speaking in 2001, he claimed that "most of [YET's] productions have focused on East Asian stories" and that "there is often a preoccupation with the roots of violence, the abuse of power, and the search for enlightenment" ("Eclipse Report" 61). For him, engaging with "universal themes" is of paramount importance. Further, as part of its outreach programme, YET runs educational workshops, residencies and community projects. It has also partnered with venues such as Soho Theatre and Young Vic Theatre.

In December 2008, Tse stepped down as Artistic Director after thirteen years in the role. Philippe Cherbonnier, Yellow Earth's literary associate, and Jonathan Man, a director with extensive experience, took up the leadership reins as co-Artistic Directors on January 2009. In August 2010, an announcement on YET's website stated that Cherbonnier and Man were leaving the company to pursue freelance careers. One of the first five founders, Kumiko Mendl was appointed as interim Creative Producer and in 2011 she became the company's latest Artistic Director, a role she still holds. As Tse has noted, "the members of Yellow Earth originate from Hong Kong, Japan and Malaysia and [they've] also worked with Vietnamese and Filipino actors" ("Eclipse Report" 61). Describing the company's definition

of “East Asia,” Tse states that it “is the area east of Pakistan and west of the Americas, all those people who fall into the generic term ‘yellow,’ in the same way that Black encompasses Afro-Caribbean, African and British” (“Eclipse Report” 61), thus revealing a politicized way of thinking about the company’s ethno-racial inclusivity.

Since the company’s formation, fu-GEN has also seen a change of leadership. Nina Lee Aquino stepped down as Artistic Director in 2009, and playwright and actor David Yee took over as Interim Artistic Director. In 2010, he officially took on the role of Artistic Director, building on the foundation that Aquino has established, leading it to its next phase of development. Having generated a close-knit community of artists who are cognizant of each other’s skills, Aquino’s departure did not spell the end of her involvement with the company. Indeed, she continues to direct many of the company’s plays.

According to the company’s website, fu-GEN defines itself as a “charitable theatre company dedicated to the development of professional Asian Canadian theatre artists through the production of new and established works” (“About Us”). Specifically, they have separate points under which they categorize a central mission and vision. Their mission is as follows:

To produce works of Asian North American playwrights, and
foster new works by emerging playwrights.

To explore and address issues of Asian North American’s [sic]
societal roles, responsibilities and identity in the past, present and
future through our artistic endeavours.

To build a stronger, truly multicultural Canadian community by breaking down
stereotypes through education and development of a strong cultural artistic base.

(“About Us”)

The company also delineates four further areas for focus, listed under the company's vision:

We serve the Asian Canadian theatre artist.

We are dedicated to exploring the underlying Asian Canadian story.

We believe in diversity of practice: using non-traditional space, time, methodology & philosophy.

We are evolving with our artists. ("About Us")

Echoing YET's mandate to focus on contemporary experiences, Leon Aureus describes how the company tackles "stories [that] are about ourselves as people living in Canada and our relationship with this community" ("A Production for"). Indeed, asserting its identification with younger generations, fu-GEN wants to move beyond the identity issues faced by earlier generations, especially first-generation immigrants. Although the company still "touch[es] on issues of identity," there is a strong sense of wanting to move beyond "stories based solely on race" ("A Production for"). In addition, the company's artists are aware of the implications of being labelled "ethnic" theatre, a designation that, as scholars Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel have pointed out, traditionally suggests an "amateur status" ("Introduction" viii). As Aquino has stated, "Why is there always the tag of 'Asian' play?...In the end, we're all Canadian theatre companies" ("A Production for"). Aureus has also declared, "We want people to come watch us because we're good and professional" ("A Production for").

Aquino's words above regarding the tag of "Asian" play foregrounds the main difference that I have already described between fu-GEN's and YET's approach to identity-centred theatre-making. Whereas to produce "ethnic" work is anathema to fu-GEN due to its

associations with amateur theatre in the Canadian context, East Asian perspectives and elements remain fundamental to YET's theatrical vocabulary. While fu-GEN's work performs and repeats the storied lives of Canadians who happen to be East Asian with tenuous ties to East Asian homelands, YET's repertoire draws on the instability of new roots, portraying characters who straddle British and East Asian identities with a slippery foothold in both. This slipperiness, however, might be in some ways an intentional strategy. As Tse has noted during an interview for an Oral History project by Ming-Ai (London) Institute,

I don't usually call myself British-Chinese because that implies that I owe something to my Chinese background and I don't. You know, first and foremost, I am British and I can choose which elements of my Britishness that I want to celebrate and promote and I can also choose which elements I want to criticise and the same with my Chinese background, you know, not everything about Chinese culture is wonderful...certain aspects are fantastic, much better than in the West but certain aspects are very oppressive. ("Interview with Mr. David Tse" 4)

In explaining how he could choose to promote and portray certain elements of Britishness or Chineseness, Tse seems to be referring to a particular aesthetic license as a theatre-maker, one who has the power to create his own surfaces, rather than be at the mercy of the collision of identities. At the same time, he reveals the illusory nature of that power, noting how artists are often forced to create and define themselves based on certain circumstances. For example, in the same interview, Tse tells interviewer Thomas Zhao, "I didn't intend to set

[sic] to become a Chinese artist I just wanted to be an artist but the country that I find myself in and also the lack of east-Asian visibility in the arts means that I am labelled as either a Chinese artist or an east-Asian artist” (“Interview with Mr. David Tse” 2). In this way, ethno-racial and national elements in YET’s works remain in tension, in the same way as in fu-GEN’s, even though the latter’s strategies tend toward a de-emphasis on ethno-racial markers.

2.2 Naming and Branding: Cultural Shorthand or Representational Shortchange?

In the previous chapter, I stated that one of my reasons for reading these two companies’ works together is to find out what kinds of cultural shorthand there might be. In playwright Philip Kan Gotanda’s words again, “working with an Asian American theater company is like working with family, where everybody has shorthand” (qtd, in Lee “The Second Wave”145). For him, Asian American artists share “a common vocabulary,” even a history. As many plays ever since the Aeschylean *Oresteia* have taught us, however, family relationships are often dysfunctional and fraught with problems. Indeed, “families” like YET and fu-GEN are made up of members from different East Asian backgrounds, with varied life experiences, temperaments, and thoughts about theatre-making. In this way, just as Yen Le Espiritu reminds us of the sub-groups that can cause conflict in coalitionist groupings, the idea of having cultural shorthand is ineluctably problematic. This is especially so in YET and fu-GEN’s cases, given the identity-centred nature of their work and mandates. To call themselves British East Asian and Asian Canadian companies, respectively, is to delimit the boundaries of membership for their imagined communities. As they shape the discourses

around their adopted identities, they also cross into the murky territory of “representation” with its attendant issues around inclusion and accuracy. Key factors in the companies’ public image such as naming, branding, and perceived cultural quality become “sticky”—in Sara Ahmed’s words—with meaning, when representational stakes are high.

Given both companies’ cultural missions to gain credibility and acknowledgement for British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, along with their need to compete for funding from already limited grant opportunities, the companies’ public images are especially closely scrutinized. As the title that passes on the lips of potential audiences, each company’s name is a vital aspect of its identity as a culture provider. According to fu-GEN’s general manager, Richard Lee, in 2003, the company’s name is short for “future generation,” which “represents the mentality of [their] group of young performers,” most of whom were then in their twenties and had come together under similar goals (“A Production for”). Reflecting its vision to evolve and to move beyond the need for “ethnic” identification one day, “future generation” suggests at once the continued processes of creating in the future and the collective community of a later time. Unlike the hopeful and relatively neutral-sounding “fu-GEN,” the appellation of “Yellow Earth,” on the other hand, is sticky with that colour’s traditional associations, namely, the historical designation of Chinese and Japanese people as a “Yellow Peril” in racist propaganda. Although David Tse has stated that the name first emerged because he was inspired when watching eminent Chinese director Chen Kaige’s film of the same name,¹⁵ this self-exoticizing naming choice, along with the company’s use

¹⁵ Released in 1984, the film tells the story of a Communist soldier who is sent to stay in a village to collect folk songs to be reformulated for nationalistic propaganda. The soldier forms a bond with a young girl who is being forced into marriage to pay off family debts. She envisions running away with the soldier to join the army and attempts to do so but drowns in the process of trying to escape. The film explores through visual metaphors the impact of politics on the people.

of “East Asian” influences for its public image, has led to oppositions to the company’s branding and approach by artists who also self-identify as British East Asian theatre-makers. Far from feeling united as a British East Asian theatre-making family, these artists are opposed to the company’s reliance on East Asian theatricality, imagery, and stereotyping, criticizing Yellow Earth for its particular way of “representing” British East Asian theatre. At the same time, the term “yellow earth” is meaningful in China because it refers to the loess—a specific soil sediment carried by strong winds—that is highly erodible and that gives the famous “Yellow River” its colour. While this meaning might not resonate so strongly in the West, it lends an extra layer to the company’s appellation—it is the persistent ground that creates a brightly coloured visibility for its artistic community.

As quoted in the epigrams at the beginning of this chapter, the artists who have formed fu-GEN and YET are on a mission to engage with representation. Aquino declares that they want to “reflect us” while Tse has elsewhere called for the need for “accurate representation”. As a highly visual and embodied form, numerous arguments have arisen around theatre’s ability to reflect, represent and produce. Indeed, Aquino and Tse’s respective calls for reflection and accuracy recall Spivak’s concept of representation as portrait, *Darstellung*, where there is a need for depiction, description, and a placing of bodies in the cultural landscape. This is complicated, however, by the fact that both YET and fu-GEN’s artistic imperatives are fundamentally political, in the sense that they aim to engage the public with the “East Asians” in their midst, who often occupy positions of hybridity and difference within the national fabric. The companies and artists therefore also represent by proxy, by *Vertretung*, where they tread in others’ shoes in terms of political representation through the arts. In terms of representational stakes, Yellow Earth and fu-GEN not only

shape the portraiture, the visual language and icons of their respective ethno-national theatre practices, they are also ineluctably interpreted as standing for, and treading in the shoes of members of their own imagined communities. Indeed, whereas fu-GEN is generally seen as a positive presence for Asian Canadian theatre with no major disagreements about its artistry emerging in public from its contemporaries or competing stakeholders, Yellow Earth has had to contend with opposition from theatre-making peers who have disagreed with how Tse has run the company. Daniel York, whom I cited in the introduction, has performed in some of YET's productions;¹⁶ yet, he has also been very critical of YET's image, approach, and management, going so far as to imply that its adherence to exotic stereotypes and lack of quality were to blame when the company lost its public funding in 2011. On 31 March 2011, YET announced on its website:

On the 30th March, Yellow Earth, Britain's only revenue funded East Asian theatre company received a 100% cut from the Arts Council. This devastating blow means that the company which has been in existence for 16 years faces an uncertain future and a real prospect of having to close.

("100% Arts Council Cut")

In response, Daniel York submitted an article to *Dimsum.co.uk*—an online forum specializing in British Chinese issues—which was published on 25th April 2011. He wrote:

¹⁶ York played Edgar and doubled as the Duke of Cornwall in YET's intercultural production of *King Lear* (2006).

The fact that we have lost the only remaining publicly subsidised theatre company creating work by and for people of East Asian descent is indeed a cause for protest. Yellow Earth, unfortunately though, is a difficult cause to fight. Founded by five friends and passed around between people who met its original artistic director's approval, the company has, more or less since its inception, operated in a strange and insular bubble of its own making. ("On Yellow Earth's")

The fallout from this article, played out over two months, was a vituperative online exchange between a defensive Tse and York, who, along with others on his side, expressed dissatisfaction at YET's contribution to shaping British East Asian theatre.¹⁷ Referring to the company's self-identification with the colour yellow, for example, York has observed how "their very name, with its connotations of skin colour, is problematic for [him]" ("Anonymous Letter to Equity" [online forum post by Daniel York]).¹⁸

Elaborating on other aspects of YET that he finds detrimental to the conception of British East Asian theatre, York also states that "the company's focus...on traditional eastern 'movement skills' was also curious in that it surely panders to rather than contradicts, stereotypical preconceptions of the kind of work East Asian people do" ("On Yellow

¹⁷ As noted in the introduction, blogs and online forums, while traditionally seen to be unreliable spaces of personalised commentary hidden behind masked personas, have, for many British Chinese people, served as important sites for the communal exchange of ideas.

¹⁸ In the comments section following the mentioned article, York again posted on 9 May 2011, under the title "Anonymous Letter to Equity" that "Equity has received an anonymous letter which complain[ed] that [his] original article ... shows 'contempt' for children's theatre [YET has created some shows intended for younger audiences]" along with other criticisms of YET's work. Over the months of May and July 2011, subsequent comments reveal different artistic camps, with York and Paul Courtenay Hyu on one side, and Tse on the other.

Earth's"). York contrasts YET's work with another company, Mulan Theatre—founded in 1989—"whose repertoire had consisted of hard hitting, controversial subject matter, such as a young gay Chinese man adrift in a landscape of racial isolation driven to murder, Japanese war survivors struggling to make sense of their past," and so on ("On Yellow Earth's"). Although the Arts Council of England (ACE) originally funded it, Mulan's funding was eventually withdrawn, and the company disbanded, while YET continued to receive funding. Pointing out that Mulan's work had "nary a dragon god or fortune cookie proverb in sight," York contends that "Yellow Earth were [sic] fundamentally mismanaged from the start" ("On Yellow Earth's"). He further suggests that YET had been complicit in perpetuating stereotypical images of East Asians in Britain, declaring that "the Arts Council were [sic] far happier funding a non [sic] challenging organisation who would tour twee exotica to obscure venues" ("On Yellow Earth's"). These oppositions reveal the complexities in creating work under specific identity labels and the complicated labour of "representation" in both meanings of the word. These issues are compounded also by the idea of ethnic minority theatre within a mainstream theatre industry, so much so that funding bodies could tick a box noting their inroads into encouraging diversity, even if this just means that they fill their quota of "ethnic minority subsidization" by funding one small group out of many. In response to York's criticisms on YET, Tse has explained that being the only company funded to create British East Asian theatre resulted in the company's being burdened with representing a whole community. As he writes:

There was a time when Mulan and YET existed. I supported this diversity of East Asian companies/voices. While some were unnecessarily undermining, I advocated for the bigger

picture. ACE [Arts Council of England] operates independently, and for whatever criteria, they stopped funding *Mulan*, a terrible loss to the East Asian sector. This placed a terrible burden on YET, and made it an easy target for some artists' frustrations.

(“David Tse—Unheard” 5)

In further defense of the company, Tse also writes:

It is ridiculous to expect one British East Asian (BEA) company to represent the entire sector, and the company never set out to do so. There is a whole plethora of Caucasian work out there: physical theatre, new writing, adaptations of classics, site-specific, interactive work. Do those AD's [sic] [Artistic Directors] have to answer to the personal demands of every Caucasian artist? A reality check is sorely needed. (“David Tse—Unheard” 5)

If we view it from a neutral ground where the only factor at stake is market success and a sustainable income for the artists in question, Tse's defense is a valid one. In YET's case, however, being the only funded theatre company to make British East Asian theatre does place the onus on Yellow Earth to ensure that its “representations” are of significant cultural value, and that its plays work to challenge outdated stereotypes, not to perpetuate them in a way that causes racist, discriminatory and exoticized imagery to affix further to contemporary perceptions. Although it is true that companies should have the right to creative freedom, publicly funded ones like YET also have a responsibility to communities—

both artistic peers and audiences—to produce quality cultural work. In the Canadian context, fu-GEN has not had to face the same burden of “representing” a whole ethno-national artistic community, nor has it been regarded as “monopolizing” Asian Canadian theatre formation as there have been other companies such as Loud Mouth Asian Babes¹⁹ in Toronto and Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre²⁰ on the West Coast, thus providing different voices under the rubric of “Asian Canadian” theatre. In terms of cultural quality, fu-GEN has tended to be regarded with respect for its often bold energy and irreverent works. As I will discuss in the following chapters, while YET has relied on East Asian influences on some of its productions, there is cultural value in the themes and stories that it explores. Even though York is justified in criticizing YET’s largely exoticized image, his artistic ideas align more with the type of work that fu-GEN does in the Canadian context. In his praise for Mulan Theatre’s work, for instance, he appears to champion an edgier, more ethnically ambiguous approach. In reading both fu-GEN and YET’s works together, then, we can discern in their similarities and their differences how each company has imagined Asian Canadian and British East Asian identity positions respectively.

The naming, branding, and labelling of ethno-national work such as fu-GEN and YET’s, circumscribed as they are by a sense of imagined contours and boundaries, reveal just how complicated it is to “represent” by *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. Although York has criticized YET’s use of yellow in their name, given that it sticks the discriminatory colour onto British East Asian bodies, such blatant self-stereotyping could also be read as an intentional strategy on the part of its founding members. Writing in a more contemporary

¹⁹ Founded by Korean Canadian playwright, performer and cultural activist Jean Yoon.

²⁰ Founded by Joyce Lam in 2001.

context, British East Asian playwright Benjamin Yeoh has highlighted the use of “yellow” in a more constructive manner, paralleling in some ways the use of the word “black” as a reclaimed nomination of power such as in the “black power” movement in the United States. In an article entitled “If ‘brown is the new black’, where does that leave yellow? Are practitioners with East Asian roots sidelined in favour of South Asian and Black British work?”, Yeoh asserts that there are “inadequacies in the level of investment and resources available” to ethnic minorities such as the East Asian, South Asian and Black British communities who are concerned about “having to clamber over each other to get a piece of the funding pie” (“If ‘brown’ is”). In addition, he recognizes that “there are currently more South Asian and Black British theatre heroes around to inspire people than British East Asian ones” so that any recognition and investment afforded to them means that “the smaller and lagging East Asian sector [not surprisingly] falls even further behind” (“If ‘brown’ is”). Emphasizing that “this is not a competition between black, brown and yellow,” he declares that “it is a call for institutions and people in control of those institutions to realise the under-investment in this talent pool” (“If ‘brown’ is”). In this way, Yeoh rehabilitates the use of “yellow” as a signifier of race; although it comes stuck with the ghosts of racist pasts, it also acts as a reminder of this very past, and indicates that the fight against racism and discrimination continues. Indeed, as I discuss in the following chapters, the fight against racism lies at the heart of both YET and fu-GEN’s plays, even if the companies’ main approaches are different, and their funding opportunities are varied.

As mentioned in the earlier example describing the exchange between York and Tse on YET’s responsibility to the community—given its pre-2011 status as the only company funded to make British East Asian theatre—material concerns are a major consideration in

both companies' works. The news of YET's funding cut came shortly after Kumiko Mendl, one of the company's five founding members, was officially appointed Artistic Director. As she noted in an interview for *Niji Magazine*, "this has been quite shocking news and [she is] concerned for the British East Asian (BEA) artistic community" ("Yellow Earth"). Mendl explains:

As a small touring company we were always going to be reliant in [sic] a large extent on our grant from the Arts Council (touring is notoriously expensive). Sponsorship and attracting private donations is not so simple when you are competing with the likes of Sadlers Wells and the National and you have no venue or building. There is not a substantial track record amongst the British Chinese business community of giving to the arts. We still have a long way to go to win the argument for investment from the business sector. ("Yellow Earth")

As YET's first Artistic Director, David Tse has also discussed the problems with getting funding for the company. Between 1993 and 1995, that is, when Tse was still doing rehearsed readings with interested British East Asian actors, none of their bids for funding were successful. Tse stated that "considerable frustration was generated because the Regional Arts Funding Officers kept changing the goal posts for what might attract funding" ("Eclipse Report" 62). YET only got a foot on the "funding ladder" when, as noted earlier, Polka Theatre commissioned *The Magic Paintbrush*, "which did very well, both commercially and critically in 1994" ("David Tse: Yellow").

This all changed in 1999 when “the Arts Council of England (ACE) commissioned a review of regional theatre in England” (Pinto 8). As YET has archived in a folder of cuttings, “in July 2000, the government awarded ACE an extra £100 million for the arts. ACE allocated £25 million of that to theatre, earmarking 10 percent for cultural diversity projects” (Pinto 8). YET was one of the ethnic minority theatre companies that received grants, listed as £30,000. Around the same time in 2001, the Arts Council England, in collaboration with the East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse Initiative, organized the Eclipse Conference intended to “encourage delegates to debate and become actively involved in suggesting solutions to combat racism in theatre” (“Eclipse Report” 3). ACE published the conference proceedings in May 2002. David Tse was one of the delegates and his presentation notes are included in the report. In addition to the Arts Council of England, YET also receives production-based support from a small number of businesses—such as SeeWoo Oriental Food Specialists for its *King Lear* (2006)—even though, as Mendl has said, financial support from the British Chinese business community is generally not forthcoming. Other sources of YET’s funding include private organizations such as the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, “one of the largest independent grant-making foundations in the UK” (“Who We Are”), which supported its production of 58 (2004) which I discuss in Chapter Three. As opposed to the limitations on YET’s funding sources, fu-GEN has successfully obtained government funding at the federal and provincial level from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council. The company also lists on its website support from corporate funders such as TD Bank, private funders such as the Metcalf Foundation, numerous community partners along with a long list of individual donors. These differences in funding opportunities between fu-

GEN and YET indicate broader material factors that have impacted the strategies and pathways both companies have taken. They also reflect the way East Asian ethno-national theatre has been regarded and received in each country, given the different socio-cultural obstacles each company has had to face. Although there is an imagined community in both, there appears to have been a more strongly defined Asian Canadian presence forming a welcoming interpretive community for such work than there was for British East Asian theatre during the years when the company was first established. Aside from the conflicts between British East Asian artists such as York and Tse who have different ideas about what their ethno-national theatre should be, the companies' works themselves show that some subgroups within British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre have more stage time than others. For this reason, Chinese- and Japanese-Canadian shoes are more often treaded in, as are British Chinese shoes. Conversely, Filipino Canadian and British Korean shoes are often left untreaded, or if they are, do not share such a dominant space of representation as other ethnicities within the various ethno-national labels. Instead of sharing a cultural shorthand, then, some members might actually find themselves short-changed in terms of representational opportunities.

This notion of being short-changed brings to mind the other side of theatre production—its reception. Since YET and fu-GEN are explicit about working to create British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre respectively, how should a theatre critic perceive and evaluate their productions? Should she be cognizant of the identity issues, racist history and financial concerns at stake? Should these factor into her critical reviews of the works or should she evaluate fu-GEN and YET's output as she would any other play? In what situation would she be short-changing them—giving them special consideration in light

of their history of victimisation, or holding them up to what she regards as standards of all good theatre? Indeed, given his belief in the work of the company and its contributions to increasing the visibility of British East Asian artists, Tse has been quite sensitive to negative critical responses to the company's work, especially when they seem to him to have "missed the point" ("Interview with Mr. David Tse" 6). When asked to share "what was the most disappointing moment in [his] professional career" (5), Tse cites the reviews of "one female critic of the *Guardian*," who, he feels, "has disliked [him] and [his] work...[from the beginning]" (5). While he does not expect her to "like everything [he does]" (6), he prefers a fairer approach where the critic would take time to understand the sentiment or spirit behind a piece, rather than criticize it solely on technical terms such as in the writing, direction, design, and so on. For him, "people like her do have a lot of influence whether people take an interest in East-Asian stories or not" (6). While Tse did not explicitly name her, he was almost certainly referring to Lyn Gardner. She and Michael Billington are the two main theatre critics for *The Guardian*. Citing in particular her negative responses to Yellow Earth's productions *Play to Win* and *58*, amid the comparatively positive feedback from other broadsheets, Tse expresses disappointment in her critical pieces for the major newspaper. For *Play to Win*, according to Tse, "every single mainstream critic from the 'Times,' 'The Observer,' ...every single broadsheet thought this is a wonderful work, she is [sic] only one who didn't" (6). For *58*, a play about "the 58 Chinese who died in the back of a lorry [as they were reportedly entering Britain illegally]," Tse explained that, "apart from the play there was [sic] also interviews with ... young and older English people in three different cities and we added that into the piece...it was quite experimental...integrating documentary with fiction and drama but again, she didn't understand either what the writer

and me as the director were trying to achieve and she kind of just dismissed the writing as being clunky” (6). While he concedes that she might have a point, he took offense at her focus on the technical aspects.

Reading Gardner’s reviews themselves yields a more complicated and nuanced picture. As she writes on 7 October 2000, “what I hoped for from this play [*Play to Win*], which is performed as part of a new sponsorship initiative called Sainsbury’s Checkout Theatre, was a production with strong youth appeal but which actually transcended the barriers of theatre for young people and theatre for the rest of the population” (Rev. of “Play”). However, as she continues, “regrettably what is on offer is a strongly issue-based piece with the unmistakable whiff of theatre in education” (Rev. of “Play”). While she thinks that “there is nothing wrong with theatre in education,” for her, “its place is in the school not the theatre” (Rev. of “Play”). Even though she praises some of the acting, technical elements and martial arts sequences in the play, Gardner did not hold back on what she found wrong with the piece. In her closing paragraph, she writes:

But Tse’s script uses language that lacks street credibility and is too transparent; the fantasy sequences are the equivalent of the ‘it was all a dream’ cop-out and the mystic message that you can find strength through gentleness is inadequate. If you were a badly bullied 12-year-old would you find the idea that ‘the smallest stream can cut through the hardest iron’ as much help as Childline? (Rev. of “Play”)

Given the many affective issues already underpinning the validity and viability of British East Asian theatre, Gardner's incisive points could come across as unnecessarily scathing. As is clear from Tse's frustrations, it might also lead to the public's disregard of the play.

Echoing the previous critique, Gardner's review of 58 includes the following closing paragraph:

Produced by the East Asian company Yellow Earth, 58 is a heartfelt if clumsy attempt to bring alive the imagined stories of some of those who died. It mixes live action with film of China and vox pops that reveal people's attitude here towards would-be immigrants. As an educational tool the show might well be useful; as a fully fledged piece of theatre it is disappointing. Philippe Cherbonnier has written stereotypes and representative mouthpieces, not characters, and the plotting is improbable even before it introduces a paranormal subplot. The cast work valiantly to bring some credibility and dramatic energy to the evening, but although this show's heart is in the right place almost everything else about it is woefully inadequate. (Rev. of "58")

In her reviews of these shows, then, it is clear that Gardner places a lot of value on technical and dramaturgical prowess, especially in areas such as plot, dialogue, and characterisation. Her criticisms of the two plays reveal that in terms of production quality, Yellow Earth still had room for improvement. As a theatre critic, Gardner is entitled to parse a production through criteria that she would apply to all theatre shows. It is this inclination towards the

technical as well as journalistic brevity, however, that has led to Tse's ire. According to him, "if [he] was working as a critic [he] would try and finds means and ways of trying to understand ... all forms of different artwork and try and... reflect on whether the artist achieved and didn't achieved what he set out to do" ("Interview with Mr. David Tse" 5). To be fair to Gardner, her reviews are not completely dismissive, and they do contain positive elements often to do with acting and the "heart" behind the works. Tse's assessment of her reviews is therefore, arguably, affected by the broader concerns around British East Asian theatre formation, where any hint of flaws could be seized on as a general dismissal of the efforts of the whole artistic community working in this area. In this way, while he insists that Yellow Earth is a "professional" company, Tse also occupies a position of acute sensitivity where he perceives that any critic's "rubbishing" of the company's work hurts something with a much higher stake—the perception of the quality of British East Asian work ("Interview with Mr. David Tse" 6).

On one hand, then, we might argue that Gardner was actually doing good by the company—evaluating YET's work in light of other "unracialized" and "professional" theatre work, thereby holding them up to higher, even "universal" standards. On the other, given the scarcity of opportunities for British East Asians and the fact that YET was, at the time, the only east-Asian theatre company in the country, Tse seems to be seeking some form of evaluative criteria underpinned by affirmative action principles, or, at least, journalistic language conducive to acceptance of British East Asian theatre. The line between "professionalism" and "ethnic theatre" and the question of what constitutes quality ethno-national work are, therefore, complex considerations with no easy answers.

2.3 Domestic, Diasporic, Transnationalist: Varied Approaches and Perceived Cultural Quality

In the previous chapter, I mentioned that one of the main differences between fu-GEN and YET is the former's focus on lives lived in geographically domestic spaces, specifically Toronto, and the latter's embracing of diasporic and transnationalist themes given its focus on East Asian lives, visual vocabulary, and recent migration stories. It is this risky connection to the sticky past of "Orientalist" stereotypes, however, that has led to opposition to YET's work from artists such as York. According to Aquino, whom I cite at the start of this chapter, fu-GEN appears to be done with early migration stories. "Asian Canadian" theatre for the company is no longer about "where do I belong" but how we as Asian Canadians live in the present and, as encapsulated in fu-GEN's very name, the future. In light of this sense of moving forwards and looking to what comes next, YET's approach easily appears the opposite, one that looks backwards and is seemingly critically unprogressive. This sense of linearity and milestones is misleading, however, as scholar Christopher Lee reminds us, "we have, it seems, gotten used to an ever-expanding list of Asian Canadian 'firsts': first literary anthologies, theatre productions, film festivals, and so on" (103). Acknowledging that this is not unique to what he calls "Asian Canadian critical practice," he nonetheless suggests that "they profoundly shape the temporality of its political imagination, a temporality in which a racist past gives way to the present as a moment of contestation in which sustained efforts may lead to a qualitatively different, and better, future" (103). In other words, Lee cautions that we should not give in so quickly to complacency about the successful eradication of racism; it might rear its head elsewhere.

What does this mean for YET's continued link to an East Asian Otherness, then? Do their works strategically remind us to be vigilant against discrimination, or are they purely, as York has claimed, "twee exotica" ("On Yellow Earth's")? What cultural quality can we perceive in fu-GEN's definition of "Asian Canadian" and YET's conception of "British East Asian" theatre respectively? Does this quality lie in "reflecting" lived experiences or in producing new modes of thinking about ethno-national lives?

Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel outline a shift in scholarly ideas—from thinking about theatre as reflective to thinking of it as productive. Referring to the "groundbreaking volume" of *Canadian Theatre Review* on "Theatre and Ethnicity" published in 1988, they cite scholar Natalie Rewa's "framing questions":

How are the complexities of race, language and culture in our society reflected in our theatre? Has this plurality found its dramatic and theatrical form in terms of the aspirations of playwrights, actors, and interest of the audience? Does affirmative action ghettoize Canadian actors, playwrights and audiences? ("Introduction: 'Ethnic'" vii)

For Knowles and Mündel, Rewa's "language is of its time" since "she is concerned...with what is 'reflected' in our theatre" (vii). Rather, for them, "twenty years later, we might be less inclined to consider what is *reflected* or *acknowledged* than what is *produced* through performance, whether that is understood to be new, negotiated, and hybrid diasporic subjectivities, racist stereotypes, or exotic orientalist fantasies" (vii). Along similar lines, when Knowles interviewed Aquino about fu-GEN in 2006, he observed that "the community

it serves is less clearly defined than Carlos Bulosans's [which serves Filipino-Canadians]" (77). He asks, therefore, "whether fu-GEN *represents* a community that already exists or whether it helps to *constitute* such a community—to performatively bring 'Asian Canadian' into being as a category?" (77). While not clearly defined in that interview, this was more explicitly articulated in 2011. In their introduction to the volume, Aquino and Knowles assert,

"Asian Canadian Theatre,"...is a fraught term, delineating not any obvious or pre-existing entity in the world. Rather it is *constituted* as an object in discourse by the very acts of founding theatre companies, holding conferences, and publishing books that adopt and map a certain body of work and a certain set of practices as their terrain, giving the field that name. (vii, emphasis added)

There is thus a strong sense of how work like fu-GEN's and YET's produce identities and constitute new fields and discourses.

At the same time, the language around "reflection" remains deeply relevant, especially since many still regard theatre as reflective of society and representative of the socio-cultural zeitgeist. In his article calling for more recognition for "black", "brown" and "yellow" theatre work, Benjamin Yeoh also uses population statistics²¹ to construct an argument about representation. According to him, "taken at face value the numbers suggest, if ... the National Theatre was truly representative then one out of every ten plays would be

²¹ At the time of writing in 2008, Yeoh cites the census figures as follows: "91% of the population of England is white and 9% minority ethnic. 5% are Asian, 2% Black, 1% Chinese and 1% mixed" ("If 'brown' is"). He does, however, recognize that "these numbers have flaws" ("If 'brown' is").

related to ethnic minorities—and one out of every twenty ethnic minority plays should relate to East Asians” (“If ‘brown’ is”). Echoing this argument, David Tse has also opined:

Our arts institutions should better *reflect* the reality of British cultural life. According to the 2001 census, British east [sic] Asians make up 1% of the population, but BEA arts organisations get nowhere near that in terms of public funding. It’s institutional barriers like these that demand urgent attention.

(“It’s Time To”, emphasis added)

Along similar lines, actor Liz Sutherland—who self-identifies as mixed race and who has performed in several of YET’s productions—has said in an interview with *Niji Magazine*:

There are very few oriental roles in TV, film or theatre and the ones that do crop up often present stereotypical characters—the Chinese take away, illegal immigrants, dodgy DVD sellers etc. Where are the British Chinese professionals who speak with British regional accents and live normal British lives? Our arts do not truly *reflect* the wonderful diversity of modern British cultural life (“Yellow Earth”, emphasis added).

Recounting the beginnings of fu-GEN to Ric Knowles in 2006, Nina Lee Aquino also refers to creating work that “reflects” us. In particular, as she explains, “*Banana Boys* [by Leon Aureus, adapted from the novel by Terry Woo] was [fu-GEN’s] first full production because

[she] thought, ‘let’s do something really new, something that *reflects* us, our generation” (“Between Home” 76, emphasis added). Therefore, despite shifts in thought, the ideas of “theatre [being] in the business of reflecting back the tensions of society, giving it a model of itself” (Bryant, “The Equality”) are still prevalent. In their work, fu-GEN and YET reflect current socio-cultural contexts, while also producing new discourses and identifications through challenging cultural performances.

As this chapter has described so far, the two companies’ approaches diverge. Even though they are both engaged in producing theatre that takes into account ethnicity and nationality as they play out in characters’ lives, each company’s qualitative sense of allegiance to nationality (Britishness, Canadianess) and ethnicity (East Asian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, etc.) differs. As the main face and representative of YET when he was Artistic Director, Tse himself has had a lot of input into the company’s delineation of British East Asianness and the type of theatre that explores that identity position. In an article for *The Guardian* newspaper’s online Theatre Blog in 2008, he writes, “of the three largest ethnic minority groups in the UK, the British East Asian (BEA) presence in arts and culture is still the most invisible” (“It’s Time to”). Citing the popular television soap opera programme *EastEnders*, he declares that “in 23 years of being broadcast, [it] has regularly featured south [sic] Asian and black families but the only Chinese presence so far has been someone selling dodgy DVDS” (“It’s Time to”, italics added). For him, this indicates “the need for accurate representation,” given that “the majority of [British East Asians are] professionals—living and working in London” and many artists from the community “are not temporary visitors” (“It’s Time to”). Despite this sense of belonging, Tse observes that “the majority of BEA actors [are] asked to put on foreign accents”; it is “as if [they] don’t belong

here or that [they] can't sound British" ("It's Time to"). In this way, we can view Tse's imagining of the British East Asian community to be made up mostly of middle class, well-educated people, working in the capital of England, who speak English like a native born and/or bred in the British Isles. This conception is also the justification he uses for the community's right to belong, even though they are not "White," and therefore automatically assumed to be foreign. On the surface, then, he seems very much committed to a performance of Britishness, whereby perfect pronunciation, good upbringing, and diligent contribution to the national workforce should render an East Asian person acceptable as part of the British socio-cultural fabric.

In his work for YET however, Tse has continued to draw inspiration from events in East Asia and from various aspects of its culture; these have permeated YET's work under Tse's leadership as Artistic Director. As he told interviewer Thomas Zhao in 2010,

There is so little...Chinese or east-Asian culture in this country [Britain] that when I was becoming interested in exploring the arts and exploring how to bring some...[of] my own cultural heritage, or my background...not only did I look to Chinese film but I also looked to Japanese film, to Korean film, to Vietnamese film ...and, actually, I found that all these east-Asian [sic] art forms, they spoke to me. ("Interview with" 4)

He shared that although Western art "showed [him] something of [himself]," he realised that "a lot of [it] is also made to reflect Western experience which is part of [him] but not all of [him]" ("Interview with" 4). Instead, he found resonances in East-Asian cultures, which, he

feels, have a “communality of a Confucian ...respect” because “people have travelled, intermingled, traded, inter-married” (“Interview with” 4). For these reasons, he has maintained a strong link to East Asia and its rich cultural, artistic, and physical vocabulary. Therefore, despite his own identification with a particular image of Britishness, he has found the need to explore the East Asian aspect of himself, delving into a diverse culture that was in many ways already foreign to him as a 1.5-generation British Chinese who started acculturating as British from the age of six. Thus, as noted in their mandate, YET has constantly sought to “integrate the theatre skills of the East and the West” (“58 Programme” Inside back cover). Their repertoire includes not only several new plays written by Tse, but also new work by Philippe Cherbonnier, the company’s literary manager, a solo show by Veronica Needa—one of the company’s founding artists—as well as a reinterpretation of Shakespeare along with plays originating in Singapore, Vietnam, Japan, and the United States.

Conversely, as Nina Lee Aquino tells scholar Ric Knowles in an interview for the *Canadian Theatre Review*, “I don’t think, as long as I’m artistic director, we’ll ever produce a work that’s solely from a Japanese Japanese [sic] playwright” (77). This sense of exclusion and distancing from purely East Asian work circumscribes Aquino’s own vision of Asian Canadian theatre, one that required, at the time of the interview, strong Canadian ties. While drawing a line at a native Japanese playwright’s work, fu-GEN was ready to produce Japanese Canadian writer Terry Watada’s *The Tale of Mask* in 2008. On that occasion, Aquino concludes that she “[doesn’t] know how to define Asian Canadian,” even though “the term...is definitely reflected in [the company’s] work” (77). Comparing Tse and Aquino’s public expressions of their respective ethno-national theatre ideas, it is easy to see that they have influenced YET and fu-GEN’s approaches. Thus, YET’s work is more

inclusive of works addressing and coming from East Asia and its global diaspora while fu-GEN identifies very strongly with locality, especially the elements of “Canadianness” as major characteristics in its repertoire. These differences in the companies’ practices reveal the dynamic tensions inherent in defining communities and the arts around identity labels such as “British East Asian” and “Asian Canadian”. On one hand, as evident in scholarship on Asian American coalitionist groups, there is a need for solidarity—people come together in numbers to fight for rights. At the same time, there are different identities within these broadly collective terms ranging from specific ethnicities such as Japanese, Chinese and Filipino, to age, gender, sexuality, ability and so on, not to mention artistic self-identifications. These differences, variations, and the conflicts they sometimes generate, reveal the constructedness and instability of arbitrary labels. To take this a step further, it also suggests that the quality of the companies’ works varies from play to play, where tensions between ethnicity and nationality, the experience of being East Asian in Britain or Canada, conjure different interpretations. The contact, collisions and conflicts among characters and their multiple identity positions create surfaces that audiences can investigate and partake in. Indeed, the quality of ethno-national work lies in the thoughts and emotions they invoke and provoke in the attending public.

As mentioned earlier, under the leadership of Nina Lee Aquino, fu-GEN was always focused on exploring Canadianness as a major element of its “Asian Canadian” productions. David Tse’s inspirations from East Asia, on the other hand, have led to his inclusion of plays by writers outside of Britain. Whereas Aquino could find role-models in Terry Watada, Jean Yoon and Betty Quan, who before her had already written plays with distinct explorations of complex ethnic and Canadian identifications, Tse did not find comparable British East Asian

work, and so had to look further afield. Thus, in line with these two distinctive strategies, fu-GEN has built a strong identity not just as an Asian Canadian theatre company, but as one based in Toronto. Indeed, the urban setting features heavily in many of fu-GEN's productions and works to assist, if not insist on, the company's emphasis on national rather than ethnic identity. On the other hand, despite being based in London, YET has always been a touring company, albeit chiefly in England. As such, unlike fu-GEN's collaborations with venues such as the Factory Studio Theatre in which it had shown many of its early major productions, YET has had to negotiate with venue managers across England to get their shows picked up for a venue's season. The company's plays also tend to feature a wider variety of geographical places than fu-GEN, whether as actual settings or as created presences due to characters' strong ties to East Asian homelands. That said, both companies have also created shows that veer away from Aristotelean time and space, distorting reality to push characters to their limits.

While there appears to be an audience for fu-GEN's work that is drawn to and/or connected with the term "Asian Canadian," audiences from the East Asian diaspora in Britain still tend to think of themselves in terms of specific ethnicities, such as British Chinese, as opposed to British East Asian. These differences in audience support have also fed into the companies' general self-perception of their own cultural value. This is particularly evident in light of the two events that I cited in the introduction to this thesis. In May 2010, fu-GEN hosted GENesis, an academic conference "intended to inaugurate a new scholarly field [of Asian Canadian theatre]" (vii). On 11 February 2013, the Young Vic Theatre in London hosted "Opening the Door: East Asians in British Theatre," a symposium of sorts "intended to address the lack of employment opportunities for East Asian artists in

UK theatre and to look at ways of improving the situation” (“Open Space at Young Vic”). Organized largely in response to the recent controversy regarding the Royal Shakespeare Company’s casting for the *Orphan of Zhao* [also known as the Chinese *Hamlet*] that I described in the previous chapter, the theatre venue saw approximately seventy actors along with a number of industry representatives, writers, critics, and other practitioners gather for a full-day’s discussion around a pressing issue: “What are we going to do—right now—to end the marginalisation of East Asians in British theatre?” (“Opening the Door”). Recalling the section on naming and branding earlier in this chapter, it is interesting to see how the perception of ethno-national theatre and its cultural value feeds into the nomenclature and metaphors generated for the two events. More specifically, comparing the titles of the two events reveals how the leaders of fu-GEN and YET, themselves members of several different discursive communities—such as age, gender, sex, race, ability, ethnicity—with an endless variety of overlaps, have positioned the companies in relation to their respective mainstream industries, namely “Canadian Theatre” and “British Theatre”. Reading the events together enables us to suggest that the companies share a similar analogical way of viewing themselves in relation to their respective wider industries. As seen in the title “Opening the Door” and in Nina Lee Aquino’s interview with Ric Knowles in 2006, creators of East Asian ethno-national theatre in Britain and Canada have pictured their cultural efforts using architectural metaphors. Nina Lee Aquino has said:

What I say to the emerging artist panels when they ask,
“How did you break down the door, or open the window in
this big house called ‘Canadian theatre?’” is “I built my own
house!” I wasn’t going to break down the door or smash the

window; I just decided, “I’ll be the neighbour. I’ll build my house the way I want it.” (“Between Home” 81)

As Aquino declares, “now I’m opening the doors for other people” (“Between Home” 81). This imagery of “door-opening” also appears in the so-titled event held in London. There is, however, a strong difference due to the event’s subtitle, “East Asians in British Theatre”. The use of “Opening the Door” for the London-based occasion positions “East Asian” theatre-makers as outsiders knocking on the door of mainstream British theatres—they are trying to get in. Given that one of the more focused discussion questions during the event was “What are you most angry about?” the metaphor indexes a need or a potential for confrontation in order for artists to gain access to increased opportunity or recognition. At the same time, a doorway is also a portal and thus simultaneously an entrance and an exit. As such, the door could potentially be regarded as an opportunity for East Asian artists in Britain to show themselves on their own terms, rather than be perceived as “inscrutable” or mysterious—an unfortunate stereotype in line with traditional perceptions of “Orientalness”. The metaphor-based title used for the event in London is seemingly layered: although the power structures underlying it can shift, there is a stronger sense of East Asian actors trying to gain entrance. This is particularly bolstered by the event’s tagline: “East Asians in British Theatre” (“Opening”). However, this differs from the label “British East Asian” used in Yellow Earth Theatre’s company mandate, which creates a relational aspect between “Britishness” and “East Asianness” within one entity. The subtitle of “East Asians in British Theatre” seemingly ossifies the institution of British Theatre, with the East Asians on the outside. YET’s conception of British East Asian fuses, at least in name, the two identity positions, even if their contact chafes and creates turmoil in the hybrid subject.

In contrast to this, the Toronto event was named “GENesis” – the uppercase “GEN” a citation of the theatre company’s name, “fu-GEN,” which, as earlier mentioned, stands for “future generation”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in its non-biblical meaning, “genesis” refers to “the origin or mode of formation of something” (OED). This formation parallels the views of Nina Lee Aquino who has “built her own house” of “Asian Canadian theatre”. Instead of trying to gain entry into mainstream Canadian theatre, she has now created another space and can open doors to that space for other Asian Canadian artists. Like the London event, it can also “invite” others in through the door. Here, however, there is less of an outsider-insider divide. Instead, people can be guests in Asian Canadian theatre and Asian Canadian theatre artists might “visit” the other house(s). Further, the premise of the GENesis conference is also important: academics and artists were invited to consider the renaissance of Asian Canadian theatre, meaning the revival or renewal of interest in the genre (OED). This is a vital reminder of the tradition of published drama written by playwrights of Asian descent in Canada. In 2009, Aquino was able to compile a two-volume play anthology marketed as the very first Asian Canadian play collection. Drawing together play-texts that already existed from different eras and parts of Canada, the publication serves the functions of building a sense of history for Asian Canadian drama and increasing awareness and circulation of the texts themselves. Through publication, the plays circulate beyond the immediate contexts of production and gain status as literature.²² Although the terms “GENesis” and “renaissance” offer different senses of time, both made sense in this context because scripts from previous waves of Asian Canadian playwriting were brought together with more contemporary plays. Parsing the metaphors invoked from the events and

²² All the works in the anthology were previously performed. Aquino’s text includes each play’s premiering history.

Aquino's part in securing the publication of the Asian Canadian play anthologies enables a reading of the companies' self-evaluation as pioneers, working to create a fairer, more inclusive industry for Asian Canadian and British East Asian theatre-makers. At the same time, both companies do it on their own terms, thus indicating a contemplative relationship to their respective industries and cultural landscapes.

The subtle but important difference between YET's conception of British East Asian theatre and the Devoted and Disgruntled event's placing of East Asians outside of British Theatre reflects a common dictum repeated at gatherings of East Asian theatre-makers in Britain: that there is a lack of "critical mass" amongst the artistic community. Until the very recent "Opening the Door" event cited earlier, there have been intermittent but few inroads by artists into the cultural landscape. This is compounded by the plural experiences of East Asians in Britain and the lack of strong activist impulses such as those of Asian Americans in the United States. Indeed, as scholar Wai-ki Luk has observed in his book, *Chinatown in Britain: Diffusions and Concentrations of British New Wave Chinese Immigration* (2008), there have been, since the 1950s, different waves of Chinese migrants from Hong Kong, Vietnam, Fujian, and so on, all under very different socio-political circumstances. These migrants' experiences differ significantly from those of UK-born Chinese, who often occupy a hybrid position between Britishness and Chineseness.

In Canada on the other hand, as theatre-maker and activist Jean Yoon outlines in her article "Chinese Theatre in Canada: The Bigger Picture" (2002), many Chinese- and Japanese-Canadians experienced large-scale traumas inflicted on their respective communities, resulting in legacies of painful narratives and survivor stories that have been passed down through the generations. Whereas British East Asians and British Chinese

might share migrant experiences that parallel in their sense of diasporic displacement, they have not undergone shared historical and national events of such magnitude as the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act in Canada, and the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War Two. Galvanized by the inspirations of Asian American theatre activism, fu-GEN's forays into Asian Canadian theatre were preceded by a range of collaborative and collective efforts from the 1970s that continued gathering momentum into the 1990s and beyond. Indeed, the very first Chinese Canadian play, *Bachelor Man* by Winston Kam, premiered in 1987 at Theatre Passe Muraille (Yoon 97), and the Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre was founded in 2001. Thus, while there has not been a sense of critical mass for British East Asian cultural work, hives of activity were already in place in Canada for East Asian theatre-makers. Indeed, while nowhere near the scale of atrocity that Chinese Canadians and Japanese Canadians went through, the Royal Shakespeare Company's casting controversy over the *Orphan of Zhao* served as an artistic impetus around which people coalesced for more political action. In this way, whereas Aquino was able to build fu-GEN together with her fellow artists as a widely accepted, valid and valuable space, YET's identification as "British East Asian" until very recently differed from how many other artistic contemporaries and peers saw themselves. Even though the British East Asian Artists (BEAA)—made up of academics and artists who fronted talks about the RSC casting controversy—formed in 2012, YET has for a long time had to define and refine "British East Asian" theatre work on entirely fresh, untrodden ground. The fervour of these arguments illuminates the richness of opinion and artistic temperaments within the British context: there are many differing aspirations as to what British East Asian theatre should or could be.

2.4 Yellow Earth and fu-GEN: Repertoires

Since their emergence, YET has produced over seventeen main productions and fu-GEN more than six. Both companies provide play development programmes and events for aspiring and, sometimes, established playwrights. In 2002, YET hosted *Typhoon*, a “unique playreading festival promoting the best of contemporary East Asian drama that has not been presented in Britain before” (“Archive: Typhoon”). This event was international in scope and included works from “China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and the U.S.A” (“Archive: Typhoon”). *Typhoon* then became a nearly annual event until 2009, and also “led to another new YET initiative, Yellow Ink, to encourage aspiring British East Asian writers” (“Archive: Typhoon 2”). Subsequent events included plays from both Overseas East Asian writers and a small number of British East Asians. In 2008, YET “widen[ed] the remit of Yellow Ink so that dramaturgical support [could be] offered to British East Asian practitioners...who may be writers, directors, actors, live artists or designers” (“Initiatives: Yellow Voices”). In 2011, under the new artistic directorship of Kumiko Mendl, YET moved away from *Typhoon* to *Dim Sum Nights*, where “a wide variety of short 10 minute pieces of theatre [is] served up in a restaurant with Dim Sum and tea” (“Archive: Dim Sum Nights 2011”). These short plays feature new British East Asian writing and mark a shift towards nurturing a new generation of writers to create challenging work. Despite these showcases, only two works from *Typhoon 5* held in 2008 have been part of YET’s repertoire. These were *Boom* by Singaporean playwright Jean Tay and *wAve* by Korean American playwright Sung Rno in 2009. By this time, David Tse had already stepped down as artistic director and Philippe Cherbonnier and Jonathan Man were sharing the role.

In contrast, fu-GEN's play development programme has been localized from the beginning. Having started in 2003, with "each season, fu-GEN dedicates resources (money/time/space/ professionals/supplies) to the development of new Asian Canadian theatre" ("Play Development"). As they delineate on their website, the company "runs a playwriting unit, called The Kitchen, developing new and emerging writers over a 10 month period. The Kitchen ends on a new play festival, called *The Potluck Festival*, celebrating the culmination of the writers' work" ("Play Development"). Also, "in tandem with the Kitchen, fu-GEN hosts a playwright in residence, who actively participates in the Kitchen activities while also developing their own project(s), working closely with the Artistic Director and Associate Dramaturg" ("Play Development"). Some of the company's works such as *lady in the red dress* discussed in Chapter Four and *Brown Balls*, in Chapter Five, have been featured in *The Potluck Festival*. Additionally, even though they do not necessarily bring some of these shows to full production, both companies' initiatives have led to other opportunities for playwrights who had undergone their programmes, such as having their shows produced by other theatre companies and venues.

Established earlier by artists in Britain, YET's repertoire has included new plays, plays written by artists outside of Britain, as well as reinterpretations of classics. This latter strategy is important as a potential means for drawing audiences to the company and creating an audience base for newer, more experimental works. It also shows the wider remit of YET's British East Asian categorisation, one that is more diasporic and transnationalist, open to continued engagement with border crossings, especially in a globally mobile world. A younger company founded in a younger country with its own complicated relationships with Britain and the United States, fu-GEN's works are all newly developed, in some ways aided

by the fact that there is already an established market for Asian Canadian cultural production through Asian Canadian literature and a Canadian theatre scene in which productions exploring the complexities of identity have already found strong audiences. For example, as mentioned earlier, Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto produced *Bachelor-Man* by writer Winston Kam in 1987. His influences are “Chinese, Caribbean and Canadian” (“Bachelor-Man” 57). In Vancouver in 1995, Betty Quan’s play *Mother Tongue* premiered at the Firehall Arts Centre, known for its timely and politically engaged works. Indeed, fu-GEN’s *Banana Boys*, adapted from a novel written by Asian Canadian writer, Terry Woo also played at the Firehall in 2007 and 2008.

As Artistic Director, David Tse has written several new works for YET. These include *New Territories* (1996), a rites-of-passage drama exploring the cultural dislocation of a Hong Kong-born boy sent to experience the educational system in England, and *Play To Win* (2000), a coming-of-age drama that I will analyse in the following chapter. He has adapted Vietnamese writer Luu Quang Vu’s play *The Butcher’s Skin* (2002), a mythical Vietnamese story, Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Nightingale* (2005), *Lear’s Daughters* (2003), originally by The Women’s Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (2006), an intercultural production that toured to the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre. In collaboration with other writers, Tse has also contributed to other productions. With Erika Tan, he wrote *Behind the Chinese Takeaway* (1997), a play that uses oral history and concerns the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China; with Philippe Cherbonnier, he created *58* (2004), based on a true event in which 58 Chinese immigrants were found suffocated in the back of a van in Dover in 2000; with Paul Sirett, Tse produced *Running the Silk Road* (2008), combining the spirit of the Beijing Olympics with modern issues faced by

young Britons. Aside from Tse's work, YET has also produced other plays by Cherbonnier such as *Whisper of a Leaf Falling* (1998), in which Beijing Opera meets Commedia, and his adaptation of the classic Japanese story *Rashomon* (2001). Other shows include Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills* (1999), featuring European style physical theatre in collaboration with David Glass, Yu Miri and Kwong Loke's *Festival for the Fish* (2004), which is an Oedipal story but looks at Japanese modern life, Veronica Needa's *Face* (1998, 2004, 2005)—discussed in Chapter Five—Singaporean playwright Jean Tay's ghostly play *Boom*, Korean American playwright Sung Rno's *wAve*, a reinterpretation of the Medea myth, and Carey English's *Why the Lion Danced*, a family show on Chinese Lunar New Year traditions amongst others. In 2014, the company premiered its latest production, *The Last Days of Limehouse*, a site-specific promenade piece that explores, through various characters, the different arguments for and against the bulldozing of London's first Chinatown which was then on that site.

Since its founding in 2002, fu-GEN has produced six major productions, along with a few workshop productions and festival showcases. The six productions include Leon Aureus's *Banana Boys* (2004, 2005, 2009), a coming-of-age drama adapted from a novel by Chinese Canadian writer Terry Woo, Catherine Hernandez's *Singkil*, about a young woman's reconciliation with the spirit of her first-generation immigrant mother, *lady in the red dress* by David Yee, inspired by the Chinese Canadian redress movement, Byron Abalos' *Brown Balls* (2011), exploring Asian Canadian male sexuality and masculinity, a three-writer piece by David Yee, Adrienne Wong and Donald Woo called *Sex Tape Project* (2012), exploring power and sexuality in a mixed race relationship, and *Ching Chong Chinaman* by Lauren Yee (2013), a comical send-up of the American dream through the experience of a Chinese-

American family. In 2014, fu-GEN showcased *The Philly Project*, written and directed by David Yee. Indicating even more experimental departures from fu-GEN's earlier work, the show is described as "bespoke theatre: tailored to the artists and the space they occupy" ("Current Season: The Philly"). As part of its mandate to develop Asian Canadian work, fu-GEN has also helped nurture playwriting talents such as Ins Choi, whose award-winning play *Kim's Convenience* had its genesis in the Kitchen, the company's playwriting unit as well as its Potluck Festival showcasing short new works. Incidentally, Choi has also been cast in both *Banana Boys* and *lady in the red dress*.

Looking at the productions enumerated above, it is clear that YET and fu-GEN have made significant efforts to shape British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre with bold experiments, intimate narratives, and an exploration of the complex nature of ethno-national hybrid relationships. While fu-GEN does indeed emphasize locality and expressions of Canadian identity in its works, various productions also reference East Asianness as an important identity configuration that deserves stage time. Conversely, even though YET seems strongly attached to East Asian, even Orientalist influences, the company has also produced shows that foreground questions about British identity and belonging. Despite Daniel York's take on YET's artistic approaches and Tse's dissatisfaction with Lyn Gardner's critiques as mentioned earlier, the company has also received due recognition when their shows are seen to work. Reviewing *Lear's Daughters* in 2003 for *British Theatre Guide*, claiming to be "the leading independent website on British Theatre," Jackie Fletcher provided, no doubt, welcoming words for the embattled Artistic Director. She writes, "Tse is obviously a director with vision, and he has blown new life into the form. This is a

production that combines the very best of British characterisation, while embracing the visual potential for live theatre that I would recognise as European” (“Rev. of Lear’s”).

For their part, while fu-GEN is generally viewed as artistically innovative, socially critical, and comically irreverent, reviews of their works reveal the subjective nature of theatre critiques. Writing about David Yee’s *lady in the red dress* for Toronto’s *Now Magazine*, Glenn Sumi has declared, “Writer David Yee and director Nina Lee Aquino deserve kudos for taking on a big, important chunk of Canadian history and making it as theatrical as possible without lessening the impact of the subject” (“Day-after reviews: A dress noir”). Full of praise for all elements of the production, the review paints the production as an elegantly constructed, sophisticated piece of theatre and observes that “Director Aquino handles the transitions between past and present, naturalism and fantasy skilfully, never descending into cliché” (“Day-after reviews: A dress noir”). Reviewing the same play for the *Toronto Star*, however, Robert Crew gave the show 1.5 out of 4 stars, stating, “The subject [the history of the Chinese Head Tax and the protracted time it took to get the government to redress the victims] deserves better. This mishmash of a play has all the depth—and some of the gore—of a video game” (“Play has the depth”). The vastly different opinions of fu-GEN’s production on such a vital subject are instructive. Indeed, they bring to mind Tse’s ire at Gardner’s reviews of YET’s work. Should Gardner and Crew be more solicitous in defining the companies’ intentions and judging the work for those merits? Or are theatre reviews, powerful as they might be to influence audience uptake, simply too biased, whether in terms of a reviewer’s personal artistic preferences, idiosyncrasies, or intentions? These differences in opinion reflect, also, the concept of reader-response. YET and fu-GEN might have mandates to guide them and artistic intentions

to present. In the face of different interpretive communities with different horizons of expectations, however, they alone cannot control meaning. The latter is created in the contact between audiences, artists, and the works at hand.

2.5 Shorthand

I began this chapter citing Philip Kan Gotanda, who described the experience of working in Asian American theatre as being like working with family, sharing a cultural shorthand and a history. The differences in YET and fu-GEN's delineations of British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, however, bring to mind the problematic nature of a cultural shorthand, an issue aptly illustrated in a recent literary "scandal" in Canada. In "Asian Canadian Ruptures, Contemporary Scandals" (2014), writer and scholar Larissa Lai recounts the controversy that emerged over "the publication of the novel *Gold Mountain Blues* by Ling Zhang and the subsequent lawsuit launched against her on charges of plagiarism, by three Asian Canadian writers: SKY Lee, Wayson Choy, and Paul Yee" (19). I will not repeat the details of the case, which Lai has described in detail and clarity; suffice to say that for my purposes here, the wording of Zhang's denial of the charge is even more significant than whether she actually did plagiarize the works of the above authors. As Lai explains, Zhang "was born in Hangzhou and has lived in Toronto since 1986," and "so was present for the debates on appropriation that raged through the 1980s and 1990s" (19). From this information she can also be described as an Asian Canadian, albeit an acculturated one, who therefore has an artistic right to express herself from that identity position. When she was accused of plagiarizing the novels of the writers listed above, including Denise Chong,

who did not join the others in the suit, Zhang defended herself by stating that “the plot elements she is accused of plagiarizing belong to a common stock of plot possibilities that emerges from Chinese immigrant history” (Canadian Press, “Authors Sue Gold” par. 10, qtd. in Lai 19). As Lai has cited, Zhang stated to the *National Post*, “A hundred and fifty years of Chinese Canadian history is a ‘common wealth’ for all of us to share and discover” (Medley, “Ling Zhang Addresses”, qtd. in Lai 19). In response to Zhang’s statement, Wayson Choy wrote in the *Globe and Mail* three weeks later, “It has to do with respect for our families who lived through this...I have benefitted from their sacrifices. Their stories are not clichés. They are not common. It’s insulting.... These stories are unique to my family” (Taylor, “Can You Own”, qtd. in Lai 20). In laying claim to the material—personal family stories—from which he drew inspiration for his own work, Choy is making two arguments: that his Asian Canadian identity is sticky with a real past, and that, therefore, outsider writers like Ling Zhang do not have a right to simply appropriate these stories, divorced from their affective contexts, the legacies of real suffering bodies. Seen in Choy’s terms, cultural shorthand could easily slip into accidental theft. While these opposing attitudes toward source materials could be problematic in YET and fu-GEN’s case, their mandates and allegiances to British East Asian and Asian Canadian identities align them with Choy, whose anxieties around personal stories stem from a need to retain a voice long discriminated against. Whereas Zhang profits personally through royalties from the sales of her novel, YET and fu-GEN—charitable, not-for-profit companies—benefit mostly from the recognition of their community and cultural work. Even if individual artists gain personal success, they would still have a history of being part of a larger cause. YET and fu-GEN’s works are fruitful sites from which to discern artistic strategies used to negotiate ethno-national identity. In the following three chapters, I

will analyze three plays from each company's repertoire. As seen from the above descriptions of their mandates, founding impulses and list of works, the two companies invite comparison because they have embarked on remarkably similar trajectories despite their separate socio-cultural contexts and times of germination. While not fully representative of each company's diverse cultural production, the six plays I have selected share thematic and dramatic parallels that constitute, if not quite a kind of "cultural shorthand," the making up of a long needed cultural shortfall. Reading them together helps demonstrate how each company negotiates the ethno-racial and national identifications experienced by their imagined communities. The works are both portraits and political representations, showcasing identity struggles in the intensities afforded by the theatre world.

Chapter Three

Reforming Bodies: *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys*

And you lied to me so much,
about the world, about myself,
that you ended up by imposing on me
an image of myself:
underdeveloped, in your words, undercompetent
that's how you made me see myself!
And I hate that image...and it's false!

– Caliban, *A Tempest*, Aimé Césaire (62)

You told me, you know, that when a child is brought
to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few
weeks, and forgets its own. Well, I am a child in your
country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak
nothing but yours. – Liza, *Pygmalion*, Act 5, Shaw (725)

Since Shakespeare first limned the plight of the morally ambiguous “monster” Caliban, the character—subjugated and denigrated, deservedly or not—has been reinterpreted in a variety of contexts. One of the figure’s most iconic iterations was in 1969 when he became an anticolonial dissident in *A Tempest*, by Martinique poet Aimé Césaire.

Recognised as one of the founders of Negritude, “the first diasporic ‘black pride’ movement” (Kelley vii), Césaire intervened in the Bard’s canonical text, refiguring Caliban into a character of resistance. Rather than chiding Miranda, Prospero’s daughter, who, in Shakespeare’s text, taught him the new language in which to express himself appropriately, in *A Tempest*, Caliban reacts against Prospero who he says “didn’t teach [him] a thing...Except to jabber in [Prospero’s] language so that [Caliban] could understand [his] orders” (Césaire 17). Indeed, as scholars Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins aver through the frame of postcolonial thought, “the entire text occupies a subversive position in relation to language control” (32). The play’s linguistic counter-strategy empowers Caliban to articulate, as in the above epigraph, another concern that also troubles the characters in Yellow Earth’s *Play to Win* and fu-GEN’s *Banana Boys*—that which is encapsulated in the line, “an image of myself”. While the companies’ mandates do not fit cleanly into the traditional boundaries of postcolonial discourse, the ideas of self-image, identification, interpellation and mimicry feature strongly in both companies’ plays, becoming central to the exploration of ethno-national theatre.

This chapter is entitled “reforming bodies” because the two plays in question feature characters who are at odds with their “images of themselves,” and who, through variant journeys, attempt to “reform” their bodies, to inconclusive, deleterious and even fatal ends. The choice of the word “reform”—a more loaded term than “change”—is intentional, because the characters opt to “edit” themselves based on their own sense of displacement and abjection in their worlds. Coming into contact with people who view them as Other, the characters are under the impression that they are somehow inadequate, and that performing a different self might lead to greater acceptance. As I discuss in this chapter, the protagonists

in *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys* suffer major crises whereby their senses of self and identity are shaken. Although elements such as age and gender do contribute to their inner turmoil, the contact between the characters' ethnically marked bodies and their national environments reveals the conflict within ethno-national identity positions. Caught between the abrasive surfaces of alienation and discrimination, the characters are vulnerable due to their skin, upon which is impressed the violent knowledge of their Otherness. The plays test the characters out on various solutions, showing how they resort to deeper changes within in their attempts to unstick the consequences of their hybrid ethno-national identities. As they reform their bodies according to what they think should be the "correct" behaviour to ensure maximum acceptance, they encounter internal, external, and even infernal forces that wreak havoc on their minds, bodies, and ultimately, mindsets. While some scholars have found problematic the analytical approach that views theatre as a mirror to society and, therefore, seemingly representative of "real" lives, playwrights and artists are often inspired by what they consciously experience or have observed, bringing echoes and traces of these elements into their artistic works. The characters' efforts parallel, in some ways, the struggles of British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre-makers, who also have to adjust, test, and experiment with how to create their specific "ethno-national" work, and then gain acceptance in the wider national theatrical community. These two plays remind us of the constructedness of identities, and the high stakes involved when these very identities become fixed and taken as a measure of one's worth. They also question the efficacy of cultural assimilation as a solution for socio-cultural acceptance, suggesting that there are ramifications to these changes.

3.1 David Tse's *Play to Win*

Premiering in 2000, David Tse's *Play to Win* was “commissioned by Sainsbury's Checkout Theatre—an initiative to encourage quality new theatre for the 10 – 14 age group” (“Productions: Play to Win”). The company's fifth production after its initial founding in 1995, the play gave Yellow Earth Theatre some recognition and provided a platform to showcase the Wu-Shu (Martial Arts as competitive sport) skills of Tom Wu, one of the five founding members of YET who also served as the company's movement coach during his tenure. The play used six actors in eighteen roles. Aimed at a teenage audience, some of the characters are also young, ranging from twelve to sixteen years of age. The plot revolves around Paul de la Cruz, a teenager experiencing not just the difficulties of growing up but also of fitting into a socio-cultural environment that marks him out as different because of his “East Asian” looks. The only son to Romel and Lourdes, first generation immigrants from the Philippines, Paul bears the additional burden of his parents' hopes of success in their new national home.

The play shows, however, that this game of life is tough to win. Given their own struggles with working long hours for low wages, Romel and Lourdes fetishize “education” for Paul, and are unable to recognize that his school environment is toxic with bullying underpinned by racial prejudice, and that school authorities have failed to protect their son. Faced with daily beatings, the loss of his lunch money, and regular humiliation, Paul dreams of fitting in and pressures his parents to buy him new games and gadgets, thinking that these status symbols would immunize him from abuse. He also finds escapist solace in his martial

arts video game, which allows him to pit various “warriors” representative of different martial arts forms against each other.

One day, enduring another set of beatings, he is rescued by the arrival of the “Black Snake Triad,” a gang of three older boys in school, whose mere presence scares off Paul’s bullies. Impressed and grateful, Paul is quickly drawn to the gang’s performance of power and plays truant with them, roaming around Chinatown and proving his “worthiness” by stealing a new mobile phone. Sharing the same ethnicity as the leader of the gang, Paul is anxious to join the gang and is soon initiated. Things escalate, however, when Paul is questioned by the principal who tells Paul that his new friends had tried to sell drugs to a young student. When Lourdes is informed, she is deeply upset, and reacts violently. Beating Paul, screaming at him, and dragging him to church to repent, Lourdes is injured when a desperate Paul whips out his butterfly knife—a gang initiation present—and slashes her arm.

Filled with guilt and at a loss, Paul runs away to the arcade to dive into his game. In doing so, Paul finds himself falling through the game console into the world that his martial arts game characters inhabit. Face to face with the warriors, Paul brashly attempts to “fight” with his least favourite character using the superficial moves he had picked up from television, although he is quickly defeated. Paul is then made to go through a training regime with the other warriors and the master (*sifu*) who teach him patience, hard work, and true disciplining of the body. Having learnt the other meaning behind “kung fu,” Paul returns to his world where he easily disarms his old gang when they threaten a fight, calming them down instead by teaching them his new skills. The play ends unresolved, with Lourdes and Romel coming to get Paul away from the gang, and Paul planting himself between his parents and the other three boys. In this way, it is up to him to choose his path rather than be

a passive participant in the game of life. Having played both the martial arts video game and an involved role in the “Shaolin” wonderland, Paul has found a possible way forward toward reconciling his self-identity issues and the world he finds himself in.

3.2 Leon Aureus’ *Banana Boys*

The impulses and desires for self-reinvention are common. People fashion themselves into a particular image, or present a particular self in different situations according to what is deemed apposite. Just as Paul sought initially to re-fashion himself with material possessions to be accepted by his peers, but learned by the end of the play to focus on his own skills acquired through discipline and hard work, the characters in Leon Aureus’ *Banana Boys* start off with a sense of emptiness in their lives, all of them yearning for wholeness but not quite recognising what they need. In one character’s case, he actually “lacks life” since he is actually “dead”. Set in twenty-first century Toronto, the play’s episodic structure follows the trials and tribulations of five male friends in their twenties, thereby touching upon issues that seem quite different from the teenage Paul’s in *Play to Win*. Ultimately, however, the characters share the same desires and conflicts around determining self-image and the performance of self in ways that would bring happiness. Commissioned, developed and workshopped in 2002 by fu-GEN Theatre, the play premiered in 2004 and was subsequently remounted in 2005. Although the company had delivered other play-readings before this, *Banana Boys* was its first full professional production. In the context of the company’s mandate to showcase more Asian Canadian work, the play represents, if not a manifesto, then a statement of the company’s branding and tone. One of the founding members of fu-

GEN, Leon Aureus took on the role of playwright as well as multimedia co-designer. He adapted *Banana Boys* from a novel of the same name by writer Terry Woo, and the play was revised several times over the course of its various runs. This study is based on the published text in *Love + Relationships* Volume 2.

Rather than having one clear protagonist, the play features five characters who, as the play's title indicates, are "banana boys". One of a range of vivid icons used to index the fraught identity issues of later immigrant generations, the banana, along with the coconut and apple, has been used colloquially to refer to East Asians, South Asians, and First Nations people who are of a certain "colour" in external appearance, but who identify with values and behaviours seen to be part of the normative "white" population. Conflicts of identity usually arise because 1.5- or 2nd generation immigrants have assimilated the culture of their new national home, but are nonetheless seen to be outsiders due to their ethnicity. This is compounded with the feeling that they do not belong in their original "homeland" either, because they have not grown up in that socio-cultural environment. According to Tseen-ling Khoo, in her book *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures* (2002), "the judgement implicit in deeming someone 'yellow on the outside, white on the inside' indicates a reductionist attitude to issues of culture, community, and race" (1). At the same time, she welcomes "the complex, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory narratives of identity the term 'banana' conjures" (1). With bloggers, writers and critics "claiming and flaunting the 'banana' tag," Khoo explains that the term "encapsulates the specific concerns of communities in diaspora and operates as both defiance and recuperation" (1). Her usage of the term applies to "hybridised Asian identities in the West, rather than specific reference to mixed-race origins, which is sometimes how the term is used" (1). In Aureus' play, the boys

self-identify as “banana boys,” although their different personalities complicate the meaning of the group label, so that there is no unified, stable association with the term except in so far as it raises issues of race and gender, factors that bring the boys together in solidarity. Indeed, in claiming and flaunting the tag, the boys perceive their experiences through a conceptual framework that helps them to make sense of the dissatisfaction in their lives. Throughout the play, the boys come up against forces that threaten the comfort they receive from identifying with the label. The five characters, Rick Wong, Mike Chao, Dave Lowe, Luke Yeung, and Sheldon Kwan (in order of appearance), represent different facets, even archetypes, that at once constitute and trouble the notion of “banana boys”.

The play itself begins on a macabre note with Rick Wong’s funeral, during which the character emerges from his coffin and speaks to the audience, commenting on the various mourners, including his family, numerous ex-girlfriends and sexual conquests. Intermittently coughing up blood and talking about “mindshifting into the future,” Rick claims to “see things before they happen” due to a “combination of sheer willpower, mental conditioning and God-given talent”, supplemented with “drugs and alcohol” (Aureus 203). When he realises that his friends are not there, and that they do not find out about his “perfectly executed plans for World Domination” (Aureus 204), he seeks to change things, leading to the introduction of the other “banana boys”.

Rather than deeply developed characters, the four other banana boys represent different facets of the identity position, suggesting that the conflict between their external appearance and internal selves is to blame for their failures at love, work, and life. The play intersperses scenes that work as gradual character exposition and that reveal the friendship dynamics in the group. Full of jumps in time and space, the plot revolves principally around

the rise and downfall of Rick, who, through an extreme personal makeover, “branches out” from the stigma of the “banana boy” position. In contrast to Rick’s trajectory, the other “boys”—all enduring various states of misery—represent what the former tries to escape from. Rick’s method of self-transformation—he learns to speak and behave like an “authentic” Chinese person—references a common perception amongst people with hybrid identities—that wholeness is necessary for success.

The specific concept of wholeness is further tied to the idea that East Asians who appear “foreign” and therefore “authentic” are more successful than people who look ethnically other but identify more with the normatively white national culture. In the play, Rick quickly rises to the top of the career ladder ostensibly due to his adoption of a thick Chinese accent and other forms of behaviour that mark him as authentically “Chinese” rather than a hybrid “banana boy”. However, Rick’s behavioural transformations into a “fresh-off-the-boat” (F.O.B) Chinese person with clearly marked foreign characteristics soon lead to deeper changes within that wreak havoc on his mental state and physical health. He begins to hallucinate, thinking he is being stalked and haunted by a vampiric presence named “Ching-Shih” (Aureus 214). Having fallen out with his friends after a huge argument in which they all turn against one another, Rick dies alone in his apartment, fighting his demons before being stabbed in the heart with a broken mirror shard. Rick’s mysterious death leads to his friends’ interrogation and soul-searching. Continuing with the “mindshifting” despite his death, Rick visits Mike, his best friend amongst the “boys,” and challenges him to create changes in his life so that he can attain happiness. In the end, Rick becomes a martyr whose death and attempts to escape the misery of being a “banana” inspire his friends to seize control and agency over their own lives. Leaving Toronto for the first time, Dave and

Sheldon head for Hong Kong and Luke goes to Vancouver. Mike stays in Toronto but finally takes courage to follow his true passion as a writer. Although these are not necessarily adequate solutions, they push the “boys” out of their comfort zones and, more importantly, out of their entrenched sense of victimhood tied to their identities. In this way, both *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys* suggest the need for people with hybrid identities to move away from self-victimization so as to find alternative routes to life, success and happiness.

3.3 Troubled Bodies

It is this perceived intrusion of something other within
the body that creates the desire to re-establish the border,
to push out the pain, or the (imagined, material) object we
feel is the ‘cause’ of the pain. Pain involves the violation or
transgression of the border between inside and outside, and
it is through this transgression that I feel the border in the
first place. (Ahmed 27)

In these two early plays by Yellow Earth and fu-GEN, characters are pushed to reform themselves because they are in pain. As Sara Ahmed reminds us, “life experience involves multiple collisions with objects and others” (26). She suggests that “it is through such collisions that [she] form[s] a sense of [her]self as (more or less) apart from others, as well as a sense of the surfaces of [her] body” (26). In their daily lives, Paul, Rick, and the other “banana boys” collide with a society that alienates them, bringing to clarity the visibility of their ethnicities and the vulnerability of their bodies. In Paul’s case, he is

violated by the bullies at school who beat him up and steal his lunch money, thereby causing bodily pain and mental anguish. This pain is shown explicitly as the play opens. Curled up on the ground, Paul endures a vicious kicking attack by two bullies, to the strains of Carl Douglas' song, *Kung Fu Fighting*. Donning blonde wigs and school uniforms, the bullies, Rachel and Peter, explicitly represent the racial dimensions of the violent exchange. Additionally, in an interesting staging occurrence through role doubling, the actors playing Lourdes and Romel also play the two bullies.

The conflation of Paul's parents and his bullies onto the same two bodies creates an interpretive layering that connects Paul's parents to the violence he encounters on a daily basis. Indeed, as also seen in the character of Mike in *Banana Boys*, first generation immigrant parents usually pressure their children to work hard, with the assumption that their lives would be better. Implicit in that drive is also the need to validate their decision to immigrate so as to achieve a better life. In Aureus' play, Mike, Rick's best friend, embodies the struggle of a second-generation child of parents who had immigrated to Canada. Despite his own wishes and wants, Mike is pressured by his mother to be "well-educated," and to work towards one of only four "acceptable" career options: "A) A Doctor, B) A Lawyer, C) A Businessman, D) An Engineer" (Aureus 230). In a fantastical scene in the play, Mike finds himself in a game show, where his mother emerges and, donning "an inflatable rubber sumo suit," beats him up for wanting to be a writer. Echoing the violent role that Paul's parents play in his life, however unintentionally, Mike's mother "runs at him and butts him with her sumo belly," "puts him in a full nelson," "gives him a belly splash," (Aureus 231) and finally "sits atop him" in order to get him to submit to her wishes. She couches this treatment of her son in terms of love, telling him, "We love you, Mikoh [the pronunciation of "Michael" with

a Cantonese accent]. You thank us later” (Aureus 232). Throughout the play, Mike is seen studying to be a doctor in order to please his mother, suppressing his true passion. He is physically and mentally affected, however, by this denial of his inner drive. Thus, he suffers from “mental white noise” (Aureus 205), nightmares, and a pervasive sense of unhappiness.

This sense of unhappiness weaves through the lives of the characters in both plays, with the implication that their “otherness” has set them up to fail. Illustrating another facet of being a “banana boy,” Dave is a computer engineer who fails at happiness because he looks for and sometimes imagines threats to himself because of his ethnicity. Although it is established in the play that he was badly bullied in school—much like the daily beatings that Paul undergoes in *Yellow Earth*’s production—Dave’s pre-emptive attitude towards racial prejudice borders dangerously on criminal injury to others and the invitation of violence to himself. While the play shows scenarios where his behaviour seems justified—he tries to defend an older Chinese lady’s honour when a store clerk mocks her heavily accented English—his behaviour escalates throughout the play and he strikes out even when there is no cause to. As one of the “boys,” Dave represents the feeling of being lost due to his identity. During a scene in a store, Dave sees the older Chinese lady get mocked by a white store clerk because she pronounced the word “vegetable” with a heavy Cantonese accent when asking him for directions. Dave tries to assist her by using Cantonese to point her to the correct location. Instead of receiving thanks for his attempt to defend her honour, the lady criticizes him for his poor Cantonese skills, implying that he is not properly “Chinese”. Later in the play, Dave discovers that his girlfriend Jeannette has been cheating on him with an ex-boyfriend who happens to be white and who owns a Harley Davidson motorcycle, thus

dramatizing a common trope that positions the “banana boy” at a disadvantage when it comes to relationship success.

This example is taken further in the figure of Sheldon, whom Mike labels “The Romantic” of the group (Aureus 269). Whereas Dave fails at love in comparison to the image of the white, masculine man, Sheldon loses out as a “banana boy” when compared to East Asians who still identify with East Asian homelands. Audiences’ first introduction to Sheldon shows him as a hopeless romantic. Clearly infatuated with a girl, Kathy, who apparently has his number, Sheldon is seen having a conversation with his cell phone, reasoning and pleading with it to make sure Kathy’s calls come through. As he says, he is even sitting in the bathtub because that is where he gets the best reception. Although his love interest does call at the end of the scene, Sheldon’s subsequent scenes indicate that the relationship—a long distance one—has become one-sided, with him making all the effort at contacting her. Failing to speak to Kathy on the phone despite calling numerous times, Sheldon is in denial about the relationship and continues to leave voice messages. He even goes so far as to find the number of Kathy’s ex-boyfriend, whom he calls—disguising himself as a newspaper marketer—to find out if she has been seeing him again. As is evident from his conversation with Rui Wan, Kathy’s ex-boyfriend, she has been staying over. The “Chineseness” explicit in Sheldon’s love rival’s name serves to illustrate the abjectness of the “banana boy” position, where they lose in love because of their identity.

Explained in more detail in another scene, which likens the characters’ relationship issues to a battlefield, this scene shows the characters in combat, but they are already at a disadvantage. Whereas “white guys” are “at the top of the sociological ladder” and, as Dave explains, would “intersect with anything [women of different ethnicities]” in a Venn diagram

of heterosexual relationships, the four characters feel as if they are at the bottom and undesired by anyone (Aureus 225). The scene also points to Sheldon's case, suggesting he has lost Kathy to a "FOB" (Aureus 225). Traditionally a derogatory term, the acronym stands for "fresh-off-the-boat," used to describe and label newly arrived immigrants who still retain strong cultural ties to their homeland. In the same scene, Dave refers to the "banana boys" ethnically contiguous love rivals as "Orientals". Still on the Venn diagram example, he explains that the circles for "FOBs" are "mostly HK [Hong Kong] FOBs but you can stack in Taiwanese and Koreans in there..." (Aureus 225). According to him, "they are an island to themselves" (Aureus 225). He also associates them with materialistic impulses, saying, "the chicks want a guy with a nice car and lots of money and the guys want someone who'll match the upholstery of their souped-up Integra" (Aureus 225). In this way, both Dave, whom Mike deems "The Cynic," and his polar opposite, the vulnerable Sheldon, conflate their failure in love with their unwhole hybrid identities.

Along the same lines of non-fulfilment, Luke, "The Lost Soul" of the group (Aureus 269), embodies in some ways the larger sense of despair within the "banana boys". Despite being a talented music disc jockey and radio host, his inner demons lead him to sabotage his own career and potential for happiness. Indecisive and noncommittal, Luke gets himself fired from a radio programme, but is thereafter unwilling to commit to a new job that will provide him with financial security. His indecisiveness is dramatized to extremes in a scene where he is in a store trying to purchase a chocolate bar. Changing his mind four times, he eventually leaves without buying anything. This inability to finish things also extends to his studies, with him telling his friends that he is dropping out of his psychology course at university.

Veering away from the perceived failure of his friends and fellow “banana boys,” Rick instead revamps himself by taking on the guise of a FOB, who the play suggests is often more successful than their counterparts who look “East Asian” but who do not have the “correct” cultural identity because they are acculturated in the West. In one of the many expository scenes showing Rick’s life while he was alive, he is seen receiving a promotion at work, successfully climbing up the career ladder at a young age. Rather than speak with his own Canadian accent, he does so with “a mildly affected FOB [fresh-off-the-boat accent]” (Aureus 208). He takes this even further later when he is seen learning from a Berlitz tape for the made-up language, “FOB Today!” as he goes through his morning workout regimen (Aureus 237). Seemingly tailored for “banana boys” who want to shuck off their own identities, the voice on the tape promises to aid Rick in his transformation into a successful person, something his friends are not. Whereas FOBs have a solid core of identity and are therefore fulfilled, Canadian-born Chinese “banana boys” fail because they are hollow inside. The tape even insinuates that Rick’s friends are holding him back (Aureus 239). In guiding him to fill in his core with dreams of material wealth and to change his external appearance, the tape leads Rick to a more grotesque transformation than he imagined. The more he recreates himself and amasses things such as a penthouse suite and a suit that costs two thousand dollars (Aureus 261), the more he loses himself. Seemingly a metaphor for his literal “revamping,” Rick is first haunted by a vampiric figure before becoming akin to one as he descends from his career ladder. Paralleling the theme of gaming and life in Yellow Earth’s *Play to Win*, Rick’s preoccupation with success and financial glory is also reminiscent of Paul’s desires for status symbols. Although different in age, both Rick and Paul equate the outward appearance of wealth and success with wider social acceptance. As

seen in Rick's eventual death and Paul's lesson in life from the fantastical martial arts game wonderland, however, it takes more than superficial signs of success for a person to be fulfilled.

3.4 Dramatic Themes—Bodily Reform through Kung Fu and Revamping

In both Yellow Earth's *Play to Win* and fu-GEN's *Banana Boys*, the characters collide with a social environment that reveals to them their vulnerability. Seen as unwhole, hollow, and unacceptable, the characters perceive themselves as victims of their birth or their parents' decision to immigrate. The stickiness of failure and disappointment adds to their personal burdens. Exploring a fundamentally similar issue of alienation and referring to life as a game, the plays utilize two bodily centred themes—martial arts and body revamping respectively—to highlight their characters' attempts to be accepted in their worlds.

As described earlier, *Play to Win* begins with Paul suffering a kicking frenzy meted out by his bullies to the lively strains of Carl Douglas' ubiquitous hit song, "Kung Fu Fighting". The use of such an iconic song evokes the political and cultural significance of "kung fu" to East Asian culture and the western perceptions of it as a cultural signifier. Indeed, the song lays the foundation for its incorporation into the play as one of the modes through which Paul modifies his "self". According to Stephen Teo, "though 'kung fu' is generically used today to denote the martial arts, its literal meaning is the level of skill and finesse of technique that one has attained in any endeavour, not just the martial arts" (4). Additionally, the idea of "kung fu" as "martial arts" is complicated by the different styles of fighting and self-defence practised in Chinese culture. Writing the first major

historiographical study of *Wuxia* (Chinese sword-play martial arts) films in 2009, Teo explains that “*wuxia* and *kung fu*...are two intersecting cinematic genres which for all their similarities have separate specificities...between their fighting styles” (4). The latter genre emerged out of the former, and where “a cult of the sword is associated with the *wuxia* figure,” ‘kung fu’ (or *gongfu*, in Pinyin, a romanization system for Mandarin) often refers to the “use of other weapons (such as the staff or long pole) and ...the art of fist-fighting or boxing” (4). As a filmic genre that emerged out of Hong Kong during the 1950s, tied especially to famous martial artists-cum-movie stars such as Jet Li and Bruce Lee, “the emphasis of the kung fu film is on the martial arts while the emphasis of the *wuxia* film [associated with Mainland China] is chivalry and the pursuit of righteousness” (4). Teo elaborates, “the hero in kung fu films can and often does display the same dedication to chivalry and the pursuit of righteousness as the sword-wielding, knight-errant, [his analogical term for the Chinese *wuxia*] though their fighting traditions hail from different schools, namely Wudang and Shaolin” (4). The term therefore encompasses not just a filmic genre and the notion of generally bladeless martial arts, but also a personal standard of achievement in that “kung fu emphasizes skill achievable through training and practice, as denoted in the word ‘kung’ (*gong*, meaning achievement or merit)” (4).

In the context of *Play to Win*, Paul is seen to have superficial access to martial arts through television and video games. Usually associated with physical agility, power, and moral righteousness when practised with good intentions, kung fu is an enticing activity for the victimized Paul to emulate. Following the abusive episode at the beginning of the play, audiences see him back in his home, a council flat that he shares with his parents. The “cheap sofa, Filipino wall hanging and statue of Virgin Mary” act as signs that index to audiences

the de la Cruz family's financial situation, ethnic background, and religious affiliations. With his nose bleeding from the earlier incident, Paul cleans himself up, and watches a video documentary on the Shaolin temple. Foreshadowing his gradual loss of faith throughout the play, he "looks at [the] Virgin Mary" statue and "crosses himself" but then retorts, "Where were you today?" (3) Despite the pain from his injuries, he throws himself into a series of sit-ups and press-ups to loud music. Showing the lack of privacy in his lodgings, the music is loud enough to disturb his neighbour whose complaint can be heard through the wall. Paul turns the music off and switches on his video game, the eponymous "Play to Win". As he does so, the phrase "Who do YOU want to BE?" is projected onto the screen, along with the images of four choices of "warriors"—Jet, Bruce, Lec Tsai and Wing Chun. Paul "selects" Jet, whose image flashes, and he proceeds to "play".

In performance, Paul's gaming sequence employs interactive graphics. For example, the four game characters are initially projected onto a screen and Paul simulates punching a red button which then turns green when he "press[es] Start to Play" (3). In addition, the physical action onstage takes the form of a martial arts choreography in which Tom Wu, as Paul, engages in combat with a series of animated warriors projected onto panels that make up the set's walls. Rather than be external to the game, Paul "becomes" his selected warrior character through a stage direction that indicates, he "spins like [a] whirling dervish" against "club-like [light] projections" which flash on the floor and around other surfaces. In his script, Tse states that "Kurogos"—stage hands such as the "shadow spirits" in Kabuki Theatre—are to "transform [Paul] into Jet" through a costume adjustment. Escaping into the identity of his martial artist idol, Paul "fights" with two opponents on the screen, punching, blocking blows and kicking the pre-recorded almost life-sized moving characters, who are

suggestive of his school bullies. He wins the fight, but as he turns off the game and the Kurogos remove his Jet costume, Paul realizes he is back in the real world. His neighbour bangs on the wall and a baby's screams are heard. Against these sounds, "Paul sits, foetal-like, covers his ears, [and] gently cries" (3).

This escapist gaming scene frames the actor's body in a specific context of exertion and artistry. Invoking cultural references that are at once familiar and unfamiliar, this scene draws on the broad signifier of kung fu that stands for a range of essentialist images—glistening, muscular male bodies in various poses indicating mid-air kicks, punches, and body blocks. Indeed, the term kung fu has become a visual, even aural and oral signifier of the East. As encapsulated in the lyrics in Carl Douglas' hit song that opened the play, there seems to be an entrenched belief that kung fu fighting is "an ancient Chinese art" and that "everybody [Chinese] knew their part" (Douglas and Appaiah). Described as "cats [that] were fast as lightning," "funky China men from funky Chinatown" were nonetheless "a little bit frightening" as "they were chopping them up and ... chopping them down" (Douglas and Appaiah). The imagery from this song, first released in 1974, was influenced in large part by the steady flow of Chinese martial arts films into the western consumer market, in particular, Bruce Lee's work. The song also features a series of battle cries and an easily recognizable 9-note "Oriental" pentatonic music phrase that is a common trope used to index Asianness.²³ These elements reflect the wider promulgation of kung fu as an "Asian practice," with stereotypical shorthand gestures that belie the complexities of its mastery and also the broader conception of martial arts as a whole. Along these lines, D.S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge remind us that "martial arts, meaning the things done to make the study of

²³ Although its origins are unclear, this musical riff has been linked to the "Aladdin Quick Step" score in the 1847 stage show, *The Grand Chinese Spectacle of Aladdin or The Wonderful Lamp*.

fighting appear refined enough to survive elite social prohibitions, has never been exclusively an Asian matter, but martial arts discourse, meaning the expectations that help order the texts and images of martial bodily training and its entourage of cultural side effects, remains predominantly projected onto the Asian body” (2). Accordingly, *Play to Win*’s references to the form are seen in the bodies of Jet Li and Bruce Lee, identifiable by only their first names in Paul’s game.

Although he has starred in several Hollywood films since 1998, Jet Li first became noted for his roles in a trilogy of films based on the legends of the Shaolin Temple in the 1980s, and also for his portrayal of folk hero Wong Fei-hung in the film series *Once Upon a Time in China* in the 1990s, directed by Tsui Hark. Bruce Lee, on the other hand, is probably the most iconic figure of kung fu in the western imaginary.²⁴ As Teo recounts, Lee was born in San Francisco in 1940, but moved several times between the United States and Hong Kong throughout his career. Occupying an in-betweenness in his identity as a Chinese American, Lee taught himself martial arts and also “invented his own technique of Jeet Kune Do (the art of the Intercepting Fist) which he modified from the Wing Chun tradition [a form of martial art that utilizes quick, precise, forceful punches]” (Teo 75). Disillusioned with a Hollywood industry that could not picture an Asian as a screen hero, Lee returned to Hong Kong where he made four films that ensured his fame.²⁵ These two figures are, therefore, key

²⁴ As UBC Classics professor, Dr C.W. Marshall reminds me, however, Hong Kong actor and martial artist Jackie Chan could arguably be the more identifiable figure for younger people today especially since his ventures into Hollywood films such as *Rush Hour* (1998), *Rush Hour 2* (2001), *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Shanghai Knights* (2003).

²⁵ According to Stephen Teo, these were *Tangshan daxiong* (*The Big Boss*, 1971), *Jingwu men* (*Fist of Fury*, 1972), *Menglong quojiang* (*The Way of the Dragon*, 1972), and *Longzheng hudou* (*Enter the Dragon*, 1973). (75) The Hong Kong company Golden Harvest produced these films. The last of the films, *Enter the Dragon*, was co-produced with Concord, Bruce Lee’s own company, and Hollywood’s Warner Bros. studios. It was the first Chinese martial arts film to be produced by Hollywood.

referents for audiences with some knowledge of the genre of kung fu films that emerged out of the Hong Kong-based Golden Harvest production company. Even for audiences unfamiliar with the specific kung fu stars, Chinese martial arts and the figure of physical fighting prowess have ghosted the public imaginary for a long time. In picking Jet, Paul chooses to identify with a figure that is both a real life actor and martial artist. His adolescent identification with “Jet” also invokes ideas of celebrity idolisation, whereby cultural icons are perceived as role models for fans that buy into their public persona and crafted life narratives. Feeling victimised on account of his ethnicity and his inability to measure up to an acceptable norm, Paul relies on gaming whereby he can, by proxy, defeat his enemies from real life—a fantasized, defensive *Vertretung*. The actor’s embodiment of “Jet” after Paul’s selection indicates a flight of fantasy whereby Paul imagines that if he were in Jet’s body, he could be invincible. At the same time, the end of the game, which brings him back to reality, shows him that such dreams of self-fashioning after an idol are not enough to protect him in the real world. Primarily aimed at teenagers, *Play to Win* aims at dramatizing more complex themes such as the threat of violence—physical, psychological and emotional—that they sometimes face in their formative years, along with the complicated experience of being in-between cultures. While kung fu as a martial art can be perceived as a beautiful corporeal form that elicits bodily mastery and discipline from its practitioners, it also has historical associations with violence. Depending on the user’s philosophy and ethics, self-defense and attack can be two sides of the same coin.

As mentioned earlier, the pressure that first generation parents place on their children has become a trope for ethno-national drama. Just as Mike’s mother is willing to don a sumo suit and beat her son into submission in *Banana Boys*, because she believes that pushing him

towards a career in medicine is for his own good, Lourdes and Romel also have high hopes for Paul in *Play to Win*. In Paul's case, his family's immigrant background adds another layer to the trials of growing up. These tribulations unfold as audiences are introduced to Paul's parents, Lourdes and Romel. Following the scene described earlier, in that same evening, Lourdes has been watching television while waiting for her husband to return. When he does, she sighs, indicating how late it is, and she serves him some soup. They talk in the Filipino language, Tagalog, while subtitles of their dialogue are projected. Their conversation reveals that it is past midnight, and he had to stay late to clean the kitchen of a hotel "extra well" because there is a health and safety check the next day. As they converse, Paul enters in his pyjamas and switches between talking to the audience in several asides and to his parents in the scene. It emerges that he has been asking his parents for new trainers, a new computer game and a mobile phone. Although it appears that Lourdes and Romel have been providing for him as best they could, Paul's youth, his lack of knowledge of the value of money, and his issues around maintaining a particular self-image—so that he will not be pegged as a "tramp" and a "loser" at school (4)—cause him to have an argument with his parents. Working at a salary of only "£3.50 an hour" (5), Romel had promised Paul that he might get him a mobile phone if he received a pay rise and if his son studied hard. However, the pay rise did not come through and Paul judges his own father harshly, telling the audience, "Dad lets everyone walk all over him. No respect" (5). As their argument escalates, Paul reveals that his lunch money had been stolen by those bullies at the start of the play. His parents express shock since they had previously spoken to a teacher about dealing with this. When Romel chides his son for not standing up for himself, Paul reveals that he tried, and

that is why the bullies kicked him. Lourdes follows him as he exits, and Romel sits, shocked at the revelation.

As presented in this scene, Paul's parents try their best to address his concerns, but their efforts are limited by their financial situation and cultural alienation. None of the characters are blameless, however—all are suffering under the strain of their circumstances. The scene serves to lay out explicitly the differences between Paul's world view and his parents'. While clearly childish, Paul's demands for material possessions reflect his entrenched belief in them as badges of normality. He seeks these things because, to him, they constitute armour in the battlefield of socio-cultural belonging. Just as Rick sought to disguise himself as a FOB to be successful in *Banana Boys*, Paul is invested in the idea of possessions, unable to see that the bullies might come after him anyway. In doing so, he measures his self-esteem against the standards of his peers rather than those of his family. At the same time, Paul's parents occupy a difficult role: as protectors who fail to adequately protect, and as providers having to negotiate the fine line between inculcating good values in their child and providing Paul with possessions that would allow him to blend in materially in a capitalist world—a need rendered even more desperate given his sense of being a visibly ethnic outsider.

As adults who do not quite understand his world, Paul's parents are grouped together with the other “adults” (and their attendant institutional associations) in the play who fail to protect Paul from violence. The teacher, Mr. Stacey, thought he had “dealt with [the bullying] months ago” (20) and had not realized that it continued unabated. In addition, Paul feels let down by religion, in spite of his mother's staunch beliefs, fervent faith and regular churchgoing. Despite his prayers, Paul continues to suffer kicks and blows in school. In this

way, even though Paul's child-like demands seem unreasonable, the family, school and religious systems around him are also shown to have failed in ensuring the safety and happiness of a child in their care. These failures are also submitted as reasons for Paul's fast attachment to a school gang called the "Black Snake Triad" (9) when they rescue him one day from his two bullies. With his bullies running away at the sight of the gang, Paul is suitably impressed with its three members—code-named Anaconda, Python and Cobra. The leader, Anaconda, is also of a Filipino background and Paul is drawn to him as a fraternal protector with whom he shares an ethnic bond. Played by a black actor and an Asian actor respectively, Cobra and Python are noted to be older, but follow Anaconda's commands. To the vulnerable Paul, the three gang members are the epitome of what he wants to be: fearless, aggressive, and owning the very types of possessions he would like, such as a mobile phone. In stylized sequences—choreographed as group movement, like a smaller version of a Greek chorus, the actors move and mingle in the space, sometimes crowding around Wu, who plays Paul, sometimes playing off his isolated figure, and sometimes moving so that they all blend in like a "shoal of fish"—Paul takes off with the gang, playing truant, and feeling free for the very first time. The danger of his association with them, however, emerges when they go to an arcade, and leave him while they go into a poolroom where it is hinted that they are conducting an illegal transaction of drugs and money (12). Despite his misgivings at being complicit in the others' mysterious criminal dealings, Paul is pleased with his new friends as he feels included and empowered, and even prays for them when he next goes to church. Lighting a candle for them at the statue of Mary, he asks her to "look out for them" (13). Paul's fast attachment to the gang also echoes the close bond shared among the "banana boys" in fu-GEN's play. Made up of three non-White members, the constitution of the

“Black Snake Triad” suggests the strategy of gaining power in numbers, and further recalls Yen Le Espiritu’s study on coalitionist groupings in Asian American theatre earlier mentioned in the introduction. On their part, sometimes victims of their own making, the “banana boys” find solace in their shared identity, using their “Canadian-born Chinese” identity as a crutch.

Things begin to escalate for Paul, however, when he insists on properly becoming one of the gang members. Encountering the gang leader Anaconda who is also at the church with his mother, Paul asks to be allowed to join the gang. Anaconda informs him that he will have to “nick something” (14). Excited about the prospect of stealing the mobile phone he had wanted for so long, Paul blows out the candle he had lit, symbolically blowing out the faith he had, entering instead into gang membership and its simmering undercurrents of danger. Paul’s descent into this phase sees him successfully stealing a Nokia mobile phone, which gains him entry into the gang through an arbitrary ceremony. Using a crude initiation ritual, the gang brands his arm with a lit cigarette, and gives him the code name, “Grass Snake”. He also receives a butterfly knife, his personal weapon to exert further violence, both symbolic and literal, on others. The moniker of “Grass Snake” is significant, given that when he first meets the gang, he was told that they do not “grass” on each other. Indeed, Paul does not actually inform on any of the gang, but his path intertwines with theirs so that he eventually learns a life lesson.

Shortly after his successful membership, Paul is hauled to Mr. Stacey’s office and asked to tell on the gang members who had apparently been caught selling drugs to an eleven-year old. They have been expelled and are being investigated by the police. Even though Paul denies his involvement with them, his mother Lourdes has had her suspicions

and drags him forcefully to the church, accusing him of being involved in gangs, drugs and stealing. Gravely upset, she (over)reacts in a violent way, slapping him and screaming at how she did not work so hard just so she could raise a criminal. Unlike the fantastical scene where Mike's mother beats him in her sumo suit, Lourdes actually does hit her son for disappointing her. She forces him to kneel and confess his involvement, and also forbids Paul from seeing the gang again. As proof of how much of an affective hold the gang has on him, Paul reacts defensively to his mother's command, whips out his butterfly knife and starts slashing wildly, cutting Lourdes' arm in the process. Throughout the altercation, the priest stands over them, trying to calm both parties, but once again fails to help resolve the situation or even prevent violence.

Upset at what he has done, Paul runs off to the arcade where he finds himself alone. In desperation, he escapes once again into his favourite "Play to Win" game. Instead of the usual set-up, however, the number of his opponents has increased to include his two unarmed bullies, three unarmed warriors from the game, Mr. Stacey (armed with a long stick), the priest (armed with a chain), Paul's father (armed with a long stick) and his mother (armed with a sword). As before, the gaming sequence employs double-casting, leading to various interpretive possibilities. In this case, treading again in the shoes of game character Jet, Paul defeats all the other pedagogic authorities. Further, the game characters' weapons are interesting when read through the framework of Stephen Teo's study on martial arts films. As cited earlier, Teo notes that a basic differentiation between wuxia films, a tradition that began in China in the 1920s, and the kung fu films that emerged out of Hong Kong in the 1950s, is the former's use of the blade in the form of swords. He further explains that wuxia films have often been seen as more historical or mythical, even fantastical, in their use of

period costumes, special effects such as the warriors' flights through the air, and their inclusion of supernatural elements. In contrast, while still mediated through the editing of film as a medium, kung fu films come across as a more realist genre. The often bare-handed fighting styles of the kung fu film's heroes and the focus on strenuous training regimes impart a sense of realism and pragmatism to the works. At the same time, there has also been a tradition of the female knight-errant, a sword-wielding beauty who threatens to disturb the highly exclusive male-dominated martial arts sphere. Having Paul's "game character mother" armed with a sword allows audiences to read her through layers of filmic convention and also serves as a reminder of the unintentional violence that might arise in as "naturalised" a relationship as that between parent and child. After a frenzied display of actor Tom Wu's physical mastery of martial arts, Paul once again defeats all of them, but his victory brings him no joy. Sobbing and slamming his fist into the machine, Paul calls out for his mother and cries out that he is sorry (21).

At this point, the play suddenly veers into the surreal, propelling him into the world of the game itself. The set pieces, mostly made up of textured, pale panels shaped like rock, move in tandem with lighting effects, transforming the space into an otherworldly idyll. Looking around, Paul soon realizes where he is and meets the warrior characters who have come to life. Aside from the four he usually sees, the character *Sifu* (Master teacher) also emerges and tells him it is time for class. Perplexed, Paul thinks he is simply embedded in the game and attempts to take on the warriors with his superficial knowledge gleaned from martial arts films and waves around his butterfly knife. Predictably, his lack of training and misunderstanding of kung fu places him at a disadvantage. Sifu disarms him expertly, and after a long look between them, Paul submits to the master's authority and joins the class—a

kung fu training session. In this way, Paul is made to fall in step with the warrior characters from the game, as they practise a choreographed exercise sequence.

The next few scenes unfold with Paul being put through the paces. Despite having had an interest in martial arts, Paul has only come into contact with the forms through video games and television. The warriors and Sifu show him that there is more for him to learn and that to be skilled in martial arts requires hard work and discipline, not just bravado. True to his real life adulation, Paul immediately strikes up a rapport with Jet, his favourite character. However, there is tension between Paul and the character, “Lec Tsai,” meaning “good boy or son” in Cantonese. Paul, reminded of his relationship with his parents, bitterly calls the character “Goody-bloody-two-shoes,” and exclaims that it is why “[he] never [chose] to be [him]!” (22). However, as he begins to train with the warriors, they teach him various “life lessons” and meditation. Indeed, at one point there is a voice-over by Sifu, saying, “in China the tradition is: My parents give birth to me, but my masters and teachers mould me. When our disciples come to us, we have a responsibility to educate them, to teach them culture and morality, to be a genuine and decent person, a kind person” (23). Once again referring to the larger educational theme of the play, the aphoristic saying underlines how the adults have failed in their responsibilities to Paul. At the same time, the neatly packaged saying recalls the trope of the wise old Chinese male character who spouts pithy wisdoms, such as the Chinese American detective character Charlie Chan, created by American novelist Earl Derr Biggers. Through training together, all the warriors impart some form of wisdom to Paul, including Wing Chun, who raises the point that being female herself, there are not a lot of opportunities for women like her.²⁶ Eventually, Paul learns to be patient and begins to train

²⁶ This is a complex contention. As Stephen Teo delineates in his book, the filmic tradition of female knight-errants has provided an image of women who are highly skilled in martial arts and at the same

properly, showing proper respect to the others and especially to Lec Tsai. His change of attitude towards the latter is meaningful given that Lec Tsai is an allegorical representation of a “good son”. Having previously been angry with his own parents at their low standard of living and inability to protect him, he has now reconciled himself to the idea of being “good” through his own actions and agency. The characters tell him he could leave whenever he wanted, but he does have a choice to finish his training first. This he does, and upon his return the action continues, set in the aftermath of his fight with his mother in church.

In the last few scenes of the play, Paul has to face the consequences of his gang membership and his injuring of his mother. Audiences see his parents discuss whether to go looking for him—Lourdes, her arm bandaged from the wound he gave her, refuses to give up on her son and tells Romel that they should not involve the police. Paul meets up with the gang in the arcade again and there is some tension as he tells them he wants to back out of a “rumble” in which they were going to teach his bullies a lesson. When Python and Cobra try for a power grab to knock Anaconda off his position as leader, Paul is somehow able to use his newly acquired skills to freeze the moment. He relieves the three of their knives, thus stopping the continuation of a potentially deadly fight when they unfreeze. Instead, he begins to teach the gang some of the kung fu rituals he had learnt, shifting from harsher forms to softer, calmer ones in order to still the conflict. The play ends with Lourdes and Romel angrily entering the scene, and Paul, in the middle, separating the two opposing sides with

time, are beautiful and feminine even as they take on masculine attributes. There is a proto-feminist lineage to wuxia films (See pages 120-124). The Wing Chun form itself is also sometimes attributed to a female founder of the same name. Despite these factors, Bruce Lee, who borrowed from Wing Chun and invented Jeet Kune Do, was reported to be wary of letting women pick up martial arts, saying in an interview, “Women fighters? They are all right, but they are no match for the men who are physiologically stronger except for a few vulnerable points. My advice is that if they have to fight, hit the man at his vital points and then run. Women are more likely to achieve their objectives through feminine wiles and persuasion” (Little 136).

his body. While audiences do not see the resolution, the play suggests that Paul has found a strategy forward, but its efficacy is untested. Further, it is unclear how Paul's flight of fancy ties in with the real world. His ability to use some of the skills he learnt from the world of the game implies that he internalized some of the lessons he had experienced. However, given that he was still interacting with the "game" in his wonderland, albeit in a more embodied way, it begs the question of how superficial his skills still are.

Writing about the 1970s kung fu craze as a result of Bruce Lee's films, Vijay Prashad in his book, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, declared, "Kung fu gives oppressed young people an immense sense of personal worth and the skills for collective struggle. Kung fu, as Bruce [sic] pointed out in his sociology of the art, 'serves to cultivate the mind, to promote health, and to provide a most efficient means of self-protection against any attacks.'"(132). Indeed, as Prashad continues, it "develops confidence, humility, coordination, adaptability and respect toward others" (132). In this way, the failure of the other pedagogic authorities to help Paul in real life is juxtaposed with the seemingly more successful lessons of martial arts training that Paul carries with him when he returns from his trip into the game world. Transported away to a utopian training space with what could be called a bunch of "shrewd mechanicals," Paul is taught the value of disciplined martial arts training, alongside ethical ways of being in the world. While the play implies that the game has imparted real changes to Paul's body, mind and mindset, the concept of utopia with its perfect, idealistic workings also suggests that what Paul experienced was only a proposed method, and not necessarily applicable to the real world in such a simplistic manner.

Nevertheless, upon his return to face the consequences of his actions, the play shows Paul using his newly acquired “technology” to deal with the gang. Drawing from the lessons gleaned from the game wonderland, Paul is able to smooth over the discord between the three gang members, and even demonstrate the powerlessness of the butterfly knife when faced with skills that have been acquired through discipline and hard work. Citing Kwai-Cheung Lo, Stephen Teo explains that kung fu is technology: “it is the human body that has been turned into a fighting machine...” (71), an image admittedly disturbing, pointing, as Farrer and Whalen-Bridge suggest, “toward an Asian war machine supposedly usurped [or usurpable] by the ‘evolution’ of sophisticated modern (read Western) methods of remote disembodied technological warfare” (2). As mentioned earlier, however, kung fu is also the concept of hard work. In this way, while Paul’s sudden mastery of martial arts skills might appear improbable, his ability to transmit calm and inner control to the gang members could stand for Paul’s deeper understanding of and less superficial attitude towards kung fu. The lesson he learns from the game or game wonderland is not the practice of martial arts itself, but the philosophy and values underpinning its powerful cultural appeal.

Dramatizing Paul’s passing of physical kung fu knowledge on to his gang, however, the play refers at the same time to the traditional kung fu filmic hero’s quest for good. In their book, *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World* (2011), editors D.S. Farrer and John Whalen-Bridge observe that “the pursuit of Asian martial arts provides a lifelong vehicle to engage in studies of language and culture, philosophy and morality, traditional medicine and healing, a practice to temporarily forget the self, in order to polish the self” (4). They also suggest that it has wider implications beyond the personal in that while martial arts can be perceived as a self-defense technique,

“*social* self-defense—defense against the slights and larger injuries associated with social class [and I might add, race]—is also very important, and becoming proficient in a martial art can offer sanctuary unavailable to those who cannot access other modes of social advancement such as a university education” (6) or, in this case, dignified treatment.

The play’s submission of kung fu as a remedy for Paul’s personal and social ills is interesting, however. The world of the game, with its warrior characters and sage yet exotic maxims—potentially problematic in terms of self-reification—is seen to be a better pedagogic environment than the family, school or church. Where the other adults have failed, the world of the game and its emphasis on various aspects of martial arts training have given Paul hope and a new world view. Under the tutelage of Sifu and the other warriors, Paul reforms himself. In this way, the play seems to argue that the complex experiences of immigrant families mean that the family institution and other systems might actually be detrimental to a child’s development, compromised as they are, as in Lourdes and Romel’s case, by their abjection. Paul is able to find coping strategies only outside of those sources. The fact that a video game is central to Paul’s interpellation into an enlightened individual with embodied skills raises questions about the impact of technology and popular culture on the young.

At the same time, due to the play’s use of role doubling, the actors playing Paul’s parents, along with those playing the gang members, are all used to embody the various warriors that help Paul reinvent himself in the world of the game. In this way, there are complex interpretive possibilities in these multi-layered representations, including what Gilbert and Tompkins have described as the “arbitrariness of all roles” (34). This arbitrariness signals hope for individuals wishing to change, even as material circumstances

remain challenging. As seen in the above analysis, *Play to Win* allows audiences to tread in Paul's shoes and understand the *Darstellung* of the lived experience of a young boy who feels like an outsider. This experience of the "lost boy" adrift in the world and gaining a concretised self-identity with a group is also a central feature in *Banana Boys*.

Indeed, as seen in the title, the group identity encompassed in being the "banana boys" brings a sense of belonging to Mike, Dave, Sheldon, Luke, and in his own way, Rick. Rick is, however, the "maverick" of the group. Whereas the others are stuck in unfulfilled lives, Rick refuses to let his Canadian-born Chinese identity define him. Against their pervasive communal atmosphere of self-debasement, Rick stands out as an agent of self-transformation. Just as Shaw's Eliza Doolittle, having been seduced by thoughts of social betterment, approached Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering to learn to sound better so that she could escape her lower class, Rick also takes action to mould himself into a figure of success. The template he chooses is that of an FOB. As mentioned earlier, the "banana boys" feel inferior to new economic migrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea because they tend to be wealthy, excelling as they do in the capitalist world. There is an underlying assumption that these migrants are higher up on the socio-economic ladder than the banana boys. Much like Eliza's linguistic and comportment improvements, Rick also refashions himself. Citing Berlitz, the successful company providing language courses, including auto-didactic material, Act Three, Scene Seven has Rick perform his morning workout to the sounds of "FOB Today!" (Aureus 237). A lesson stored in a Berlitz tape, the programme promises "not only [to] teach [Rick] the basics of the FOB language, but how to interact within the FOB culture seamlessly" (Aureus 237). The tape also functions as a way to explain to audiences reasons for the abjection of "banana boys" as an identity. Telling

listeners to “get ready to cast aside [their] *Jook Sing* identity,” the voice on the recorded tape explains that the term is “translated as hollow bamboo, used to define Canadian-born Chinese” (237). This hollowness was earlier refracted through Dave’s experience with the old Chinese woman who critiques his Cantonese skills on account of his mismatched insides and outsides. In order to succeed, Rick has to fill up that hollow. He does this using the taped lessons, which further persuade him to use props such as “Hello Kitty dolls” (238) so that he can alter his personal behaviour to create an acceptable cultural performance. As the tape elaborates, “FOBs are an integral part of today’s world economy. Bananas [on the other hand,] become data entry clerks, minimum wage slaves. FOBs become CEOs, high-ranking corporate executives and all around winners in the game of life” (238). Reminiscent of the gaming structure in *Play to Win*, Rick also “plays” in different senses of the word, one of which is that he “performs” the “FOB role”. As he himself mentions at his funeral, however, he is also hooked on drugs and alcohol. This addiction, compounded with his self-alteration, leads to a profound and disturbing transformation in his body and his mind. Following the tape’s lessons, Rick is instructed that “[he] needs to be lighter” (238). He does this by applying foundation, thus lightening his skin tone. Sounding more and more like a sinister brainwash, the taped voice declares:

Poor people are dark. Low-class, mainland bottom feeders.

You are no longer from Scarborough. You are from Causeway Bay. You spent afternoons shopping in Tsim Sha Tsui and torturing the boat people on the harbour because they were darker than you.

Class is everything. And everything is class. (Aureus 238)

It also continues to guide Rick in using makeup to alter his appearance, such as lining his eyes to approximate “the shape of perfect almonds” (239). Ultimately, the tape turns Rick into a grotesque shell of himself. Looking like he has been embalmed, Rick’s eyes are now “exotic and female” (239). Further, the tape nudges Rick away from his banana boy friends by saying that they hold him back, being “empty baggage” and “dull-witted” (239). Although Rick is proud of his transformation, he clearly loses control and slowly becomes something he had not anticipated.

As already glimpsed in the Prologue of the play, Rick is effectively haunted by a supernatural presence. The use of the supernatural as a method of exploring cultural haunting is an important device and is also seen in the next chapter when artists write about traumatic historical and contemporary wrongs. Revealed throughout the text, Rick’s mindshifts and drug-taking have led to his being stalked by a vampiric female figure. In his text, Aureus names her as “Ching-Shih,” (214) which can also be translated roughly into “passion spirit”. Incidentally, this is also the name of a famous female pirate captain in the 19th century. In a split-scene moment, Mike and Rick both record notes on separate mediums, a notebook and a video camera respectively. Between their alternating lines, they delineate a picture of this figure. Writing as he speaks, Mike says, “Ching-Shih, period. Female vampire period. Something of a legend comma with a little bit of truth mixed in period” (Aureus 214). Rick follows up with “had a dream...Dark hair. Black eyes, darker than sin itself. Blood-stained teeth, sharpened canines with shreds of flesh hanging off them” (214). Whereas Mike scribbles in his notebook, Rick’s video recording is tied to his mindshifting process. Given that his “travels” means that he loses track of his position in time and space, Rick has taken to making “baseline videos” in which he records a video diary, attempting to anchor himself

to his friends' time streams. However, it appears that his self-altering attempts and mindshifting practices have invoked her presence. As Rick says, "She's coming to get me. My history" (214).

The sense of menace that Rick experiences blends together two legendary figures: one from Chinese history and the other from Western literature. Ching-Shih's command was marked by ruthless insistence on obedience. According to Matt K. Matsuda, Ching Shih, also known as "Cheng I Sao" and "Lady Ch'ing," was "a former prostitute married to a sea robber" (110). Together, they "organized gangs in the nineteenth century to attack ships, ransom crews, and force local settlements to pay for protection" (110). When her husband died, Ching Shih became a pirate leader known for "meticulous organization and ruthless energy, building up warehouses of ready stores, supplies, and weapons for her raiding campaigns and brutally torturing and butchering opponents" (110). This bloodthirsty trait could also be seen in her western literature counterpart, the vampire. In her book *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture* (2009), Mary Y. Hallab states, "vampire literature plays with the slipperiness of place and time and our perceptions of it, and the conflict between our desire to stop time *now* versus our compulsion to barge on ahead" (39). Citing Bram Stoker's iconic work, she observes that his "method of narrating Dracula carries us backward and forward in time and place, from a medieval castle in Romania to modern London but also, within the narrative, from one character's time to another's" (Hallab 39). For her, "one of the most popular features of vampire literature is the way that it plays with the impingement of the past on the present—or even the future—while not entirely abandoning the conventions of realism" (39). Indeed, referring to vampires' ability to transcend time and space, she writes:

When they are not actually time travelling, [vampires] move back and forth in mind and memory...sometimes with nostalgia, but also to draw comparisons with their current circumstances and reinforce the lessons learned from their mistakes, say, in the seventeenth century. As living dead, they stand for both the loss of all that is past and its paradoxical aliveness in the present. As readers or viewers, we are free to identify with their histories and take them up as our own. Through the living dead, we acquire a sense of the past that we did not have before. (Hallab 43)

Viewed through Hallab's analysis, Rick's linkage with the Ching-Shih is evident in that his mindshifting through time is comparable to her movement capacities as a vampire. Relative to the historical Ching-Shih, Rick's transformation can also be read as a form of "piracy;" he steals and appropriates the stereotypical traits of FOBs in order to satiate his greed for success. While he wanted to be successful, taking on the manners and general beliefs of FOBs as camouflage so that he can blend in with them in their world, Rick's self-fashioning ultimately destroys him in two ways. On one hand, his Berlitz tape and drugs cause him to adopt the appearance of the Ching-Shih that haunts him. On the other hand, his quest for economic success equates to a betrayal of his friends and their group label, the brotherhood of "banana boys". Further, in reference to Marx's use of vampiric metaphors, in one of a few medical room scenes, Rick is shown to be dead of body but still mentally conscious. The other young men "operate" on his cadaver, excavating detritus that represents his life such as money clips, condominiums and cars. When they reach the place where his heart should be,

it is empty. These material goods and the lack of a heart suggest that in his economic vampirism, Rick has destroyed his own sense of self and his mortal and moral tether to the world. This suggests that the superficial FOB image that he dons is ultimately not ideal. Trying to escape being a “jook sing,” he is ultimately still hollow inside.

Towards the end of the play, Rick, losing more and more control of himself, “haunts” Mike through a series of appearances, popping up at different times even though Mike already knows that he is dead. Although circumstances around his death remain a mystery as seen in the Prologue, it is intimated that he had a fight with the Ching-Shih in his condominium and was stabbed to death through the heart with the mirror shard found in his chest. In a series of sequences, the young men deal with their grief at Rick’s death, although Mike continues to be disturbed by Rick. On one occasion where he is visited by the (un)dead Rick, who is practically a vampiric figure himself, Mike blames him for ruining his life, because he had always been there to help “keep track” of Rick, anchoring him to the “banana boys”. Rick on the other hand, explains to Mike that his death has a purpose. He beseeches Mike to tell the others about his sacrifice:

You have to tell them. Tell them there’s more out there. Let my story be an example for them. Let my life teach them their dreams are possible. They’re your friends, Mikey, you can’t let them all die alone, unsatisfied...hollow. This Banana Boy shit—this non-identity—won’t get them anywhere. (268)

During an intense scene in which the boys are at Rick’s grave and Rick is trying to speak to Mike, the latter also transforms from his original role of dutiful son to one who is going to

“tell the truth” (269). Mike says, “The Romantic, The Cynic, The Lost Soul and The Doctor. They stand up. They loosen the curtains. Light floods in and lays bare every broken thing, every stitch and scar. But at least they’re at the window. At least they’re in the light” (269). Referring to himself, Mike continues, “He is the writer. He is the poet. He is the prophet. He is the fighter” (269). In contrast to Mike’s calm resolute intonation, Rick is in chaos, exclaiming:

I am sitting in a penthouse suite, surrounded by forty milligram
doses of hope and overturned bottles of love. The suit I am
wearing cost two thousand dollars. I can’t tell you what my name
is, but I know it was two thousand dollars. What the fuck does
that mean? I don’t recognize this place. I know it’s mine, but I
don’t...everything’s so fucking foreign. I need...a drink. I need
to recover. I need a womb. I need... (Aureus 270)

As Mike assumes a new role, Rick loses control of himself. Having rejected his “banana boy” status and taken on the FOB role, he finds himself in a place that is “foreign,” albeit with the trappings of wealth, and worse, has forgotten his own name. The scene reaches a climax when Mike stabs Rick through the heart with the mirror shard the way a vampire would conventionally be staked through the heart with a piece of wood, coming full circle to how audiences first see Rick at the start of the play. The use of the mirror is meaningful, given Rick’s obsession with creating what he believes to be a better self based on painted-on facial surfaces and the superficial adoption of an FOB persona. Unfortunately for him, what the broken mirror reflects is the fragmentation of his identity, even his soul. The mirror stake

indicates that what is “at stake” for the “banana boys” goes beyond modulations in behaviour and appearances. Instead, it points to something deeper, the need for a different kind of understanding, and even a change in mindset. In stabbing Rick with the mirror, Michael takes control of events and history. Although he had been Rick’s “black box” (Aureus 204), keeping track of his friend during his various flights of fancy through time, space, life, and death, Mike finally refuses to record everything passively. Taking over the narrative when he silences Rick once and for all, Mike finally helps his friend to find peace. He also follows Rick’s suggestion to help the banana boys to do more with their lives instead of staying in their stagnant environments. In the Epilogue of the play, Dave and Sheldon are on their way to Hong Kong, while Luke goes to Vancouver. These travel plans show how much they have each stepped out of their comfort zones, out of the carapace of “banana boy” so that they can explore other cultures and people. Whereas *Play to Win* foregrounds the benefits of martial arts as an embodied skill, *Banana Boys* troubles the label and highlights the multiple limitations at play in this identity term. Rick’s self-alteration has adverse consequences but his sacrifice meant that the other boys have broken out of their self-imposed traps to explore possibilities outside of the borders of their birth. Although there is no promise of guaranteed happiness, the young men are taking steps to “get better”. In this way, the plays have very different approaches to the “polishing” of the self.

3.5 Filling the Hollow

The underlying thread in these two plays is self-formation, even reformation. As early works in each company’s repertoire, they resemble the deeper impulses that pushed the

artists to form the companies in the first place—in order to build their respective British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatrical spaces. Whereas *Play to Win* questions the effectiveness of pedagogic authorities, arguing for personal development and skills in the face of obstacles and violence, *Banana Boys* reveals the futility of mere cultural mimesis, suggesting a more fundamental change in mindset. Although there is some truth to Lyn Gardner’s observation—mentioned in Chapter One—that a badly bullied child would benefit more from the Childline helpline than esoteric mystically framed teachings, the idea behind *Play to Win* is about gaining power for the self, rather than continuing to rely on forms of pedagogic authority with the designated power to transmit. In some ways, this reflects the broader mandate of Yellow Earth to gain the power of representation for British East Asian artists without needing to rely on or seek the approval of the already established professional British theatre bodies. On the other hand, as an indiscriminating consumer and user of FOB paraphernalia, costume, and performative devices, Rick carries out a kind of organic hybridity in his own body, with no regard for the consequences. The play, however, shows that his body ultimately rejects this and calls for the acceptance of intentional hybridity, such as the complications that come with being a “Banana Boy”. The proposed solution is to go beyond the self-limiting and self-constructed barriers the characters have put up. The challenge for them is to find a way to survive and live along the fault lines of hybrid, ethno-national identities.

As fu-GEN’s first professional production, the play can again be read as a statement of the company’s objectives to find their way in building an Asian Canadian theatrical space. Importantly, it is not enough to mimic, like Rick, what appears to be financially rewarding as a measure of success. The play implies that the company has to go deeper, to explore stories

and to widen its horizons. In this way, both plays are about filling in the hollow sensation experienced by characters torn between two cultures and the attendant difficulties of reconciling them in the same body.

Part of each company's early repertoire, both plays are significant, not only for opening up a space for British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, but for other issues addressed in them. As critic Jon Kaplan reminds us in his review of *Banana Boys*, although there have been "plays about Asian-Canadian women staged in Toronto in the past several years,²⁷...far fewer works have looked at the experiences of Canadian men from Asian cultures" ("Banana Boys Club"). *Banana Boys* fills in this gap, even as it shows how the characters try to fill in their own empty cores as they struggle with achieving wholeness. On its part, Yellow Earth's *Play to Win* not only offers a new voice for British East Asian identity, it also explores and illuminates the experience of British East Asian youth. Despite being from a different culture, Paul could very much be the younger version of the "banana boys". This age difference between the two plays' characters is affected in some ways by the fact that David Tse was writing to the criteria of the Sainsbury Checkout Theatre funding opportunity. Therefore, whereas Yellow Earth's *Play to Win* was aimed at teenagers, Kaplan states that "the production of *Banana Boys* grew from the idea that fu-GEN should premiere with a script that speaks to—among others—an audience of 20-something Asian professionals" ("Banana Boys Club"). This could also explain why the theme of education and a didactic tone is more pronounced in one play, while the other aims instead at connecting with a slightly more mature audience. In his review, Kaplan cites Aureus who

²⁷ Kaplan refers to "works like *The Yoko Ono Project*, *Little Dragon*, *Mother Tongue*, *China Doll* and *Miss Orient(ed)*" ("Banana Boys Club").

admitted that “[he] couldn’t totally identify with all five of Terry [Woo]’s characters...but each touched on some aspect of [his] life” (“Banana Boys Club”). Not only did Aureus feel that “the book spoke [his] language,” according to him “it connected immediately with people [he knew]” (“Banana Boys Club”). As he describes it, the play is “a commentary on destroying who you really are, the danger of putting on airs” (“Banana Boys Club”). Woven through the journeys of the five characters, *Banana Boys* asks audiences to think about identity and the choices people can make in achieving their own contentment in life.

Despite these intentions, the early status of these plays also means that reviewers do not always comment on the play’s issues, but focus on production values or dramaturgical quality. In his review of the play for example, Glenn Sumi notes some technical issues with length and the repetitiveness of certain ideas. However, he observes that “as a display of the talents of [Nina] Aquino and many rising actors, this inaugural production of fu-GEN Theatre, a company devoted to Asian-Canadian theatre shows plenty of promise” (“Banana Republic”). *Guardian* theatre reviewer Lyn Gardner provided the only mainstream critical opinion of *Play to Win*, an early play of Yellow Earth before it had achieved any strong profile. Unlike Glenn Sumi’s review of *Banana Boys*, which focused mainly on technical issues, Gardner expresses some misgivings about the dialogue in the play, commenting that “Tse’s script uses language that lacks street credibility and is too transparent” (“Rev. of Play”). She further has issues with “the fantasy sequences [which to her] are the equivalent of the ‘it was a dream’ cop-out” (“Rev. of Play”). Interestingly, she also deems “inadequate” the “mystic message that you can find strength through gentleness”—one of the “sagely” sayings that Paul is told in the game wonderland. Gardner’s discomfort with this “mystic message” points to an interesting point discernible in reading the plays together.

In their own ways, both plays are about being in the world and finding ways to fit in and be accepted. Neither Paul nor the “banana boys” feel at home in their bodies. While Rick attempts to revamp himself, his efforts eventually lead to self-destruction. His sacrifice does not completely discount his strategy, however. One of the key parallels that emerge in reading these two plays together is in the relation of hybrid identities to East Asian culture. Both plays put forth “looking East” as potential solutions to the emptiness and hollowness of the characters’ lives. The characters’ fates suggest, however, that there are right and wrong ways of filling one’s hollowness with East Asian culture. Thus, Paul’s superficial engagement with martial arts through his video game and Rick’s transformation into a visible FOB through mimicry only cause them grief. In contrast, Paul’s learning of the true meaning of “kung fu” in the game wonderland, as well as Dave and Sheldon’s move to Hong Kong toward the end of *Banana Boys*, imply that sincere immersion in East Asian culture, or one’s homeland culture, is a viable option for filling in the hollow. Importantly, though, both plays do not show the results of these forays, leaving them untested. What they do assert is the need to throw off the shackles of a self-victimizing attitude. The plays call for the characters to take responsibility for their own destinies rather than wallow in their lot. Thus, reading these two plays together reveals meanings that go beyond the plays themselves; it also thickens our understanding of how each company’s artists have also made the decision to move forward and forge their own way in their respective cultural landscapes. *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys* can be read, then, as statements of intent—Yellow Earth and fu-GEN aim to move forward and take agency for themselves.

Chapter Four

Haunted Bodies: Spectral Agents in *58* and *lady in the red dress*

Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing to what
I shall unfold. (Ghost of Hamlet, Shakespeare 1197)

The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very
particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening.
Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our
will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling
of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge,
but as a transformative recognition. (Gordon 8)

Ghosts, spirits, and spectres have long haunted literature, film, and theatre. As Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin state, “ghosts are hard to escape in modern and contemporary culture” (1). In theatre, encounters with the ghost of old Hamlet and Banquo contribute to Hamlet and Macbeth’s respective mental unravelling and tragic fates. In Japanese Noh drama, ghosts of warriors and romantically jilted women have crossed many a *hashigakari* to seek release into a peaceful afterlife or vengeance on the living object of their love. According to Avery Gordon in her book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), “the ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social

life” (8). Whereas the previous chapter explored YET and fu-GEN’s approaches to hybrid, unwhole identities through male bodies, the protagonists discussed in this chapter are haunted by spectres that remind them of their humanity, mortality, and bigger responsibilities to history and social life. In YET’s 58, written by Philippe Cherbonnier, and fu-GEN’s *lady in the red dress*, written by David Yee, ghosts and spirits body forth the stage alongside the world of the living. Following the trope of ghosts that remain because they have unfinished business, the spectral figures of these plays have additional import as agents of communal memory. Indeed, while Cherbonnier and Yee have not written history plays, their works directly reference two real life events that have impacted the socio-cultural profile of British Chinese and Chinese Canadian communities respectively.

In her book *Performing Remains* (2011), Rebecca Schneider argues, “...historical events, like wars, are never discretely completed, but carry forth in embodied cycles of memory that do not delimit the remembered to the past” (32). The socio-cultural contexts in which British East Asian and Asian Canadian artists have experienced prejudice and discrimination have also witnessed large-scale traumas for their respective ethno-national communities. Subjected to immigration laws underpinned by racism, and fighting to survive away from homelands ridden with poverty and political strife, many East Asians in Britain and Canada have suffered considerably in the course of history. In these two plays, YET and fu-GEN contribute to the “embodied cycles of memory” that continue to haunt the present. Using ghostly figures who “call upon the living to act for them” (Rayner xx), playwrights Cherbonnier and Yee re-present history so as to create moments of “transformative recognition” (Gordon 8). Given that both plays are based on historical events, the companies’ spectral approaches result in an interesting interplay between the real and the fantastical,

even as they dramatize moments of real life suffering. Ultimately, along with using ghostly devices as acts of remembrance or as correctives, these plays also aim to build audience awareness, understanding and empathy for the fates of their characters and their corollary off-stage—East Asians in Britain and in Canada.

Strikingly, despite their different contexts, both companies rely on the supernatural as dramatic agents in arguably the most poignant works in their respective oeuvres. As Rayner reminds us, "...ghosts have both a powerfully emotional effect and a crucially doubtful status" (xx). Indeed, "a ghost escapes definition because it is not a thing, yet, like time, it works in things, as things, or invisibly on things" (Rayner xii). Given the often acutely experienced sensations of helplessness and senselessness that accompany trauma, whether personal or communal, the spectral is especially effective here. Ghosts on stage, embodied by actors, are representative once again, in Spivak's two senses of the word. Physically occupying the space, in appropriate costume, and under appropriate lighting, actors present a portrait of those who are lost (*Darstellung*). Retracing their footsteps and replaying their stories, actors also tread in the shoes of those who were once living (*Vertretung*). The spectral is uniquely positioned to allow the living to make sense of tragedy and to carry on. Thus, *fu-GEN* invokes a vengeful spirit of history to remind people of the affective damage to individuals and communities as a result of the Chinese Exclusion Act in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Canada; *Yellow Earth* brings to "life" and "death" three characters, whose stories broadly reflect the vivid hopes and dashed dreams of fifty-eight Chinese emigrants found dead in the back of a lorry in Dover, England in 2000. In both plays, the spectral offers the dead an embodied voice so that they can be heard. The protagonists, along with audiences, serve as witnesses made to "lend...serious hearing to

what [they] shall unfold” (Shakespeare 1197). In this way, the plays create space for communal mourning as well as important intellectual reflection on these events.

4.1 Philippe Cherbonnier’s 58 - *yan wai you yi/ meaning lies beyond language*

We want to encourage people to think of immigrants and asylum-seekers as individuals who have people who care for them and love them. The point...is to remind people of their humanity. (David Tse, qtd. in McGavin “Play revisits”)

On 19 June 2000, the British media reported that 58 bodies had been found in the back of a lorry at the English port of Dover. Subsequent reports stated that sixty Chinese people had been travelling inside the Dutch-registered vehicle in an attempt to get into Britain. Leaving behind their homeland in order to seek better working prospects abroad but unable to meet border control requirements set up by their target destination, the would-be immigrants fell victim to the unscrupulous practices of illegal human traffickers. As later revealed in news channels, the victims were transported from Beijing across Europe, and were on the last leg of their journey—a five-hour ferry crossing from Zeebrugge in Belgium to Dover. However, fearing detection of his human cargo, the lorry driver Perry Wacker closed the only source of oxygen—an air vent on the side of the lorry—so that customs officers would not hear noises coming from within. Of the people in the vehicle, only two men survived; fifty-four men and four women died from suffocation. Their deaths led to various official statements of shock and disbelief in the days following the discovery of their

bodies and the lorry driver was eventually sentenced to 14 years in jail (“Play About Lorry” Clements).

Four years later, Yellow Earth Theatre paid “tribute to the 54 men and four women who died on the journey” (“Play puts Dover” Spiro) by producing 58, a play written by the company’s literary manager, Philippe Cherbonnier. Coming a few years after the tragedy, the idea of dramatizing the event was met with mixed feelings. Reporting on the upcoming premiere of the play in *The Independent* newspaper, Harvey McGavin noted that “customs officers who found the bodies during a routine check said the scene was like something ‘out of a nightmare’” (“Play revisits tragedy” McGavin). According to him, “many [officers] later received counselling” and one was quoted as having remarked, “It’s something a lot of people would rather forget about, so I can’t imagine that making a drama out of what happened is particularly useful” (“Play revisits tragedy” McGavin). Indeed, YET’s Artistic Director David Tse, who directed the play, “acknowledged that some sections of the Chinese community had been ‘less than enthusiastic’ about the play, which ends with the stowaways banging on the sides of the container and falling unconscious but does not show the discovery of the bodies” (“Play revisits tragedy” McGavin).

Amidst this sense of unease however, there were also signs of the timeliness and affective potency of a work that seeks to commemorate the victims and the traumatic event. As BBC News community affairs reporter Cindi John writes, Mr Li Zhen Gui, whose brother Li Zhen Qian was one of the victims, “was in tears at the end of the performance of 58” (“Moving Stories”). Elaborating, John observed that “the scene which so affected Mr Li portrayed the trapped passengers banging desperately on the container walls to be let out” (“Moving Stories”). She quotes Li, who said, “seeing the scene I could feel exactly what my

brother went through, I felt his suffering” (“Moving Stories”). In this way, the play served as a vehicle for communal commiseration and acknowledgement. For director Tse, “the play puts a human face to immigration statistics” (“Immigration: Dover Tragedy” Rebecca Taylor). In addition, the play’s premiere in November 2004 came just nine months after another tragedy involving Chinese migrant workers. In February of that year, twenty-three people, mostly from Fujian province in China, drowned while cockle-picking at Lancashire’s Morecambe Bay. Once again, the tragedy raised issues about migrant labour, and also concerns about the practices of gang-masters—some of whom are also from the local UK Chinese community—who take advantage of migrant workers’ undocumented status, poverty and inability to speak English. With little regard for these workers’ wellbeing, the gang-masters profit from exploiting their labour.

Against this broader background, playwright Philippe Cherbonnier has said that “[he] very deliberately didn’t want this to be a banner-waving exercise, our main concern was to spark debate” (“Moving Stories”). As Tse also explains, “it’s not just a negative story about Chinese immigrants, it’s saying the desire to move is a universal one and it’s just that some are luckier than others” (“Moving Stories”). In order to achieve this sense of debate, “the play was researched with community groups in Britain” and performances featured “video interviews with the British public from Canterbury, Birmingham and Leicester” (“World Premiere of Tale” Faversham News).

Despite the real events that inspired the play, the characters themselves, including the three ghostly victims, are fictional. As Tse has said, “the show was inspired by the story of those who died in Dover, but it is not about the actual people” (“Play puts Dover”). The play includes eight characters played by five actors. Although it is set primarily in the aftermath

of the tragedy, it traverses the present day as well as the recent past. At the heart of the play is protagonist Kate Joiner, a police clerk in charge of cataloguing the items of clothing and other belongings of the victims. As she says later on in the play, she is “a sort of librarian for the dead” (Cherbonnier 11). At the start of the play, audiences learn that her job takes her to Maidstone during the week, away from the home she shares with her husband, Dave, in Hull. Through their phone conversation, it is evident that Dave is a stereotypically feckless man who sits at home watching television and playing the lottery using the “pocket money” that Kate leaves for him. Claiming that he is unable to find a job where he lives, he tells Kate that he is playing the lottery because he dreams of moving with her to Spain if they win big. The more practical Kate nags at him, understandably, to get a job instead, and he claims that his friend Mike is going to give him a lead on an opportunity. Tension arises when Kate tells Dave that she does not trust his “mate”.

Interrupting the conversation, Zhaodi²⁸ enters. An interpreter working for the Home Office, she has been drafted in as a replacement for Jennifer, the previous Chinese translator who worked with Kate on her cataloguing. There are indications that the former had fallen ill under mysterious circumstances. As Kate and Zhaodi get to know each other better, talking through sometimes embarrassing and politically incorrect assumptions about each other’s culture, they begin to form a mutual fondness and understanding for each other. This creates awkward moments of discomfort when Kate receives calls from Dave who is portrayed as racist towards foreigners, who he feels are the reason for his joblessness. Although Kate apparently held similar views to his before and would laugh when he made racially offensive

²⁸ In Cherbonnier’s draft of the play, the character’s name is spelled as “Zhaodin”. However, dialogue between Kate and the character indicates that the latter’s name means “bring a younger brother” (10). In Standard Chinese, “brother” is pronounced as “di”. Reviews of the production also refer to the character as Zhaodi.

comments, time spent with Zhaodi has changed her. The gradual understanding between the two women is interspersed with scenes featuring the three mainland Chinese characters who are the ghosts of the play.

Acting as exposition, the scenes occupy a different temporal and spatial logic, working as narrative asides that show the characters when they were still alive, as well as when they made their fateful decisions to journey to Britain. Representing different social classes, genders, and ages while very broadly standing for the different reasons for why people emigrate, Chen Min, Meng Xin, and Lan's stories are "unfolded" to audiences while Kate and Zhaodi continue to perform research work in the background. In the course of their conversations, Kate and Zhaodi discuss some of the belongings that were found with the bodies, such as a pouch with seeds, a photograph, a recipe book, and so on. These items crop up during the exposition scenes and thus add another layer of poignancy because they clearly index the three mainland Chinese characters' deaths. Having left China due to poverty, political reasons, and the search for personal liberty respectively, Chen Min, Meng Xin and Lan are trapped in the lorry and lose their lives.

The plot escalates as the ghosts relive their entrapment in the vehicle, in a scene which perforates the border between the world of the dead and the living. Working in the office, Kate and Zhaodi experience the effects of the ghosts' haunting. They receive mysterious phone calls, feel unnaturally cold, and hear Chinese voices. In this particular scene, Zhaodi even sees the ghost Lan asking her for a tissue to help clean Chen Min's wounds sustained when he crossed snakehead gang members engaged in human trafficking. Towards the end of the play, a subplot also hinted at earlier in the play reveals that Zhaodi is actually there with a personal agenda to find out if her cousin is among the dead. While Kate

feels betrayed and tricked, she has changed so much that she is willing to help Zhaodi, although not before expressing her anger. As it turns out, Zhaodi's cousin is not one of the victims, but the interpreter is able to explain to Kate that they are being haunted because of the common Chinese belief that "it takes seven weeks for the soul[s] [of the dead] to reach the gates of the afterlife" (Cherbonnier 61). Zhaodi recognizes that the haunting has reached a frenzied state because the three spirits are "frightened that no one will mourn them," given that "nobody knows who they are" (Cherbonnier 61). That day being the 49th day, the ghosts need recognition because they "will never find peace" if "their souls [unrecognized by the living] won't be allowed through the gates [of the afterlife]" (61). After Zhaodi coaxes Kate to join her in lighting incense for the spirits, the worlds of the spectral and the "real" of the stage finally merge fully when Kate manages to communicate with the spirits.

Participating in the ritual, Kate seems to be given access to the spirits, hearing them and understanding their names. The play ends on a sombre note, underlining a strong idea made throughout the play—that life is like a lottery because one's birth often dictates the kind of life one would lead. Juxtaposing Dave's losing money in the lottery with the sounds of frantic banging on the lorry's walls, Cherbonnier underlines the extreme differences in stakes for the characters involved. The image is made even more powerful as the stage design allowed for a set of metal container doors to be closed in on the set that was Kate's office. The play ends with the characters bowing and briefly describing their family histories. When the last actor finishes, he or she directs the following question to audiences: "And you—where do you come from?" (Cherbonnier 63). 58 therefore brings the past to the present and engages the present through past events.

4.2 David Yee's *lady in the red dress*

The play represents a means for the Canadian and Asian-Canadian community, in particular the Chinese-Canadian community, to gather together in one space and witness history as seen through *their* eyes, in *their* voice, and by *their* people. It becomes a means of empowerment to own up and to confront this story—however ugly or painful it might be. (“A Note from fu-GEN”)

On 22 June 2006, the Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, apologized to the Chinese Canadian community for the “race-based financial measures” and exclusionary immigration policies “aimed solely at the Chinese [that were] implemented with deliberation by the Canadian state” between 1885 and 1947.²⁹ As I have discussed in an earlier paper, these border control measures began with the Chinese Head Tax at \$50 per head in 1885, increasing to \$100 per head in 1900 and then to \$500 per head in 1903. This amount was equivalent to two years’ wages. In 1923, the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented all Chinese from entering Canada, except for certain students, diplomats, merchants, and clergy. In this way, the labourers who had helped build the Canadian Pacific Railway were systematically prevented from bringing over their wives and in some cases children to join them (“Chinese Head Tax”). In 1984, the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) began a campaign for redress over the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion

²⁹ This chapter draws on some of my research on David Yee’s play *lady in the red dress* used in my paper, “Drama as Surgical Act: Operative Realism and the Chinese Canadian Redress,” published in *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*, edited by Roberta Barker and Kim Solga.

Act. Their efforts have sometimes been discussed alongside the Japanese Canadian call for redress for victims of internment camps in World War Two. The victims of these policies faced numerous governmental rejections over the years, so the 2006 apology and attendant symbolic payments to the few remaining head tax payers and their spouses were hard-earned and, for many, the realization of a long-fought-for dream. As part of this official apology, the government also sought to “establish funds to help finance community projects aimed at acknowledging the impact of past wartime measures and immigration restrictions on ethno-cultural communities” (“Address by”).

Just as Cherbonnier’s play 58 was inspired by a real-life tragedy, playwright David Yee was moved to write *lady in the red dress*—with its play on the word “redress”—out of anger at the unjustness of a historical event and its contemporary repercussions. As he recounts in the preface to his play published by Playwrights Canada Press in 2010, the work “began as a response to an email [he] received from an MP in British Columbia” (vii). According to Yee, “the email itself was in reply to a petition [he] had signed in opposition to proposed amendments to Bill C333, which attempted to quietly sweep a number of issues (including the Head Tax and Exclusion Act) under a decidedly cheap rug” (vii). According to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), the Chinese Canadian Recognition and Redress Act, Bill C-333, “was introduced to recognize and apologize for the treatment that early Chinese immigrants received despite the extraordinary contribution they made in the building of Canada, especially on the railways. The Act would also provide for redress to be made in respect of application of a head tax and the operation of The Chinese Immigration Act, 1923” (“CRRF Supports”). In 2005, however, the Canadian government proposed to amend the bill, which “w[ould] dramatically change the content and intent of the original

Bill” (“CRRF Supports”). One of the amendments listed, as Paul Winn, Interim Chief Operating Officer of the CRRF, explains, “would recognize only one Chinese Canadian organization as the negotiating partner for redress, a situation which would divide the Chinese Canadian community” (“CRRF Supports”). In the face of what he deemed libellous attitudes from those in the position to offer redress, Yee turned his anger and frustration into a play that explores some of the affective issues surrounding the historical event and the challenge facing contemporary activists trying to seek redress for this past wrong. As historical wrongdoings by a national government go, the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act is sometimes discussed alongside the sufferings of Japanese Canadians during World War Two. Unjustly dispossessed of their homes, dislocated, and incarcerated in internment camps solely because of their appearance and presumed ties to Japan, the victims, their descendants and activists had been working for years to get the Canadian government to issue an official apology and to redress the communal trauma. Despite this occurrence for Japanese Canadians in 1988, it took the Canadian government until 2006 to finally issue an apology to Chinese Canadians, many of whose ancestors were caught up in the border control policies. In his play, Yee appears to argue that much of the delay was tied to the language of apology—where the Canadian government did not want to admit *liability* for this past wrong. Indeed, he has written that “th[e] play is dedicated to the 81,000 Chinese who paid the Head Tax, to the countless number who were kept from their families and loved ones during the Exclusion, to those who died building the foundation of this country only to be disavowed and forgotten” (ii).

Just as Cherbonnier and Tse have said of 58, however, Yee is also careful to point out in the play’s press pack that he is a playwright, not a historian. As such, he has taken liberties

with the topic, most evidently in its supernatural elements and the warping of space, time, and logic. In writing and staging their play, Philippe Cherbonnier and David Tse also employed the same strategies of the spectral and what Gardner has described as “impossible” (Rev. of “58”). In this way, the historical sufferings of real people and the actions of Canadian politicians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries serve as the emotional and political basis that undergird the plot of the play. Spanning 2006 and the past, *lady in the red dress* has fourteen characters, played by five actors. Just as David Tse uses role doubling in *Play to Win* for layered representations of various characters through the face and bodies of specific actors, fu-GEN’s production of *lady in the red dress* also uses the economy of role doubling to meaningful effect. Of the five actors, only two play constant roles, that of the protagonist Max Lochran and Danny, his son.

Set primarily in Toronto with references to local streets and the city’s Chinatown, the plot follows Max’s journey from ethical bankruptcy to enlightenment. A high-flying lawyer working for the Department of Justice in downtown Toronto, Max is a government representative in charge of negotiating with the CCNC the terms and settlement amount for the survivors of the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act as part of the official redress. Portrayed as a mouthpiece for the government with some racially discriminatory views of his own, Max is seen as efficient, in-demand, and vigilant when it comes to the government’s language around apologizing for this historical atrocity. Despite his skills and eloquence, Max is struggling to juggle a phone-call with CCNC’s Linda, simultaneous calls from his various work superiors, and an interruption by the presence of his son, Danny, because it is “bring your kid to work day” (Yee 6). Drinking bourbon and dealing with them as best as he can, Max passes out at the end of the first scene, and is then woken up by Sylvia in the next.

Clad in an exotic Chinese silk dress—the cheongsam—and emitting a faint glow of mystery, she banters with Max before telling him that she needs him to find someone named Tommy Jade. As the play’s fragmented timeline and subsequent scenes show, Tommy is a victim of the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act. Although he initially had hopes of bringing his wife, Chor Swan, over to join him in Canada, going so far as to pay a customs official \$600 to arrange this, the government’s policies against admitting Chinese immigrants meant that it could not happen. In addition, the customs official, Daniel Coogan, had actually been taking advantage of Tommy’s trusting nature and had defrauded him.

While Max is initially unwilling to go on the quest set by Sylvia, he is forced to do so when she turns violent, stabbing him in the hands and the leg so as to persuade him because, as she has learnt, “men respond best to pain” (Yee 33). Although Sylvia’s interactions with Max—mostly when threatening him with a knife or breaking his fingers—indicate that she has a flesh-and-blood body, Max’s continued investigations lead him to surmise that she could actually be of the spectral world. Going through old newspapers, Max finds similar incidences “spanning decades” where people “involved in some degree of anti-Chinese activity” had been “killed in the same way, the same manner [as a man whom he saw Sylvia killing]” (53). His quest is made more urgent by the fact that Sylvia has kidnapped Danny, Max’s autistic mixed-race son—Max married a Chinese woman but she died five years before the events of the play. Indeed, as Max stumbles along in his search for Tommy in Chinatown, he encounters strange characters such as Willy, Happy, and Biff Chan, who offer him different clues and glimpses into the past.

In fantastical scenes with elements of the absurd, even time travel, the three characters—whose names reference Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*—let Max

experience Sylvia's killing of a racist policeman in 1943, "speak to" Tommy Jade in 2006, and be at the scene of Tommy's death in 1924 respectively. Most interestingly, Sylvia was also present at Tommy's death. During Max's big *anagnorisis*, it becomes clear that Max and Sylvia's lives had been intertwined several generations ago. Due to Coogan's long absences from his home, dealing with customs issues and exploiting Chinese labourers who could not speak English, his wife, Mirabel, had become lonely and dependent on opium. When Tommy showed up looking for Coogan, Mirabel, in a haze of drug-induced desire, seduced Tommy, who could not resist as he was also overwhelmed by the opium fumes in her home. Seeking information from Biff Chan, Max is shown this window into the past. Importantly, he recognizes that "Daniel Coogan" was his grandfather's name. Biff eventually sends Max into the "past" to be physically present at the big revelation of Tommy's fate. Showing up at Coogan's house to get his money back, Tommy encounters Max who accompanies him into his grandfather's house. In disarray, it appears that Mirabel had given birth to a daughter a few days ago. Max immediately realises that the baby is probably Tommy's, and this is confirmed with Mirabel's nervousness at seeing the latter in the house. Despite Max and Mirabel trying to contain the situation by getting Tommy to leave, he refuses and lets slip that he had visited before when Coogan was away. Matching the time of Tommy's visit to the length of his wife's pregnancy, Coogan comes to the inevitable conclusion.

In yet another mind-blowing moment of "transformative recognition" (Gordon 8), Max learns that the baby's name is Sylvia. Coogan, overcome by anger and hatred on top of his racist predisposition, places Sylvia back in her crib and shoots her with a revolver he draws from his belt; blood splashes on his face as he does so. Faced with this, Tommy charges at Coogan but is shot dead in the process. Coogan rips from Sylvia's neck a jade

pendant that Tommy had given her as a gift, throws it on his body, and spits on him. In an unsettling moment, the baby Sylvia suddenly cries from her crib, despite having been shot previously. Having witnessed and experienced this tragic moment, Max is “sent back” into his own time when Coogan shoots him in the head, paralleling the way Biff Chan had sent him to the past.

Back in his world, Max tries to get his son back by attempting to kill Hatch, a colleague used throughout the play as a mouthpiece to justify racist governmental measures against immigrants. Max’s strange encounters with the spectral and the past have skewed his sense of reality. He tells the tied up Hatch, “I’m not going to kill you. Because none of this is real. If I shoot you, you don’t die. The part of me that is you...*that* dies” (Yee 89).

Fortunately for Max and for Hatch, Danny is alive and is instrumental in preventing his father’s impending criminal act. Brought back to Sylvia’s den in Chinatown, Danny slowly causes Sylvia to let her guard down by being himself and sharing with her his contentment of being someone who is born half-and-half. Whereas the mixed-race Sylvia had experienced nothing but negativity for her hybrid ethnicity, Danny sees himself not as a “mongrel” or “mutt,” but as “twice blessed” (Yee 84). In a revelation that makes Sylvia soften towards Max, Danny tells her that his father had told him that “no one can call [him] a mutt” because he is “special,” being “the best of Max and the best of mother” (Yee 84). In this way, as he says, Sylvia is also “twice blessed” (Yee 84). As Danny explains, when his mother died in a car accident, “Max didn’t talk at all after that for exactly 112 hours and 13 minutes” (Yee 84)—which he calculates to be around 4.67 days. According to him, Max “was different” after that (Yee 84). These gradual exchanges diminish some of Sylvia’s bloodlust. When she follows the Chinese ritual of burning paper money and other representative possessions for

her parents in the afterlife, she allows Danny to “send” Max a map he drew so that Max can find his way back. The arrival of Danny’s map dropping out of the sky at Max’s feet leads him to stop trying to kill Hatch. Max unties Hatch instead, allowing the latter the opportunity to shoot him. The unconscious Max wakes up in his office as if nothing had happened. Wondering whether it was all just a dream, Max nonetheless feels real changes in himself, and has one last conversation with Sylvia during which he gives her the jade pendant from Tommy. Seemingly changed as well, Sylvia departs, telling him that it is “the struggle” that matters, “...not the destination...not even the journey” (Yee 92). The play ends with Max valuing Danny more in his life, and having to decide how to continue his negotiator role now that he has experienced his ethical awakening. Using the spectral and a trope similar to *Alice in Wonderland*, fu-GEN’s *lady in the red dress* invokes intellectual and affective engagement with a historical atrocity.

4.3 Haunted Bodies, Spectral Agents

But ghosts do not have the power of action. Hence, they call upon the living to act for them. They invest the living with the ‘spirit’ to act, but they need the living to fulfil their demands, to respond, and ultimately to set them to rest. (Rayner xx)

In *58* and *lady in the red dress*, Yellow Earth and fu-GEN have created intellectually and affectively important works that engage with the broader cultural memories of their respective ethno-national communities. Unlike the fantastical elements in *Play to Win* and *Banana Boys* that cause characters such as Paul and Rick to change themselves so as to

survive and be more accepted in their social environments, 58 and *lady in the red dress* employ the spectral to get the living to act. Drawing on real tragedies and referencing events that have caused historical hardships and deaths, Cherbonnier and Yee's ghosts remind protagonists, as well as audiences, of their ethical responsibilities. Interestingly, in plays by companies aiming to tell British East Asian and Asian Canadian stories, both protagonists are white and start off distant from, if not opposed to, the Chinese victims of the plays. Their dramatic journeys cause ethical transformations where they recognize and begin to truly understand the plight of the victims. In this way, the ghosts that haunt the protagonists are there to invest members of the larger community with the "spirit" to act. Not just for British East Asian and Asian Canadian audiences, the plays suggest a desire for dialogue with and support from the normative white community.

As the protagonist in 58, Kate is portrayed as a white, lower-middle class worker with some very commonly held stereotypical views about foreigners such as the Chinese. These are revealed during her conversations with Zhaodi. For example, she asks Zhaodi if her name means anything because she thought it did, rather "like in westerns when they call the Indians 'Young Buffalo' or 'Pretty Little Cloud'" (Cherbonnier 10). Zhaodi explains that Chinese names do sometimes mean something and hers happens to mean "bring a younger brother" because her parents "were hoping for a boy" (Cherbonnier 10). This reference to the traditional Chinese family preference for a son leads Kate to ask Zhaodi, "So it's true all the stories about parents killing baby girls?" (10). Though partly in jest, the question prompts a bemused Zhaodi to say, "Well I'm here" (10), leading to an awkward moment during which Kate apologizes. In another instance of cultural misunderstanding, Kate, having told Zhaodi a little about her background, asks the latter, "where do you come from?" (Cherbonnier 19).

While seemingly an innocuous question, these five words have become saturated with meaning in the British East Asian and Asian Canadian cultural consciousness. Often seen to be outsiders because they look ethnically foreign to normative white citizens, British-born East Asians and Canadian-born Asians have often had to contend with the question of their origins. For them, the simple question should not apply because they feel British or Canadian due to their country of birth. Being asked the question means being reminded that people in their home country do not necessarily accept them as fellow citizens. This issue is played out in the dialogue between Kate and Zhaodi. When Zhaodi tells Kate that she is from “Harrow,” Kate says, “I mean originally” (20). This line of questioning illustrates how people who ask this usually want to hear an answer tied to their interlocutor’s ethnic appearance. Zhaodi repeats that she is from Harrow and tells Kate that she was born there because “[her] mother found out she was pregnant when she arrived in th[e] country [England]” (20). Making a joke of it, Kate says to Zhaodi, “You were smuggled in...” to which the latter replies, “yes...you could say that” (20). Although Kate’s quip could be taken light-heartedly, there are darker undertones to what she says, especially if it comes from someone who is actually racist. Kate is not meant to be villainous, however, and her behaviour is more indicative of ignorance than intentional offensiveness.

Indeed, even though Zhaodi is introduced as an interpreter who is chiefly there to help Kate sort through the 58 victim’s belongings and identify the unnamed dead, she actually serves an even more important role, as a physical Chinese presence who can guide Kate to a better understanding of Chinese culture. In a scene where they discuss some of the possessions found on the bodies, Kate says, “It’s strange what you find in people’s pockets. They come from the other side of the world with nothing but a small round mirror and an

elastic band on the wrist” (Cherbonnier 20). In response, Zhaodi is able to explain that “the mirror’s meant to chase away evil spirits” because people believe that “evil spirits are so ugly that they get frightened when they see their own reflection in the mirror” (Cherbonnier 20). Similarly, she enlightens Kate on the elastic band found on one of the victim’s wrists, saying that it was worn for luck because of its red colour, which is considered lucky in Chinese culture. Their exchanges are important because Kate’s assumptions about the Chinese are quite commonplace, and in this way Zhaodi serves not only as a linguistic interpreter but a cultural one as well, explaining aspects of Chinese culture.

Within the context of the play, her most significant insight for Kate is why the ghosts are haunting her. As mentioned earlier, Zhaodi tells Kate that the ghosts are desperate to be recognized by the living because of specific Chinese beliefs about death and the afterlife. In order to be allowed to enter the gates and pass peacefully over into the afterlife, the ghosts need Kate to know who they are, because then they will be named and mourned. Zhaodi goes on to involve Kate in a ritual right in the office, setting up a makeshift altar on the desk by arranging the three photos of the unidentified ghost victims and lighting incense. Kate goes along but manages to express that “This is too weird” (Cherbonnier 62). In using Zhaodi as an interpreter and guide, Yellow Earth invites audiences, many of whom presumably hold views like Kate’s, to regard and be initiated into some of the more obscure aspects and beliefs in Chinese culture. In this way, audiences who do not know Chinese culture could see things through Kate’s eyes and, hopefully, be transformed, just as she is in the play. At the same time, it is important to remember that “Chinese” culture is not homogeneous across native or even diasporic communities. Different regions, classes and even tribes in China, along with people who self-identify as “Chinese” in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam,

Singapore, the Philippines, and the West, mean that even though there might be shared practices and beliefs, there are also many community-specific variations in what constitutes “Chinese” culture. What Zhaodi translates for Kate is one version of “Chineseness” that not all of that ethnicity might subscribe to. Indeed, what Kate finds “weird” might also be bizarre to other Chinese people who do not share the same beliefs.

Just as Kate is the embodied lens through which audiences can experience and learn about some aspects of Chinese culture, Max is also the protagonist that audiences can root for as he learns to take more ethical responsibility for the history of the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act. Similar to Kate, Max also has his own assumptions about the Chinese in Canada. Clearly biased against them, he is shown telling a colleague over the phone, “this goddamn Chinese thing—we have to take a hard line, Bob, a hard line, or this country is going to the...*dogs*...” (Yee 18). He also takes issue with the fact that in Chinatown, a Royal Bank of Canada’s bank machine has screen instructions in Chinese. As he complains to Thomas Hatch, his colleague, “it’s the *principle* of it. It’s that we’re in Canada; Chinese isn’t the official language of Canada, English is. And French, I guess, but who even speaks that anymore?” (Yee 23). Justifying that he is not racist because he “love[s] Oriental girls” and had married one, Max nonetheless claims, “they’re [the Chinese are] taking over. They study harder in school, they work harder, and then they bring each other up the ladder because who knows, right?” (Yee 23). Using his wife’s brother as an extreme example, Max says the latter was “working the rice paddies in China one minute, not a word of English, [but] a quick boat ride later he’s CFO of Merrill-fucking-Lynch” (Yee 23). Paralleling Rick’s template for self-transformation in *Banana Boys*, Max also views fresh-off-the-boat Asians as so successful that they become a threat. In the course of his quest, however, Max comes to empathise with

the Chinese. Witnessing Tommy Jade's fate and finding out about his own familial link with Sylvia, Max understands and is ready to take personal responsibility for their suffering.

In both plays, then, the spectral are agents that inspire, if not force, change in the protagonists. There are differences in how the spectral is used, however. While Sylvia appears to Max in a material body and is able to inflict pain on him, the ghosts in 58 remain primarily in the spirit realm. Unlike Sylvia who is able to communicate with Max and tell him to find Tommy, the ghosts are not able to speak to Kate until the very end when she participates in the mourning ritual for them. Whereas Sylvia has direct contact with Max, Chen Min, Meng Xin and Lan require Zhaodi to help Kate understand them. In terms of their haunting of the protagonists, Sylvia and the three ghosts also have different agendas. As a vengeful spirit who has apparently murdered many anti-Chinese criminal perpetrators across decades, Sylvia's goal is to cause an ethical transformation in Max. Rather than telling him everything, she sends him on a quest to find someone named Tommy Jade, a difficult task which he is reluctant to undertake. Max is nonetheless made to go through with it, even as his grasp on reality slips with every spectral and fantastical encounter. As he tells Hatch of his week-long nightmarish quest, "I can't say I'm...clear on what's happened over the last week" (Yee 86). In fact, he has "had a heart attack," "been shot in the head...twice," been "stabbed in the leg," one of his hands is broken and "[his] teeth have been pulled out" (Yee 86). Worst of all, though, is the fact that Sylvia has taken his son. In spite of his original cynical stance on the terms of redress he was in a position to negotiate for the government, he comes to the following epiphany:

They took my son. My—who does that? Who takes a child away
from his father? Who holds a family as fucking ransom? (beat)

These are the question I've been asking myself. Been trying to—
understand, right? Negotiating with myself. And you know what I
realized? We do. We do those things. And then we—what—what,
we give them a cheque? Say “sorry”? Where's the fairness in that,
Hatch? Where's the justice in that? (Yee 86)

Aside from pushing him to finally recognize his grandfather's murder of Tommy, Sylvia is able to teach Max an even more important lesson through taking Danny away from him. Although it is not clear whether she intended this—she might have taken Danny simply to pressure Max into undertaking the quest, and even threatens to kill Danny at various points—the injustice of this act forces Max to evaluate his own position. Even though the events seem to all have been a dream in the end, Sylvia does manage to change Max for the better. Her intervention also improves the relationship between Danny and Max: the latter realizes how much his son means to him, and Danny learns to call him “Dad” even though he has, perhaps as a result of his autism, always addressed his father as “Max”. Importantly, Sylvia's successful transformation of Max also brings her some level of peace. Having gone back to the past and seen Tommy's death when Sylvia was only a baby, Max is able to give her the jade pendant that her father had intended her to have. In addition, having spent time with Danny while holding him hostage, she is able to feel a parent's true love for his child when she sees how well-adjusted Danny is to his mixed-race heritage. Rather than the negativity she was used to facing because she is a hybrid, Sylvia is able to consider herself “twice blessed” instead.

In contrast, the three ghosts in 58 are largely unknown to Kate. Even with Zhaodi's help and the mourning ritual for them at the end, Kate does not get to hear their stories or

understand the true depth of their suffering. Although they appear in several scenes showing them when they were alive, these are primarily diegetic scenes for audiences. As a commemorative play based on real events, 58's addition of three victim-characters and their varied backgrounds functions to add nuances to the nameless mass of bodies described in the news. As such, audiences are introduced to Chen Min, a down-on-his-luck farmer who, wanting to be able to support the woman he loves, was lured by a snakehead (human trafficker) to work in the UK. Rather different in background, another eventual victim is Meng Xin, the wife of an activist who has been imprisoned. She decides to leave China for her own safety, with tragic consequences. A departure from the impoverished Chen Min and political refugee Meng Xin, the play also features Lan, a young, vociferous rebel with blue hair. Although Kate later learns that her name is "Yin Hu Yu" (Cherbonnier 63), the character goes by the single word "Lan," which means "Blue" in Standard Chinese. Self-sufficient, confident, and carrying with her an abiding love for her brother who died at a political rally, Lan has somehow managed to get herself on the same route to the UK where she looks forward to being free after the stultifying intellectual atmosphere in China. More for the benefit of audiences than the protagonist Kate, the three characters' back-stories offer glimpses into some of the socio-cultural and political issues affecting China.

Despite having a large economy, many areas of the country are poverty-stricken. Chen Min is representative of the farming class of people who have little choice in terms of other opportunities. In love with Xiuxiu, a widow with a young son from the next village, Chen tries to win her hand in marriage, but is rejected because she wants to go to another city to find work. Although she was working as a teacher, she says that there are no children in school and she needs to support her son. During their conversation, Xiuxiu criticizes Chen

for selling his blood, which many villagers had resorted to doing as a quick way to get money.³⁰ As his story unfolds, audiences learn that Chen had actually changed his mind about going to the UK when he bumped into Xiuxiu on a bus on the way to the new country. However, the snakeheads refused to release him from his contract and sent him on his fateful journey, although not before giving him a vicious beating. In a different class to Chen, Meng Xin has been caught up in the controversy around the building of a large dam in her home town of Fengdu. As explained in a scene between Meng Xin and her grandmother, the project led to the displacement of many people who had lived on the site for many years. Meng tries to persuade her grandmother to relocate to a new flat given to residents of the area. However, the latter refuses on the principle that this was her home, and she had planned to die there, having even already bought her burial site. It turns out that Meng Xin has decided to leave because her husband has been arrested for writing petitions and articles about the project. Since the government is watching her too, she feels it would be safer for her to go to the UK where her husband can join her if he is released. Planning to stay with friends until she settles down, Meng later tells Lan that she plans to work as a cook in a restaurant—the recipe book that Kate and Zhaodi look through belongs to her. She too is caught up in the fateful journey in the lorry container.

Lastly, Lan, or Blue, is a young rebel in her twenties. Literally bursting onto the stage through a corkboard on the wall, her entrance is dynamic, full of colour and rage. Clearly having idolised her brother, she tells audiences that he was a rebel who died young, having

³⁰ This is in reference to a practice which took place in the early to mid-1990s in China. According to John Gittings, *The Guardian's* foreign editor and China expert from 1983 to 2003, “Henan was one of many provinces where commercial companies known as ‘bloodheads’ offered Chinese peasants a tempting deal...give [them their] blood, [they] will extract the plasma and let [the peasants] have the rest back—plus some cash. Red blood cells were returned to the peasants from a tainted pool using unhygienic equipment” (“The AIDS Scandal”). This led to the widespread contraction of HIV/AIDS.

“had his head kicked in” during a protest. She follows his example and appears to live a life of abandon, doing whatever she likes. Incandescent with the bravado of youth and grit, her portrayal is very different from the poverty-stricken Chen and the quiet resolve of Meng. Speaking abruptly and with exclamation, she sometimes sings or hums a song by Chinese rock musician Cui Jian, with the lyrics, “Nothing to my name/ I want to give you my dreams/ And give you my freedom” (Cherbonnier 60). First emerging in 1986, the song became an unofficial anthem for youths who felt disillusioned with the government and was associated with the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Lan’s vibrancy as a character is a strong counter to the lotus blossom and dragon lady stereotypes so prevalent in orientalist works.

As she rants to audiences in a long monologue, she reveals that she is no longer an innocent youth, having lived with an older man who supported her financially. Finding him dead in the shower one day, she took the rest of his money and found a way to go to the UK, having researched the place on the Internet. Befriending Meng and Chen on the same journey, she finds her dreams tragically cut short. Indeed, unlike the circumstances under which Chen found himself with the snakeheads, Meng and Lan appeared to have gotten onto the same journey with different means and resources. Whereas Chen would have been answerable to the snakeheads, Meng has friends who were going to find her work. Also different from the other two, Lan was excited because she thinks the UK is a “free country” (Cherbonnier 51) and she is looking forward to it after the surveillance and oppressiveness of China.

The victims’ back-stories as described above are shown in a combination of presentation styles: flashbacks, first-person audience address, as well as dialogues and interactions between the characters. The victims therefore ghost the stage both as spectres

within the world of the living and as memories, or re-enactments of several lives. It is implied, however, that their presence has been causing Kate and Zhaodi to feel unwell and uneasy. Even though they do not fully interact with the living until the end, the ghosts and their stories have been taking place in the same office space where Kate and Zhaodi work. Based on footage from YET's archives, the production's set heightened the eeriness of the ghosts' presences. Designed by Sigyn Stenqvist, the office itself was a small room with a table and two chairs set so that Kate and Zhaodi were in profile when they sat. Two walls flanked this central working area from the point of view of the audience. Throughout the performance Kate and Zhaodi pulled open drawers so that the walls looked like they contained filing cabinets. These cabinets were shown to audiences in profile as well, emerging as long drawers that Kate could pull out to retrieve files. However, in a feat of design ingenuity, these same drawers also doubled up as morgue storage. Indeed, in one especially eerie scene, the three ghosts "entered" the stage by sitting up and climbing out of the long wall drawers that had been made to slide out slowly. The visual impact was such that these spectral bodies looked like they were trapped amongst the case files of the 58 victims.

At the end of the play, the whole set was "wrapped up". The walls that audiences saw are revealed to be the doors of a metal container. These were closed, triggering memories of how the doors were closed on the 58 real life victims. Even though the actors playing ghosts do not physically interact with Kate and Zhaodi until the end, the juxtaposition of their bodies in the same space and the discomfort that the two living characters feel create an atmosphere of disquiet. Eventually however, the ghosts do come forward to identify themselves when Kate has transformed enough to show acceptance and compassion for the

victims. In this way, unlike Sylvia, the three ghosts have a personal agenda—being recognized by the living and mourned, so that they can have a peaceful afterlife. While Sylvia is a powerful force that drives Max to change, the three ghosts only have real impact on Kate because of Zhaodi's presence and cultural translation. While their haunting causes Kate and Zhaodi fear and discomfort, they do not have the same obvious presence of purpose as Sylvia in contacting the living. Ultimately, however, both plays juggle fiction and reality, leading to ways of processing the real life tragedy in reimagined and empathetic ways.

4.4 Voices of Racialization

In both *58* and *lady in the red dress*, the spectral pushes the living to act, effecting changes and transformative recognitions in the protagonists. As mentioned earlier, whereas Sylvia travels through history in a material body, wreaking vengeance on people in positions of authority who have committed racist acts against the Chinese in Canada, the three ghosts in *58* haunt Kate and Zhaodi because they do not want to remain nameless and unrecognized. In order to find peace, they need to be acknowledged and mourned. At the same time, as historical events given literary and aesthetic reconfigurations, the plays are also about reflecting on the past and seeking empathetic connections. The fact that both protagonists are white and are taken on transformative “journeys” shows that in the companies’ approaches to the plays, there is a desire to get the ethnic majority to understand the struggles of immigrants, who are often cast as villains in racist propaganda.

In the plays, then, the characters with racist traits are the villainous ones, if not outright villains. Construed as a reductive stereotype himself—white, working class, a victim

of a declining industry that has rendered him jobless—Kate’s husband is the voice of racist “reason”. This is evident during a phonecall he shares with a friend, theatrically staged as a monologue:

Where are you? You lucky sod. Me? Home. When you coming over? Can’t you come any earlier? Come on mate. I’m so bored ...it’s doing me head in. No, I can’t. I can’t, Kate’s got the car. Yeah, down south. She needs it...for work. Dunno exactly. Yeah ...no...yeah something to do with that, the ones in the lorry. Are you sure? Fifty-eight of them? Bloody Hell! Can’t say I’m sorry though. Yeah! We’re too soft. [...] Who pays for all that eh??? We are. You, me...we’re paying for it. OK not me...but people like me right? What do we get out of it? Bugger all. They don’t even spent [sic] their money here. No, they send it all back to their family. I tell you Mike we’re too fucking soft. And I get grief from my wife in the bargain. Kate? Not too good. Dunno. At weekends she don’t want to go out. She don’t want to drink. She just wants to stay home. I’ve been home all fucking week. I want a bit of fun you know what I mean...a bit of a laugh. Go for a Chinese? Yeah very funny. You know what? She keeps buying takeaways. Chinese... yeah I don’t mind sweet and sour but she buys these other weird things. Kung Po something, black bean bollocks. I tell you, if she carries on she’ll turn all slitty eyed on me... . (Cherbonnier 28)

Peppering his conversation with negative references to the Chinese, Dave articulates views that are not often openly discussed in everyday conversation. Delineating a clear “us” versus “them” line of thought, Dave claims to be part of the ethnic majority being made to pay for the influx of immigrants to Britain. Even though he does not literally “pay” out anything, given his jobless situation, he considers himself a victim simply because of his own self-identification as British. In staging this scene, *Yellow Earth* also brings in an element of the “real” through a performance video featuring a range of people voicing negative opinions about foreigners in Britain. Just as Dave says, “we’re too soft,” the video interrupts the scene, showing “real” people expressing views that echo his own.

Recorded during workshops that Tse and YET conducted with communities in Leicester, Birmingham and Canterbury, the projection of “real life” people’s opinions captured on camera right in the middle of Dave’s speech creates a moment of frisson, even discomfort. Whereas audiences could perceive Dave’s lines as being constructed for the purposes of the play, this buffer of the literary is removed when confronted with “real” speech. That real people could and do hold views similar to Dave’s means that there is an ongoing undercurrent of racial hatred subsumed under a veneer of political correctness. The video serves to remind audiences that these views exist; the play, then, aims to challenge these opinions by allowing viewers to tread in the victims’ shoes and enabling them to sympathise with their plight. At the same time, because the video has been edited and cut for use in the scene, its contents should not be accepted at face value—directorial presence and agenda should be taken into account. This scene’s juxtaposition of “real” opinions and Dave’s speech brings to light the difficult topic of racist reasoning, or why people hold these

views. In allowing space for these thoughts on stage, *Yellow Earth* invites people to reflect on them, and to feel the impact of hearing them voiced so openly.

While some racist beliefs exist because of ignorance or unfounded fears, such as the idea that immigrants are stealing jobs from the native population, there are also those that are purely underpinned by racial dislike or, at the extreme, hatred. In a later scene, Dave calls Kate up to share a joke: “Just a quick one... Do you know why there are so many Chinese in Harrow? Do you know?” (31). Knowing what he is going to say, she tries to stop him, but he continues: “Because when they get off the plane, they jump into a taxi and say ‘Harrow...harrow’” (31). This exchange is made even more awkward for Kate because Zhaodi is in the room, and in their earlier conversation, the latter had said she is from Harrow, having been born in London. When she tells him off, Dave says, “Come on. There was a time you would have found it funny” (31). Kate replies that “that was before,” and Dave adds, “before your slitty-eyed friends” (31), whom he goes on to brand as “illegals” and “criminals” (32). In this exchange, Dave’s views stem from a true dislike of the Chinese. However, Kate’s discomfort with his joke and remarks shows that engagement with individuals can help people to get past the abstraction of larger generalizations of race and ethnicity. While Kate had enjoyed Dave’s racist quips before, her interactions with Jennifer and Zhaodi have given her a chance to understand Chinese culture better, and to put a face to the “foreign”. Having grown to empathize with two people, Kate finds it difficult to accept Dave’s cruel comments. In contrast, Dave’s cultural isolation and detachment from Kate’s work means he is able to hold those opinions because “the Chinese” are still largely “alien” to him.

This voice of racist reasoning is also captured in *lady in the red dress* in the character of Thomas Hatch, Max's colleague. Although not explicitly stated, Hatch is implied to be a lawyer also working at the Department of Justice but at a higher rank. As an interlocutor with Max before his transformation, Hatch comes across as a reasonable person, one who sees the bigger picture and has the government's interest at heart. As he says to Max,

The problem, Max, is the longer and louder they scream...the more likely that people are going to listen. And we can't have that. We've done informal surveys, only 23% of Canadians even know what this redress business is about. That's 77% of the general public—real Canadians—who don't even know what the fucking Head Tax was! But the longer these people scream 'not good enough' ...the greater chance somebody is gonna stop and ask "not good enough for what?" And that's the beginning of the end, Max. This is our chance to acknowledge and commemorate a tragic part of our nation's history, but more importantly it's our last chance to do it on our terms. They want us to 'apologize,' to claim 'liability.' How will that look, Max? You tell me how that will look. (24)

Later on in the play, however, when Sylvia's quest has put Max through the paces and he is distraught at the thought of losing his son, Hatch reveals that he is actually deeply racist, despite his veneer of civility. Kidnapped and bound to a chair by the distraught Max who believes that shooting Hatch would help bring Danny back, Hatch furiously launches into a lengthy monologue that is at once horrifying and significant:

Lemme tell you something, Max. I hate these fuckers. Okay?
Off the record, you want the truth? I hate them. And everyone like them. They treat Canada like its one big alimony cheque, and everyone wants their due. They paid a fucking tax. Jesus, I pay taxes, I don't ask for it back. Because it's what I owe, Max. I owe that to my country. And you know what, buddy? They owed it to my country too. We gave them opportunity. We gave them work. Wages. And I'm sick and fucking tired of every Tom, Dick and Wong crying about how they 'suffered.' If it's not the Head Tax, it's the Exclusion Act. You got the Indians yappin' about the residential school bullshit, the Japs and the internment, Blacks with their drugs and guns, Raghead-fucking terrorists turning Toronto into fucking Baghdad...But *we're* the bad guys? (88)

Echoing Dave's stance in 58, Hatch goes on to say:

I'm sick of it! Cry cry cry about the goddamn *state* of things. But you say this stuff, Max, and people think you're a Nazi. White people are the minority, Max. We're giving jobs out to coloured people left, right and centre, qualified or not; they can't speak English, we let 'em wear their towels on their heads, even though—I mean *come on*—you live in *Canada* now; we give them all this shit, Max...and we're the racists? That's a joke. That's a goddamn bumper sticker. (88)

In this fiery outburst, Yee places in Hatch's mouth a series of thoughts and rants that is framed as the unspoken "truth". Previously couching his words in political correctness, Hatch lets loose here and reveals his real feelings about foreigners. Clearly xenophobic, Hatch, much like Dave, lays claim to his perception of Canada as a "white" nation, which has been losing out because of the influx of "coloured people". Ignoring the role of early white settlers in their treatment of First Nations' peoples, Hatch simply lumps all non-white people together as victims "crying" and "yapping" about inequality. In his mind, they do not deserve more because Canada has already provided them with opportunities. Referring to the climate of political correctness as well, where his opinions cannot be openly voiced, Hatch also argues that white people are the minority and are the ones who are oppressed. Even though his words are extreme and shocking, fu-GEN does powerful work in bringing them onto the stage because they are spoken in the context of a drama interrogating a real-life event. Through the frame of theatre, these thoughts are given a chance to be heard and reflected upon. Indeed, in a culture that champions freedom of speech, such opinions, no matter how worrying, need to be heard and addressed, not hidden beneath the surface of civilized hypocrisy.

In giving space for the articulation of these thoughts, fu-GEN reminds audiences that these beliefs exist and could even be rather commonplace. As seen in Hatch's situation, however, they are often suppressed because of the stigma that goes with admitting to them. Given Hatch's initial portrayal as a brazen character with a cruel sense of humour that is nonetheless likeable, his words are there to shock, as well as to provoke discomfort in audiences whose own attitudes might resonate with his. Underlying Hatch's fury is the idea that Canada, his country, and the Canadian culture he had always known is being changed to

accommodate foreign newcomers. In his mind, the Canadian nation is fixed and all cultures should be subsumed under his imagined sense of Canadianness. Instead, he sees his environment changing, and as a result, feels threatened and displaced. What is at stake for him is the social acceptance of his views, which he expects others like Max to also hold. Instead, as Hatch finds it, these thoughts are generally unacceptable and might even cause him to lose his reputation. In creating a character like Hatch and providing a public forum for airing his views, fu-GEN offers a safe space for these ideas to flow out and be said without social consequences. Although responses to Hatch could vary, such as from grim agreement to horror due to past encounters with racism, the fact that fu-GEN has portrayed this shows that it is willing to tackle difficult social questions and confront audiences with challenging ideas.

Given the poignant story of Tommy Jade and the ethical transformation of Max, it is possible that the play could also be transformative for audiences who do not consider themselves racist, yet nonetheless feel the socio-cultural effects of immigration. In comparison to Hatch's highly emotive outpouring of hate, Yellow Earth's Dave's views are presented in a relatively constrained manner, bolstered by video recordings of "real" people giving negative opinions about foreigners. Taken together though, both companies' strategy of allowing racist thoughts on stage serves to remind audiences that these very same ideas exist, are erroneous in an ethical world, and are the cause of much suffering, historically and in present times.

Indeed, while both companies allow space for the iteration of racist reasoning in these plays, they also foreground the plight of immigrants in a way that highlights their reasons for immigrating. As seen in the three ghosts' stories in 58, the victims left China because of

poverty, as well as for personal and political reasons. Both plays also invite a deeper reflection on the vulnerability of the victims, and illustrate the high stakes of their actions when compared to the everyday decisions of native white characters. In a scene from 58, for example, Kate tells Zhaodi more about Dave and how she “wish[es] he’d get himself a job” so that she “wouldn’t feel so responsible” (Cherbonnier 37). She also fantasizes about not having to go back to him. In response, Zhaodi tells Kate that she is “lucky” because she “can choose to go to Spain, Canada or Australia and start a new life” (Cherbonnier 37). When Kate reminds her that “it’s difficult to get a work permit” (37), Zhaodi says that Kate does not “have to put [her] life at risk to get there” (37). Along similar lines, when Hatch reveals his true feelings about foreigners to Max, he compares his own tax contributions to the Chinese Head Tax, saying, “they paid a fucking tax. Jesus, *I* pay taxes, I don’t ask for it back” (Yee 88). In this way, just as Zhaodi shows Kate that her decision to move, should she want to, does not equate to life and death as it does for the 58 victims, Hatch’s self-comparison to someone like Tommy Jade and descendants of the Head Tax payers shows how absurdly out of touch he is with the impact of this historical atrocity. In recreating and commemorating these traumatic events, then, the companies aim to enlighten audiences as well as invite understanding.

4.5 Ghosting and Thematic Connections

As discussed earlier, interestingly, both *Yellow Earth* and *fu-GEN* have used the spectral in the very plays that are based on real life tragedies. Serving to commemorate and reflect on these traumatic times, the events themselves haunt the plays as much as the plays

use ghosts to inspire action and changes in the protagonists. Interspersed with the affective truth of the past, the absurd, fantastical and ghostly elements in the plays enable the parsing of senseless violence in ways that generate moments of, as Avery Gordon terms them, “transformative recognition[s]” (8). Aside from the actual ghost characters on stage, however, the plays also feature ghosting in the manner discussed by Marvin Carlson in his book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2003). Even though as he writes, “on the most basic level all arts are built up of identical material used over and over again, individual words in poetry, tones in music, hues in painting, ...these semiotic building blocks carry much of their reception burden in their combinations” (7). For Carlson, however, “the practice of theatre has been in all periods and cultures particularly obsessed with memory and ghosting” (7). In particular, as he explains, “unlike the reception operations of genre...in which audience members encounter a new but distinctly different example of a type of artistic product they have encountered before, ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context” (7). Whether repeatedly reappearing as texts, actors’ bodies, costumes or props, the stage is full of “ghosts,” complicating meaning making and interpretation. In this way, we can say that all theatre is haunted by characters, plots, and so on. In this play, however, the ghosts are specifically labelled as such.

Just as *Play to Win*, as discussed in Chapter Two, uses role-doubling to implicate Paul’s parents in the violence he suffers, *lady in the red dress* also makes use of the staging device. Along with the main characters Max, Danny and Sylvia are a panoply of motley characters who fall into two main groups—a series of mostly villainous roles played by a white actor, and a list of mostly good characters played by an Asian actor. In the 2009

premiere of the play, Stewart Arnott played the white characters Coogan, Hatch, Doctor, Stryker and John. Of these characters, the negative ones are Coogan, the corrupt immigration official who kills Tommy Jade and shoots the baby Sylvia; Hatch, Max's racist colleague who is also involved in the redress process; Stryker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) lieutenant whom Sylvia seduces and kills for his racist ideologies, after he calls her names such as "half-breed" for being mixed-race; and John, Max's father who tried to sacrifice his own son when Sylvia first approached him. The Doctor is the only neutral character who serves as a comic figure when he speaks to a befuddled Max in Cantonese. In the same production, Korean Canadian actor Ins Choi played Tommy Jade, Willy, Biff and Happy, all likeable characters. Tommy Jade is the direct victim of the Chinese Exclusion Act, as a result of which, despite his hard work and trust in the immigration system, people such as Coogan steal his money and refuse to bring his wife over from China; Biff and Happy are two brothers whom Max approaches for help in locating Tommy Jade, comically depicted as a one-man DJ and a one-man TV station respectively; and Willy, implied to be paternally related to the brothers, owns The Golden Pearl, a strip club in Chinatown that Max goes to for help. The use of role-doubling here is interesting: on one hand, for a play so bound up in moral issues and ethical responsibility, role-doubling allows for the representation of the characters as archetypes that are dynamic and memorable. The template of the same actors' bodies reappearing as victim or aide and racist oppressor emphasizes the ideas linked to each character type. On the other hand, the conflation of these characters onto two particular bodies marked by ethnicity inadvertently cites the problematic practice of non-differentiation. Despite playing a series of different characters, the same actor's body in each

case might lead to the perpetuation of erroneous ideas such as “all Asians...look alike” or, as seen in the play, “all white men are secretly racist”.

Aside from the spectral figures and the use of role-doubling, ghosting also plays a part in Yee’s play in the form of citation. As mentioned earlier, two of the five actors of the show play a multitude of characters. The actor who plays Tommy Jade, Ins Choi, also takes on the roles of Willy Chan, Biff Chan and Happy Chan, an instantly recognisable trio of names for theatre audiences cognizant of Arthur Miller’s work. Yee’s citation of the three characters from *Death of a Salesman* brings to *lady in the red dress* not just the titillation of nominal recognition, but also the memory of Willy’s psychological breakdown and his relationship with his sons. Given that the relationship between Max and his son Danny features strongly in the latter play, which also sees Max descend into mental instability over the moral choices he has made, Yee’s ghosting of his play with one of the western canon’s great modern tragedies is strategically effective. Serving as comedic foil to the strained experiences between Max and Danny, Willy, Biff, and Happy Chan allow Yee to position his work as part of a long line of great plays and also incorporate a kind of dramatic shorthand in reference to a familial structure ruined by misplaced faith in misguided beliefs. Although they are not the focus of Yee’s play and there is no clear relationship among the Chans except for their shared surnames and familial link in Miller’s original, their citation brings to mind thematic echoes that resonate with *lady in the red dress*. Thus, like Willy Loman’s obstinate delusions of grandeur, Max’s colleague Hatch also clings to false ideals built on a familiarity with his world as “white”. In the face of having to redress historical wrongs, he reveals the misguidedness and moral bankruptcy of his position. Whereas Willy Loman is haunted by the memory of his son Biff discovering his infidelity, Max is haunted by Sylvia,

who sends him on an immersive historical and personal lesson involving his own family's culpability in the exploitation and even murder of someone like Tommy Jade.

Broadly, Max's situation also parallels Willy's, as a father and as someone whose mind appears to veer off into fantasy or the unexplained. Just like the Loman brothers, the Chan brothers do not appear to have amounted to much, except as radio and television presenter-performers whom Max approach for help in completing the quest Sylvia has set for him. Departing from Miller, however, Yee constructs the brothers as embodied puns: Biff and Happy Chan are both the "media"—providing music, television, and culture—and "mediums"—giving access and contact to the spiritual, fantastical world. Indeed, Happy is a one-man radio station who broadcasts Asian music and reports on traffic. When Max approaches him about Tommy, he is hostile, until the mention of Sylvia. In his role as a medium, Happy "channels" Tommy by embodying him for Max, even telling his listeners about the latter's first "transcendental radio experience" (49). To get the complete story, however, Max also seeks out Biff, the "one-man TV station" (Yee 61). Differing from his brother's "medium" powers, Biff broadcasts Tommy's "history," with the actor playing Biff morphing into Tommy as Max watches. Ultimately though, Max needed to experience and witness everything as it unfolded in history. To do that, Biff shoots him in the head and sends him to "the other side", leading him to his great transformative recognition. Operating rather differently to the Loman brothers in Miller's play, the Chan brothers are nonetheless useful as a dramaturgical device which rewards audiences who recognize their significance and can tap into the connections between Miller's play and Yee's own.

Additionally, the strains and underlying love from Miller's play haunt the various father and son relationships in Yee's own work. Injected as an element of familiarity, they

are nonetheless made sufficiently different by Yee, so much so that they are more akin to absurd gatekeepers of historical time and space, upsetting Max's sense of reality. For example, Max meets Willy first. Having apparently passed out from a heart attack the first time he visits Chinatown, he goes to Willy's strip club a second time for information on Tommy Jade. His access can only be granted with a password and while Max does not know it, Danny shows up unexpectedly and supplies him with the correct word of "Sylvia". In this scene, Danny surprises Max by greeting Willy cheerfully in Cantonese as if he has been there before. Max is also allowed to watch a peepshow into the past after Willy painfully extracts a payment in the form of a tooth. As the latter tells Max, "You are the mouthpiece of justice, Mr Lochran. And you owe me the truth. As an agent of collection, it is my job to obtain it. Please understand, it's nothing personal" (Yee 38). In this way, the ghosts and elements of ghosting in both plays serve not only to inspire the living to act, but also to draw thematic connections for audience recognition and meaning-making.

4.6 Justifying Justice

Coming three years after the official redress, *lady in the red dress* is similar to 58 in that they both serve commemorative purposes. Indeed, by the time the play premiered in 2009, Prime Minister Stephen Harper had already presented an official apology to the remaining survivors of the Head Tax and Exclusion Act, largely brought about because of the activist work done by the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC). In this way, the play cannot effect any real changes politically, but in some ways similar to 58, it helps process and bring to light the affective consequences of communal trauma. In both, the

playwrights have taken liberties with reimagining scenarios even though the works were inspired by real events. Further, both playwrights rely on spectral characters capable of inspiring, if not provoking, changes in the living characters. Where in 58, for example, the ghosts of Lan, Meng and Chen Min cause Kate and Zhaodi so much discomfort that they find a mutual understanding for each other's cultural background, in *lady in the red dress* Sylvia's quest to avenge her father and the resolution to that through Max lead to the protagonist's own change in perceiving his own ethical responsibilities. Thinking about spectral characters in drama, Alice Rayner has reminded us,

One of the dilemmas in using ghosts as a critical trope is that, on the one hand, they remain imaginary figures and can thus be dismissed as imaginary and that, on the other, these figures represent realities so horrifyingly real either personally or historically that the trope may trivialize those realities. (xxvi)

Cherbonnier and Yee's plays work, however, because they are ethically and empathetically creative works that commemorate and explore the affective aspects of these events. Indeed, their very non-factual nature provides a continually engaged consciousness that might otherwise have slowly faded in time. As Rayner has also written,

Inhabiting the twentieth-century landscapes of the dead, where ever fewer survivors of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, can tell their stories, the demand to remember is increasingly imperative lest the reality of the terror be forgotten

and turned into mere fact. For whatever their value as correctives to idiosyncratic, speculative, or manipulative rhetoric, facts are already signs of forgetting as they provide legitimacy, order, selectivity, and false assurance against the indeterminacies of the lived relations between past and present, the dead and the living (xxvii).

For Rayner, “While soothing, facts are themselves spectral, having lost the productive and constituent force of the paradoxical position of doubleness, of ‘is and is not.’ Through facts, reality fades through a comforting series of apparent certainties or an apparent ground for opinion or action” (xxvii). In this way, these two plays are significant in their use of ghosts, the fantastical and absurd. Their broaching of various ideas and issues allows for continued parsing of the mentality that led to the events in the first place, and helps to keep them in public consciousness longer.

In the context of this study, reading these two plays together further reveals a shared strategy between the companies despite their geographical and cultural differences. Seen in the juxtapositions of Hatch and Dave with their respective changed counterparts, Max and Kate, the plays are also about justifying the need for justice in these tragic events. Although politically incorrect, offensive, and troublingly real, the staging of Hatch and Dave’s outpouring of racist hatred allows their views to be aired rather than silenced. Given that much of their reasons for racial hatred stems from fears about losing out on their positions of privilege traditionally dominated by “whites,” hearing these very views on stage gives audiences a chance to reflect on their validity relative to the experiences of immigrants undergoing trauma. In this sense, the plays are there to enlighten and explain; both works

counter racist claims by showing how emigration is often a necessity, and also, how immigrants can be fundamentally decent people who deserve help and acceptance.

Critical reception of the plays shows how the strategy of the spectral and absurd has split opinion. Whereas Momoko Price, quoting Yee in her review of the play, writes that he “wanted to create a world where the voice of disenfranchisement could be heard, [and] had no choice but to be heard in a very real, violent way” (“Getting Angry is Better”), Robert Crew, writing for the *Toronto Star*, claimed, “the subject deserves better. This mishmash of a play has all the depth—and some of the gore—of a video game” (“Play has the depth”). While Crew is disturbed by the reimagination of the Chinese Head Tax redress in Yee’s play, Glenn Sumi, writing for Toronto’s *Now Magazine*, is impressed with Yee’s sense of humour in approaching such a heavy topic. Aside from the ones discussed earlier, Sumi identifies other ghostings in Yee’s play. He writes,

[Yee’s] got a great sense of humour, sending up everything from CBC dramas to acting at Stratford and Canadian Heritage Commercials. There’s a bit of Alice in Wonderland in here, but also a nod to J-horror [Japanese horror]. And his use of Toronto’s Chinatown is obviously a comment on Roman Polanski’s depiction of Chinatown as a sinister place where nasty, secretive things can happen. (“A Dress Noir”)

While Crew views Sylvia as “a serial killer who stalks all those that have exploited and mistreated the Chinese community down the years, casually slitting their throats,” (“Play has the depth”), Jon Kaplan quotes Yee as saying, “Sylvia is the voice I wish for Chinese

Canadians, a mix of Bruce Lee and Confucius and all the ghost stories about the vengeful bride with white hair. She's the voice of struggle, fighting for Chinese Canadians throughout history" ("Yee is Seeing"). In the case of 58, *The Guardian's* critic Lyn Gardner has judged it as "a heartfelt if clumsy attempt to bring alive the imagined stories of some of those who died" (Rev. of "58"). Echoing her comments on Yellow Earth's didactic tone in *Play to Win*, she also deems this play potentially useful as "an educational tool" (Rev. of "58"). However, unlike Sumi's admiration for Yee's ability to cite and send up multiple cultural elements, Gardner criticizes Cherbonnier's writing. In particular, she notes how he "has written stereotypes and representative mouthpieces, not characters, and the plotting is improbable even before it introduces a paranormal subplot" (Rev. of "58"). Ultimately, for her, "although [58's] heart is in the right place almost everything else about it is woefully inadequate" (Rev. of "58").

The above critical opinions show that the companies are doing important work in bringing to light these tragic events so as to invite audience reflection and generate better understanding. Although Yee's writing style—with its various citations—might be regarded as more sophisticated and critically acceptable than Cherbonnier's, both plays are in fact about explaining and creating moments of recognition. In another important example in 58, when Dave insinuates to Kate that he is jobless because of the influx of migrant labour, she reminds him that the Chinese manage to find jobs no matter how difficult the job market is. The play cites the Morecambe tragedy³¹ by having Dave say, "I'm not going to freeze my nuts off picking cockles all day..." (33) while also revealing his parochial view towards

³¹ In 2004, 23 Chinese workers were drowned cockle-picking in dangerous working conditions in Morecambe Bay, Lancashire. Cherbonnier uses the example to show how these victims, exploited by gangmasters, have a very different work ethic when compared to Dave.

employment. He insists to Kate, “I’m a skilled worker. I didn’t do my apprenticeship and all these years in the yard to end up cleaning bogs” (33). In highlighting the difference between Dave’s attitude to work and the extreme work ethic of Chinese immigrants, the play illustrates how the stakes vary for both. Reading the plays together thus allows us to compare the companies’ use of the spectral to commemorate the past, and to promote ethical responsibility and reflection in audiences.

Chapter Five

Demonstrating Bodies: Occupying Audiences in *FACE* and *Brown Balls*

Performance as a public act is perhaps its greatest potential
in the realm of testimony and witnessing. (Heddon 55)

It is through such painful encounters between this body
and other objects, including other bodies, that ‘surfaces’
are felt as ‘being there’ in the first place. To be more precise
*the impression of a surface is an effect of such intensifications
of feeling.* (Ahmed 24)

“My face overwhelms my identity,” (70) Veronica Needa tells the audience during an emphatic moment in her autobiographical solo show, *FACE*. Veering between Cantonese and English throughout her piece, the British Hong Kong Eurasian performer—very visibly passable as “white”—discloses to her witnesses that she “feel[s] a Chineseness inside which isn’t normally visible” (70). This manifest pigment also renders her out of place in Hong Kong, the land of her birth. She confides in the audience that the situation “is difficult to explain” and that she feels as if “[she] does not belong to [the] place as much as [other Hong Kong people] do” (71).

Near the end of Byron Abalos's play *Brown Balls*, the three characters, JP, Charles and Paul, enjoin audiences to move en masse in response to statements patently too common to deny:

JP: (to audience.) Stand up if you've ever judged someone because of their looks—or because they came from another country, looked too old or too young, didn't worship the right god—

Charles: Or were attracted to the 'wrong' sex.

JP: Stand up if you've ever made an assumption about someone based on a single characteristic. If you have made someone else feel like they didn't belong or were worth less because of your prejudice, stand up.

(Abalos 45)

As seen in the previous two chapters, despite their cultural and geographical differences, Yellow Earth and fu-GEN have explored similar issues in their plays. From the pain of being a “banana boy,” a hybrid identity between cultures, to the vilification and exploitation of immigrants to the West, both companies have employed a mixture of realistic and fantastical elements, along with the spectral, to lend an artistic voice to British East Asian and Asian Canadian concerns. Departing from the dramatic strategies used in the other four plays, Veronica Needa's *FACE* and Byron Abalos' *Brown Balls* are remarkable in that they both revisit the companies' earlier themes by foregrounding specific performing bodies and by direct audience address. In the above exchange between the three characters and the audience, stage directions indicate that the actors could “ad lib until most people are standing” (45), giving performers a chance to gauge and control the crowd, even risk

unexpected responses. In this scenario though, the described actions are so ethically charged that audiences willing to stand could take solace in the fact that everyone in that space and time were guilty of the same deeds. Indeed, while the term “universal”³² tends to be regarded suspiciously these days, the actors are there precisely to get audiences to recognize the commonplace quality of prejudice and to admit to their own complicity. In standing up, audiences allow others to witness their avowal, as much as they witness others’ admission. To refuse to stand in that space—especially if one is physically able to do so—would invite not congratulation but derision. Abalos’ play generates a space for audiences to share the burden of shame and to be agents capable of shaping their own moral appraisal. While the earlier chapters delved into how bodies can be “reformed”, even “resurrected” through dramatic narratives, this chapter explores how Yellow Earth and fu-GEN have experimented with staging real bodies that are meaningful because of their specificity.

At first glance, the two productions in comparison here are very different. Needa’s solo show takes on an auto/biographical structure reminiscent of the work of British performance artist Bobby Baker and is thus ineluctably linked to the legacy of women’s performances simply in “genre” alone.³³ As scholar Deirdre Heddon has noted in her book *Autobiography and Performance* (2008), “located within and arising out of the second-wave feminist movement, autobiographical performance was regarded by women as a means to

³² References to the “universal” must be made critically because of questions of power and whose world view is being discussed. For example, as Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins remind us, “Given the legacy of a colonialist education which perpetuates, through literature, very specific socio-cultural values in the guise of universal truth, it is not surprising that a prominent endeavour among colonised writers/artists has been to rework the European ‘classics’ in order to invest them with more local relevance and to divest them of their assumed authority/authenticity” (16).

³³ Needa herself cites Baker’s 1991 *The Kitchen Show* and Natalie Barney’s Paris salon in the 19th century when situating her work (“FACE: Renegotiating Identity Through Performance,” 11, Footnote 16).

reveal otherwise invisible lives, to resist marginalisation and objectification and to become, instead, speaking subjects with self-agency” (3). In this case however, Needa does not focus on her experiences as a woman but, instead, uses the form to reveal various aspects of her life story as a “British Hong Kong Eurasian”—an identification that has caused her to feel misrecognized. Abalos’s play on the other hand, as the playwright himself explains to Jon Kaplan of Toronto’s *NOW Magazine*, was first inspired by fu-GEN’s production of *Banana Boys*, discussed earlier in Chapter Two. Cast as one of the five boys in the company’s 2008 remount of their very first major production, Abalos was personally involved in performing Leon Aureus’ “battlefield of love” scene, which “looks at the hierarchy of who can date whom, and how far down on the list Asian men are” especially when compared to men of other ethnic origins (“Byron’s Balls”). Finding in the scene “enough material for a whole play,” he developed his piece, *Brown Balls*, featuring “lecture techniques, erotic art and a lot of comedy” (“Byron’s Balls”). Although Abalos “relies on his own experiences and that of his friends...he believes that other minorities will identify with the material” (“Byron’s Balls”). This hope for sympathetic accord also underpins Needa’s intentions for sharing her story. While she engages audiences as “herself,” Abalos’ play centres on “regular guys JP, Paul and Charles,” played by Richard Lee, Sean Baek and David Yee, who, though not “nonfictional” as Needa’s material presence seems to suggest, are nonetheless iconically true to their ethno-racial characteristics for the most part. Thus, they play someone of Chinese, Korean, and mixed-race descent respectively. Despite their tonal differences—*Brown Balls* is interrogative and *FACE* elucidative—both these productions are interesting in that they engage audiences more fervently than the common practice of aesthetic distancing. Whether by nature of the auto/biographical form or by strategies such as “live dramaturgy”—playing

with the tension between control and aleatory effects—both shows foreground “real” bodies while attempting to activate audiences into consciousness, even conscience, around how these bodies tend to be perceived. These two productions are also significant in that they require very specific performers’ bodies on stage, consequently rendering pointless, on one hand, the many debates surrounding casting decisions addressed earlier in Chapter One, and on the other, highlighting their continued importance in contemporary theatre practices involving increased acting opportunities for non-white actors. Unlike the earlier plays discussed, neither *FACE* nor *Brown Balls* follows clear narrative structures in which characters face trials and then are changed. Instead, the performer/characters address and interact with audiences, leading them through different issues to do with particular identities, until deeper layers of pain are revealed.

5.1 *FACE* – A Background

On the 22nd and 23rd of September 2006, Veronica Needa presented her solo show *Face*³⁴ at the Lumley Studio in Kent University. This was the latest incarnation of a work she had been performing in various configurations and versions since 1998.³⁵ Intimate and

³⁴ Needa has provided me with two versions of the script for her solo show *Face*, a copy of the dissertation she wrote based on it, as well as an abstract. For this chapter, I utilize her “Appendix 2: Script of Second *FACE* – English Version Directed by Tang Shu Wing,” which was part of Yellow Earth’s 2002 showcase. She incorporates Playback Theatre in the 2006 version of the show, which she reworked as part of her MA requirements. Needa’s thesis is also available for download on the website PlaybackTheatre.org. The page numbers between the version she provided me with and this online one vary.

³⁵ In Appendix 8 of her MA thesis, “*FACE: Renegotiating Identity Through Performance*” (2006), Needa lists the production history of her show. In 1998, she performed its first incarnation directed by Chris Harris in Bristol, London and East Sussex, the second incarnation in Hong Kong at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, Fringe Club, La Cremeria Theatre, and in various Hong Kong schools. In 1999, she performed the show again in London Docklands, Hong Kong, Macau, and Shenzhen, China. In 2000, she again presented

multimedial, the show featured a generous display of Needa's personal and family photographs while Needa herself performed live, disclosing various milestones in her life story through her embodied display of various characters. As a mixed-race woman trying to fit in, both in England and in Hong Kong, she has had to conform to generally accepted etiquette, constantly modifying some of her own behavioural traits in order to do so. This, she tells audiences, has been difficult. Morphing into various identities on stage, she channels at various times her mother, primary school teacher, as well as herself at different stages in life. The show incorporates a mixture of English and Cantonese, and, as it was conceived as a touring piece, these linguistic ratios differ depending on performance location and the expected level of audience comprehensibility.

Whether in English with some Cantonese or in Cantonese with some English, Needa has constantly returned to this personal piece of work she was first commissioned to create by the Hong Kong Arts Centre for their event, *FESTIVAL NOW '98: Invisible Cities*. For Needa, this commission, scheduled a year after Hong Kong was officially handed back to China, had both social and personal import. The festival's choice of theme, in particular, was "an artistic investigation...to bring into focus the invisible side of [a part of Hong Kong's] community which has long been living a shadowy existence" (qtd. in Needa 9). Following the recent death of her mother, Needa felt "a desire to assert the history of the Hong Kong Eurasian community in some form" (qtd. in Needa 9). In "creating a script from autobiographic material, [she] would be making [herself] visible as a Hong Kong Eurasian woman in a dominantly Chinese environment in the hope that the collective as well as personal wound of anonymity is mitigated through this testimony" (Needa 10). As she

the show in England and Hong Kong, before its 2002 tour of England, presented by Yellow Earth Theatre (83).

explains in her thesis, she saw it as “[her] mission ... to come out and stand for children of mixed-ethnicity, to expunge the burden of shame carried by generations of Eurasians before [her and her peers], where both lines of ancestry—the Chinese and the colonising British—disparaged miscegenation” (Needa 10). In her book on autobiographical performance, Deirdre Heddon reminds us that the “potential” of autobiographical performance also includes “potential to ... do harm or to fail in its politically aspirational or transformational objectives” (6). In particular, “some [artists] might speak ‘for’, rather than ‘as’, while others might be appropriated in unexpected ways or might appropriate other’s stories in inappropriate ways” (6). In Needa’s case, her self-described mission suggests that she is “speaking for” as well as “speaking as,” in a way in which her personal story could be relevant to a broader community. It was this work, then, that Yellow Earth Theatre presented in 2002, and then again in 2005. In both runs, the production toured to various parts of the United Kingdom. In this sense, this example is interesting because it had already been performed prior to the company’s engagement and has its own production history outside of YET’s mandate.

As a piece of theatre, *FACE* is constantly evolving. For example, after YET’s presentation of the show in 2005, Needa revisited it in 2006 for her MA by Practice as Research degree program at Kent. Having left Yellow Earth to form her own company primarily dedicated to Playback Theatre at the time, she added a second half in the form of an “unscripted, improvised ... [segment where] other autobiographical stories from the audience are facilitated to emerge into the public realm through the vehicle of Playback Theatre” (Needa, “Abstract”). In contrast, the first half of the show formed the entirety of the piece when YET presented it and “chronicles the experience of a British Hong Kong

Eurasian,” showing her “journey from child to adult and from Hong Kong to England, within the frame of inner and outer identity” (Needa, “Abstract”). In her MA thesis, Needa also noted how in the earlier developmental processes for *FACE*, she had wanted to “focus simply on racial/cultural lines” because “the inclusion of sexual politics” would “complicate [her] process” (12). This meant that she made a conscious decision not to work with a female director, Wong Yuen Ling, who would have channelled the material through a feminist perspective and instead, collaborated with two male directors, Chris Harris and Tang Shu Wing, as her show evolved for different audience contexts. At the time of her thesis-writing however, Needa expresses how she is now ready and “keen to make a second show which looks at womanhood” (12). In this way, Needa’s reliance on a director and other technicians during her show’s run exemplifies what Heddon also suggests: “the performance of autobiographical material ... is typically a collective affair which will have an impact on the representation of that autobiography or the re-presentation of the ‘self’” (9). Heddon’s assertion reminds us that autobiographical performance is not necessarily a naturalistic “slice of life,” but rather, an artistic piece strategically shaped for consumption. Despite the relatively protean nature of the piece and its various histories, the show’s presentation under Yellow Earth Theatre locates it under the company’s mandate, and thus contributes to the project of British East Asian theatre formation. Given her concerns in the piece, Needa’s *FACE* complicates in particular the idea of invisibility that had led to YET’s goal to build a space for British East Asian artists. Despite being visually marked as white, a position traditionally regarded as privileged, Needa shows that there are hidden depths to that surface. *FACE* brings these unremarked aspects to the fore. In repeating these acts and having audiences watch her do them, Needa, borrowing Heddon’s words, “perform[s] [her] ‘selves’

into existence” (28).

5.2 *Brown Balls* – A Background

Whereas *FACE* “unconceals” the lived experience of Veronica Needa especially in terms of her British Hong Kong Eurasian identification, *Brown Balls*, as is evident in the ribald title of the play, suggests a very different focus—ethno-racial colouration along with male sexuality. While Needa also refers to colour in terms of her passable whiteness, Abalos combines “brown” with the slang for male testicles to create a provocative appellation that first compels potential audiences to consider their own levels of comfort around publicly discussing sex. Partly inspired by fu-GEN’s production of *Banana Boys* discussed in Chapter Two, the play explores “where Asian men sit in the hierarchy of sexuality” through what reviewer Wayne Leung has described as “a cross between an academic lecture and a sketch comedy show” (“Review: Brown”). Specifically, according to another reviewer, Majiej Roszkowski, the show is “partly a parody of academic presentations—with stuffy talk about paradigms and ‘hegemonic sexuality,’ pie charts and statistics—and partly a satiric revue” (“Brown Balls”). As mentioned earlier, Abalos was personally involved in performing Leon Aureus’ “battlefield of love” scene, or Act Two, Scene Nine, in fu-GEN’s revival of *Banana Boys*. In that scene, the five boys, “armed in John Woo style” (Aureus 224), are embroiled in a war—a metaphor for what is construed to be a difficult love life on account of their ethno-racial identity. Mike, whose main conflict within the play was his desire to be a writer despite his parents’ wishes for him to be a doctor, exits the scene early “in a gurney, [with] a sheet over him...[and] an arrow marked ‘unrealistic career’ stick[ing] out of the sheet” (Aureus 224). Based on the premise that “white guys are at the top of the sociological

ladder” and that, in general, “white girls,” “Orientals,” and “Banana Girls” tend to go for any other ethno-racial group except for “Banana Boys” (Aureus 225), Sheldon, Luke and Dave lament their own inadequacy and the unfairness of their circumstances. In contrast, Rick embodies the only alternative, one who “fit[s] in everywhere and is “just so damn attractive that no one, not even the enemy, is impervious to [his] charms” (Aureus 226).

As we saw in Chapter Two, the character Rick was on a massive mission to reconstruct his image, taking on characteristics of a fresh-off-the-boat (FOB) person because one of the tropes of Asian Canadian male discourse is that East Asians are regarded as more successful than their second-generation counterparts born in the West, such as in Canada. Indeed, for the three boys, Rick is “bulletproof...unharmd by stereotypes and desired by all” (Aureus 226). As elaborated in Chapter Two, however, Rick’s strategy for self-remaking was untenable. The “battlefield of love” scene—nestled in between Scene 8 where the boys attempted to piece together, through Photoshop, their “Perfect Girl” based on pictures of female celebrities, and Scene 10, in which Sheldon leaves a voice message for Kathy, the girl who had dated him but then ignored his calls—posits that Asian Canadian men are left out of the mating game and only have access to “exotic fish, Quake, internet porn...” (Aureus 225).

Inspired by the above scene, Abalos created his play *Brown Balls* over a period of five years. According to its development history, the play “received a Theatre Creators’ Reserve grant recommended by Cahoots Theatre Company in 2006 and was workshopped as a part of fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company’s 5th Annual Potluck Festival in 2008” (“Development History”). The play “continued development through an Ontario Arts Council Playwriting Residency with Carlos Bulosan Theatre in 2009 and received further workshops as a part of Factory Theatre’s CrossCurrents Festival and fu-GEN’s 7th Annual

Potluck Festival in 2010” (“Development History”). Aside from the “battlefield of love” scene that Abalos has, in interviews, cited as a creative stimulus for the longer project, *Brown Balls* also recalls other scenes such as Act Four, Scene One of *Banana Boys*, in which the character Dave is giving a presentation, his demeanour “Reverend Jesse Jackson-ized in his exuberance” (Aureus 242). The action shows him talking while slides in black and white are projected. In this scene, Aureus’ stage directions indicate that the character Dave should speak directly to the audience like a charismatic preacher, while audiences respond to his homily, not on religion but on racism perpetuated by “white people,” or “the pig-mentally challenged” (Aureus 242). A director’s staging of this scene might use either real audiences, prompted to give specific responses, or have the other actors act as “audience members”.

Using a similar model, *Brown Balls* incorporates a slide-show presentation along with high levels of audience engagement whereby the actors encourage and stir up audiences to chant, stand, raise their hands and so on. Aside from this link, the two actors, Richard Lee and David Yee who play JP and Charles respectively, were also in the 2004 premiere show of *Banana Boys*. During that production, Lee played the tragi-comedic character of Rick while Yee was Dave, the loose cannon with a temper and inclination toward pre-emptive strikes against what he deems to be racist acts against himself. In this way, *Brown Balls* cites *Banana Boys* in various ways and contributes to fu-GEN’s “voice” as a company through ghosted themes, characters, and ideas. By engaging the audience in structured yet nonetheless aleatory ways, *Brown Balls* remains a “productive text,” where audiences contribute as co-creators during the event, rather than simply consume a product dictated and closed off by the written script.

5.3 Tales Bodies Tell

Due to their emphasis on audience address, both *FACE* and *Brown Balls* do not follow a clear plot structure. Instead, both are constituted of segments of anecdotes, ideas, and thoughts that performers share with audiences. Thus, in *FACE*, Needa creates an intimate space in which she reveals aspects of her life—her parents’ ethnic heritage, the British and Chinese culture she grew up with, her childhood in Hong Kong, her acculturation into British behaviour as an adult, and her struggles as a mixed-race person. In *Brown Balls*, the characters JP, Charles and Paul take turns talking to individual spectators as well as the whole audience in a parody of academic presentations. Indeed, whereas Needa’s solo performance invites audiences into a sacred and personal space where they might feel privileged to gain insight into aspects of her life and struggles, Abalos’ show starts off by subverting the usual pre-show rituals of sitting, chatting, and waiting by having the three performers show audiences to their seats, and then, dramatically, close the auditorium doors in a simulated hostage takeover. Despite their differences in tone, both shows are fundamentally about showing audiences something only available through these specific bodies.

Central to Needa’s *FACE* is her bi-cultural experience as a “British Hong Kong Eurasian”. Unlike Canadian playwright David Yee’s treatment of the subject in *lady in the red dress*, Needa’s personal approach to the theme stresses the difficulties in not being recognized for her Chineseness because of her appearance. The show follows an episodic structure and has no dramatic arcs or climaxes. Instead, it meanders through a roughly chronological time-scale, with Needa taking audiences to different spaces through narrative,

photo projections, lighting, and sound. Over the course of her performance, Needa reveals to audiences the “selves” she has acquired through her parentage, family upbringing, and apparatuses such as school. While Needa’s show refers to several different sites, the set she does place on the stage suggests a private domestic space, such as a small living room. The largest structure is a mobile “4’ x 6’ wooden frame with bamboo blinds that roll up and down in front and behind” (78), positioned most of the time upstage centre. Needa uses this to indicate, variously, a doorway into and out of a scene, a portal into the past, and a picture frame for various photographs projected onto a screen lined up at the back of the structure. There is also a 2’ x 3’ prayer mat set downstage centre, on which there are cups and saucers laid out for seven, including a teapot filled with hot tea. A chair and side table (both Chinese style) stand at mid-stage left. In Appendix 9 of her thesis, “FACE: Renegotiating Identity Through Performance” (2006), Needa includes a list of audience responses to her show. This includes an email from theatre reviewer Michael Gray, who noted that Needa used her mother’s furniture for the set.³⁶ Some preset props include a toy model of a pale blue Volkswagen Beetle, Needa’s glasses, a newspaper article, a jewellery box containing a Chinese hair ornament, and a dragon puppet in a bag.

As mentioned at the start, the two shows discussed in this chapter actively address and engage audiences as witnesses to the stories held in specific bodies. Audiences entering the space find themselves stepping into a nostalgic atmosphere—an enlarged photo of Needa as a baby—with chubby arms and curly hair—is projected onto the lowered bamboo blind of the frame and the Spanish song “La Golondrina” plays in the background. For those in the know, the Mexican composer Narciso Serradel Sevilla wrote the song in 1883. According to

³⁶ In a casual conversation I had with Needa, I confirmed that the furniture used for the show was indeed her mother’s.

a contributor on a lyric translation website, the song “us[es] the image of a migrating swallow to invoke sentiments of longing for home” (“The Swallow”). Even if audiences do not know the song, its haunting melody is effective for evoking the intended sentiment. Indicating the official start of the show, the projection is replaced with a blackout, followed by a slide of Needa as a svelte young adult, with hair swept back from her face, reminiscent of a ballerina. Needa herself, entering the stage during the blackout, now stands behind the bamboo screen so that her face overlaps with the projected image. The live performer is now much older than the self in the projected picture. As she moves, it is clear that she is still energetic and lithe. No longer neatly coiffed as the self in the photograph, a mass of wild, brownish curls protrudes from her head. The effect is, according to Needa, “face upon face, then and now” (78).

This conflation of projected image and real body remains mostly still, while a string of Cantonese sentences pervades the scene, its medium of emission differing depending on the dominant language of the particular show. In the Cantonese version with some English—the version favoured when the show toured Hong Kong, including its arts centre and schools, as well as when presented to community centres across England—Needa remains motionless while audiences hear a broadcast of pre-recorded lines. In the English version with some Cantonese—performed mostly in venues in England—Needa as live performer speaks in Cantonese. In both configurations, Needa follows the Cantonese phrases with spoken English lines, offering non-Cantonese speakers in the audience a translation. As is revealed, the words are actually a “Prayer”:

I offer a prayer to my ancestors. You gave me bloodlines that
straddle the world, that dig deep into four countries across many

seas. I give thanks for your courage and your goodness; your
passion and your imagination; your curiosity and your greed.
I give thanks for your anger and your tears—and for bearing
your pain with such patience. I give thanks for your love. (61)

Immediately after, there is a blackout on the double image of Needa's faces. Needa herself rolls up the bamboo blind from the back, steps through the frame, and lowers the blind again from downstage (61). Addressing the audience directly, she tells them,

I have become conscious of a call within me to tell the stories
of my ancestors, to tell of my confusion of identity and belonging;
to create something that tells my story and thereby be the voice of
my ancestors too. Welcome to you, friends and strangers, witnesses
to these stories ... foon ying ... welcome. (61)

In this personal welcome to the audience, Needa breaks the fourth wall of the stage and invites audiences to witness the stories she is about to tell. Given the conventions of theatre, where audiences attending a show are already participating in a voyeuristic act of watching performed stories, it is difficult to determine the real impact a simple "direct address" might have on the assembled audience. In this case however, this explicit invitation adds not just a verbalized consent for the audience's gaze, it also highlights the fact that Needa is aware of the audience's presence and is witnessing their attention as well. In her act of illocution, she is foregrounding her own presence in the space, and reminding audiences that what they are seeing is happening to her body, now, in that moment and in that shared space.

This is important in the context of her show since it is all about her lived experience through embodiment. Part of this embodiment, as she goes on to share, derives from her parentage, which has also caused her to undergo a “confusion of identity and belonging” (Needa 61). She therefore invites the audience, whom she addresses as “friends and strangers,” to observe her lineage through a series of photographs of her parents and grandparents, guiding the audience through each photo and giving a brief account of each person. While the format she uses is that of a slideshow of images, Needa elevates the scene to a “spiritual” level by combining the photo presentation with a tea ritual—specifically one commonly practised by certain Chinese families, of offering tea to one’s ancestors as a form of remembrance and worship. With music playing softly in the background, she walks to the Prayer Mat that had been preset downstage. Kneeling down in the centre, facing the audience, she punctuates the introduction of each ancestor by pouring hot tea into a specific cup out of the seven present. These “anointed” cups become representative of each ancestor and their filling coincides with corresponding photographs projected onto the slide and framed by the vertical structure.

Starting from herself as the common link to all, Needa tells the audience that she was “born in Hong Kong, an only child” (62). She introduces her mother with basic details that centre on her age and looks, Janet Broadbridge as “a fleshy soft-featured Hong Kong Eurasian beauty—15 years younger than [her] father” (62), while a photograph of a similarly imaged woman flashes up on the screen. Her description of her father, on the other hand, is warmer and filled with more detail and adoration, perhaps revealing some favouritism on Needa’s part. Unlike the visual attributes in her mother’s description, she reveals that her father was “a glamorous jockey from Shanghai with a big charming personality” (62). Going

on to her maternal grandparents, she tells the audience that “[her] Englishness comes from the North—Everton, County of Lancaster,” tied to her grandfather, “Alfred Cyrus Broadbridge...an adventuring sea captain” (62). She adds that “[her] Chineseness comes from Hong Kong—British Crown Colony—as it was then” (62) through her maternal grandmother who was born “Wong Seui Gum” (62). Having become an orphan, Needa’s grandmother was “adopted by a Eurasian lady—a Mrs Hunter” (62), who gave her the English name, Lily Hunter. Needa reveals that this adoptive great-grandmother also adopted other Chinese female orphans who were all married off to “suitable foreigners in Hong Kong” (62). In this way, Lily’s adoptive mother arranged to marry her off to Broadbridge.

Mentioning “real” data gleaned from research, Needa tells the audience about their marriage date as registered in the Hong Kong Marriage Registry. She also informs them that her grandparents had eight children in all, including her mother, although Broadbridge died when her mother was six months old. In stark contrast, when she comes to describing her paternal grandparents, Needa reveals, using “half-empty frames,” the scarcity of information for that side of the family. Still, she tells audiences that “[her] Japaneseness comes from [her] father’s mother” (62). Also, that “[her] father’s father possibly came from Damascus in Syria which was under French Mandate at the time” (62). This introduction to her family ends with a slide blackout. She says to the audience:

Pretty mixed up huh? Interracial marriage happens all over the world. We Eurasians of Hong Kong come from very diverse backgrounds and circumstances. And its [sic] becoming more and more common. What looked clear on the surface, is not so below. (62)

In this scene, Needa “speaks as” a Eurasian, revealing through photographs the complex international networks that led to her existence. Bringing in the biographical traces of her ancestors, Needa not only conjures them into the space as absent presences but also creates an engaging effect through juxtaposition. The interplay between photographic evidence of progenitorial faces that produced her and her own onstage body elicits an instinctive response in audiences to search for facial or physical similarities between her and her forbears. In this case, there is additional frisson because she looks “white” while this whiteness is visible or invisible to different degrees in her various family members’ faces.

In referencing her other non-white roots in Japan, Syria, and Hong Kong, Needa also asserts the cultural presences of what are usually unseen on her visage, which nonetheless inform her identity. Thus, she reminds the audience that “what looked clear on the surface”—her whiteness—“is not so below” (62). Indeed, in her thesis, Needa cites Parker and Song, writing, “how one’s physical appearance is socially recognised impacts on identity and the ‘politics of authenticity and belonging’” (Parker and Song 12-14, qtd. in Needa 15). She argues that “in contrast to many experiences where the face presents a racialised body [her] story insists on acknowledging what is invisible in [her] face, revealing [her] roots through aural experience, and in the physicality of language—embedded in body, voice and tongue” (15).³⁷ For audiences witnessing this scene, Needa’s revelations present visual proof that racial identity cannot simply be read in facial codes or skin pigment. Additionally, Needa refers to the notion of “passing,” the idea that some Eurasian people like herself can

³⁷ In my associations with Needa through her current theatre company, True Heart Theatre, I have sometimes come across people who have been surprised and even impressed that she speaks Cantonese. This incongruity, between an expected way of being and speaking and the alternative, continues to raise important questions about ethno-racial legacy and one’s agency in learning something that one is not automatically given.

pass for white. Even though this can be “a resource in certain situations,” (18) some Eurasians “may have no wish to pass,” (18) given that such passing “can also involve misrecognition ... between how someone perceives her own ethnic identity and her identity as seen by others” (19).

This shifting sense of identity on account of skin colour, appearance, and contact with others also plays out during the start of *Brown Balls*. As stated in his stage directions, Abalos has “three Asian Canadian men welcoming people in the lobby using thick Asian accents” (4). In this case, the actors Sean Baek, Richard Lee and David Yee greet audiences in accents that are not their own but that reflect stereotypical ideas of what Asians sound like when they speak English. In the process, the actors are also directed to “usher the audience in and make small talk with them” until everyone is in the space (4). When the show officially starts, there is a “multimedia show” with moving lasers, flashing lights, theatrical smoke and projections,” followed by the actors saying “thank you” in Korean, Tagalog and Cantonese. After welcoming audiences to “the First Asian Canadian Kultural Metropolitan Electronics Exhibition also knows as ‘FACKMEE’” (Abalos 4), the three actors suddenly switch gears, and in a sequence of actions, inform audiences that they are “under siege” (Abalos 5). Indeed, dropping their thick Asian accents, JP gives instructions to the other two to “secure” the area. Paul, the character most preoccupied with desirability and physicality of all three, secures the door “in an exaggerated martial arts style” (Abalos 5). Together, they reassure audiences that they will not be hurt or have their valuables taken. They declare instead that they are there “to discuss more relevant matters: Asian masculinity” (5). Playing with homophonic acronyms, they tell audiences that they are not actually attending “FACKMEE”—the electronics convention. Instead, they are at “FACCCUU,” or, as they

project onto a screen, the “First Asian Canadian Cultural Conference for Unified Understanding” (Abalos 5).

In this opening segment, then, the three characters frame the event as one that requires “an audience to complete [their] research, prove [their] theories and validate [their] mandate” (Abalos 6). They claim that having been rejected by multiple sources and organizations such as the “Canadian Social Sciences Council,” the “U of Guelph’s Sexuality Conference,” the “Sex Education Council of Canada and even world famous Sexpert Sue Johanson,” they “concluded that [taking audiences hostage] was the only option [they] had left” (Abalos 7). They announce that they organized this “historic conference” because “no one in North America wants to talk about Asian sexuality” or “Asian masculinity” (Abalos 7). Unlike the inviting tone of address Veronica Needa uses toward her audiences for *FACE*, reminiscent of a hospitable host, Abalos’ *Brown Balls* aggressively confronts and occupies audiences, holding them in a crucible of reckoning. That the three characters put on a mask of “Asianness” at the beginning is also interesting and recalls Rick’s achievement of “success” through adopting the behaviour of a fresh-off-the-boat person. Put another way, when compared to Needa’s language around identity, JP, Charles, Paul, and their dramatic predecessor, Rick, work to “pass” for authentic “Asian”. As is implied in the sudden switch in accents, “Asianness” is meant to be safe, a way of lulling audiences into a sense of security where East Asians sound “foreign” as expected. In dropping the mask and showing audiences their “real” selves, however, the three characters, portrayed by three Asian Canadian actors with native accents, remind audiences that this expectation of East Asian otherness is an outdated one. These two ways of confronting audiences with racial perception echo what Sara Ahmed has posited of bodily surfaces—that collisions between bodies reveal

the very borders that separate and join them.

5.4 Embodying Mixed-Race and Colouration

As a self-identified British Hong Kong Eurasian whose appearance easily passes for a white woman, Needa has experienced personal struggles around her mixed-race heritage. In her MA thesis, she notes several ways in which people who are mixed-race have historically been perceived negatively, even though these views are now inclined to be more favourable. Referring to “British Hong Kong Eurasians” specifically, she cites May Holdsworth, a Hong Kong-based author educated in Malaysia and Britain, who has written:

Eurasians were tangible products of colonialism. In early Hong Kong their status was indeterminate at best. Neither fish nor fowl, they hovered between Caucasians for whom they symbolised shameful liaisons with native women, and the Chinese community which, holding strict ideas about kinship and lineage, scorned anyone who couldn't emblazon his father's name on an ancestral tablet. (186)

In a more general sense, historian and Asian American studies researcher Laurie M. Mengel has stated that “the most common designation imposed on mixed race people of all ancestries is the inference that they are fragmented beings’ (100) reinforcing ‘the ideology that the mixed race individual is somehow less than a whole person” (101, qtd. in Needa “FACE: Renegotiating” 3). As I noted in Chapter Three, this feeling of being half-and-half, un-whole, or tainted has also underscored Canadian playwright David Yee's work as seen in the

characters Sylvia and Danny in *lady in the red dress*. Indeed, being half-Scottish and half-Chinese himself, he has often woven the terms “mutt”, “mongrel” and “half-breed” into his plays as a reminder of the appellations inflicted on people of mixed-race heritage. Negative perceptions have been changing, however. As Needa cites in her thesis, David Parker and Miri Song have noted how “hybridity, mongrelisation and syncretism are no longer pathologies, but celebrated as exemplars of contemporary cultural creativity” (2001: 20, qtd. in Needa 3). According to Hannah Beech, *TIME*’s East Asian Correspondent and China Bureau Chief, in her article, “Eurasian Invasion” published on April 23, 2001 on the magazine’s website,

Fusion is in, not only as an abstract fashion concept, but in that most grounded of realities: mixed-blood people who walk, talk, and produce even more multiracial progeny. Most strange of all, these hybrids are finding themselves hailed as role models for vast masses in Asia with no mixed blood at all.

Indeed, writing a year after the millennium, Beech observed that Eurasians now dominate the entertainment industries in East Asia, even to the extent of monopolising it in some contexts. Working within the British and Hong Kong theatre contexts, Needa’s experience is more complicated and differs from the experiences of actors in film and television industries indicated in Beech’s assessment. For instance, she makes strategic use of “liveness,” serving up her changing, aging body with each iteration of *FACE*. The immediacy and indispensability of her body to the work means that she is also involved in repeated auto-sculptural acts. Each time she gets on stage to present the person of “Veronica Needa,” she

brings with her material changes such as new hair, skin cells, wrinkles, and so on. The juxtaposition between her body and the photos she projects also invites audiences to parse and empathise with her situation.

Despite stating that she has stepped forward to stand for and speak about Hong Kong Eurasian experiences, Needa reveals during her show various points in her life that contributed to making her the person she is. In this way, even though she is part of a community, and a small one with certain shared bloodlines, her own experiences are still unique to her. One of the more insidious consequences of the formative behavioural patterns she experienced is the loss of her Cantonese dialect. As a young child growing up in Hong Kong, Needa lived with her Chinese grandmother with whom she watched Cantonese opera on television, and learnt how to behave as a female in a Chinese family. Recounting her experience at Glenealy Junior School, however, she informs audiences that “at Glenealy we spoke only in English. I never got a chance to speak Cantonese there. We weren’t allowed to” (64). This resembles the kind of social conditioning that often results in the loss of the “mother tongue” in children educated under western institutional practices imposed as part of the process of British colonialism. While Needa’s experience does not appear as severe and cannot be directly compared to the detrimental effects on Aboriginal children who were forcefully placed into residential schools in Canada, both indicate a similar experience of losing touch with ancestral languages. In Needa’s case, she was only able to pick up the language again of her own volition as an adult, and indeed, as part of her preparation for *FACE*. In this way, Needa alludes to British colonialism, and suggests its impact on her as a child. However, she does not take any explicit political stance against it, treating the British impact on Hong Kong more as a factual occurrence than something to be condemned. This is

evident in scenes where she tells audiences of her daily ritual that involved her going off to school and then to her parents' workplace afterwards, in a "trusty powder blue VW Beetle". Re-enacting these car journeys, Needa capers about, grabbing in her fist an exact toy model replica of the Beetle car as a prop. Moving herself in a circle around the stage amidst the prayer mat and furniture, she makes sound effects for the car, such as "Vroom vroom vroom puh puh puh ...," and intersperses them with road names she remembers, such as "Tai Hang Road," "Blue Pool Road," Jardine's Lookout," "Magazine Gap Road," and "Old Peak Road". The very fact that some of these names are in English is a reminder of the British presence in the country.

Later in the show, Needa discloses another instance of having to conform to culturally acceptable behaviour—this time when she was training to be an actor in England. Although she left Hong Kong in 1974 to go to university in England, she returned after her graduation because her father had lung cancer. In 1983 however, she went to England again to train as an actor at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. By this point, Needa has moved on from her performance of childhood. A photograph projected onto the slide shows her onstage as an actress. Needa herself stands in front of the frame. With a neutral expression on her face, she mimes walking, but remains rooted to the same spot on the floor. Audiences see this as the following pre-recorded voice-over is broadcast:

I was very excited and enthusiastic and I told myself to work very hard. At dance classes I would wait to see if anybody would go to the first row just behind the teacher and in front of the mirror. It was the best place to learn. It seemed like everybody wanted to be in the back row. So I would go and take that place. (70)

Still moving in the same way to the voice-over, Needa shares that another time, “[she] was selected to take part in a professional production at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre Royal” (70). She was so thrilled that “[she] went mad” (70). With the slide showing another picture of Needa as an actress, she confides in the audience that “[her] English friend Kathy touched [her] on the shoulder and said quietly to [her] to tone it down. Many others had not been chosen and they would not enjoy seeing [her] go crazy like this” (70). Needa asserts that, as a result, “[she] suppressed [her]self” (70). She elaborates:

My challenge was for me to understand Englishness. I might have spoken excellent English and looked as if I was English, but I was behaving ‘differently’. My enthusiasm unnerved them. No one wanted to work with me. Now the American girl in the other class was also incredibly hardworking and keen—she was a ‘swot’³⁸—but that was OK. She was from the States and they made allowances for her. It wasn’t OK when the ‘swot’ was me—a very very English girl—one of their own, it seemed. Of course now I realise I was behaving in a perfectly normal Hong Kong way. Then...I didn’t know how different I was (70).

At this point, the voice-over ends and a slide of Needa in a white jacket is projected onto the screen. Needa herself starts to speak again, saying,

³⁸ A British slang term for someone who studies hard at school.

They never asked me where I came from. And I didn't know
how important it was for me to tell them. If I had, they would
have known how different I was, and so would I. (70)

In this whole sequence, except for the last part, Needa makes use of a pre-recorded voice-over as narration. This disembodied voice permeates the space as Needa herself remains dissociated from it. Obviously belonging to Needa herself, speaking in first-person, yet not visibly coming from her lip movements, the voice seems to suggest something that Needa has left behind, or something that is no longer present in her own material body. Unlike the last part—where she speaks live and reflects on the potential importance of asserting her difference to her peers, thereby allowing audiences to see her voicing these thoughts live—the pre-recorded segments exist separately. Even if they occupy the same space during the performance, the alienated voice is now external to her, and Needa walks through it, and arguably away from it into her later, reflective understanding of the situation.

Aside from having to modify her behaviour in order to be more acceptably English, Needa has also experienced some conflict around language. As mentioned earlier, she lost her ability to speak Cantonese during her school days because it was forbidden. She does remember, however, her mother's command of not only Cantonese and English, but what she calls "Chinglish". As she explains in her thesis, this is a "mix of English and Cantonese—a patois common to Hong Kong Eurasians" (Needa 16). In one of the scenes from her "childhood" segment, Needa tells the audience about her after-school ritual, which involves her being driven to the business district of Hong Kong where her mother works in a flower shop. Shifting out of her "child" persona, she sits on the mat, holds up two fingers to mime

smoking, and channels her mother with the following lines:

Dring! Good Afternoon, Jeannette's florists. Hello Mr Hamilton.
How are you? Good. Your in-law's are in town? Oh lovely.
What kind of flowers would they like. Cameras? Oh...I see. Go
to Long Hing in Central Building. Ask for Annie or Robert Chan.
My good friends. Utterly reliable. Mm-hm You are welcome. G'bye.
Dring! Jeannette's good afternoon. Hm? No. You have got the wrong
number, we're not a jewellery shop, we sell flowers. Mind you, there
is a little shop round the corner from me. If they don't have what you
want they can make it for you. Tell them I sent you and you'll get
a better price. Hm? Oh you're welcome. G'bye! Dring! Jeannette's...
Susie. What can I do for you? Mai faa? [Buy flowers?] Gung hai duk la!
[Of course!] What flowers would you like? The usual. Mm...hm, pink
carnations. Leung daa [two dozen]...yes we have two dozen, car-peen
leh? [Card?] Nice. Day zee yut yeung [Same address]. First thing
tomorrow morning, ho-ma? [Alright?] Oh m sai m goy. [You're welcome]
Ha? Tomorrow's tips? Oh, my husband says, in the 5th race, Daisy Bell
must win. Haih [Yes]...Emperor's Gate, Merry Memories and Bandit
Queen are also very fit. But Daisy Bell is in another class. Should be
easy. Yeng—jou cheng ngor yum cha la wo! [If you win, treat me to a meal!]
Mm! Ting yut geen. [See you tomorrow.] Bye Bye! (65)

Seamlessly transitioning between English and Cantonese, Needa reveals how her mother

communicated with customers using “Chinglish”. While Needa’s live performance of this scene would be impressive given its seeming complexities, her own experience with language proficiency is more complicated, tied as it is to her body’s appearance, and also her comportment. In a way, she needed to learn how to “speak” the cultural language of England and Hong Kong so as to fit in as best as she could.

In the scene after her drama school recollection, the slide becomes a blackout while Needa “crawls forward and stands [in] a special lighting square” (70). She tells the audience,

The next fourteen years I lived in London. My Chineseness
became even more invisible here. It was in my cooking—or
the way I burp and make a frightful noise when I am eating—
well, thats [sic] quite acceptable in Hong Kong but not in England.
I got so caught up in learning how to fit in and find my place here,
that I forgot where I came from and what I’d brought
with me. For a long time I felt a large part of me was missing. (70)

Stepping herself back into the darkness, she suspends her hands in the lighting square and does a series of hand mimes during her next lines—this includes rotating her wrists and hands as if she were making little spirals in the air at different speeds. She asserts that “life in England has sometimes felt like pushing through porridge, or like treading water, hard work to stay afloat. On good days, its [sic] like moving through honey, sweet, but thick” (70).

She tells audiences, however, that she eventually found the missing part as she “fitted more and more of [her] jigsaw puzzle together” (70) when she began working with a mission to engage London’s Chinese community. As she tells audiences:

I began to see myself as the other side of a coin to many Chinese people born overseas. They are perceived as Chinese, and assumed to be Chinese when some feel quite differently inside. And I feel a Chineseness inside which isn't normally visible. My face overwhelms my identity. (70)

This overwhelming effect is particularly pronounced when she is in Hong Kong. Similar to what she did earlier, Needa once again “walks backwards upstage to [the] frame and begins [to] mime walk[ing]” to the following—another pre-recorded voice-over:

In Hong Kong whether I am shopping or in a taxi, people say to me ‘Wa nay sik gong Gongdonghua, ga?’ “Oh you speak Cantonese?” “Nay dee Gongdonghua haih been do hok ga?” “Where did you learn it?” “yu-gwor hgo m geen do lay, ngo joong yee-wai nay hai JungGwokyun teem!” “If I didn’t see you, I’d think you were Chinese”... and some of them stare at me with great big eyes, and others just think I am English. Its [sic] so difficult to explain. I know they don’t mean to be unkind. But one moment I am feeling at home, part of the community, another moment I feel pushed out, alien, from another world. As if I don’t belong to this place as much as they do. (71)

At this point, the voice-over ends and the music cue fades out. Needa “walks out of [the] light and kneels on [the] chair” (71). She repeats, using her own live voice, the line she uttered earlier: “My face overwhelms my identity again” (71). She shares a poem that her cousin wrote in 1955 about his Eurasianness, first in Cantonese and then in English. The English version is as follows:

The bat is like a rat and a bird
During the day it lives in the ancient temple
By night it enters the forest
Who knows the bitterness of the bat
Within the body of a mouse
It has the heart of a bird. (71)

Needa tells the audience, “I wonder if it still speaks for some of us, even today. I feel a belonging that isn’t recognised, and am seen as a stranger in the land of my birth” (71).

Unlike the earlier moments of childhood jubilation, excitement, and intimate personal narratives in which Needa recalls her ancestors and performs her memory of her mother, this scene confronts audiences with the ethno-cultural and racialized codes through which the performer has had to negotiate and navigate as a British Hong Kong Eurasian. Using the visual performing presence of her body, pre-recorded voice-overs and direct audience address, Needa expresses the steps she has had to take in order to find acceptance when she was a student in Britain, but also the rejection she feels in Hong Kong, despite the fact that she was born there. Given her ancestral ties to Britain through her maternal grandfather, she shows how it is important for her to find, embody, and enact a version of Britishness that is

at once acceptable to others and to herself.

Along similar lines but one that invites audience members' physical participation rather than passive reception, *Brown Balls* also unpacks the practice of ethno-racial colouration, that is, the way people have been identified, perceived and evaluated based on their skin colour. Indeed, as indicated in the title of the play itself, Abalos names and foregrounds the colour "brown," and pairs it with a raunchy colloquial signifier that draws attention to male sexuality. In this way, Abalos's play parallels Needa's *FACE* in terms of their unconcealment of the arbitrariness, instability, even absurdity of ethno-racial colouration, even as they demonstrate how pervasive a framework it is.

An example of a scene along these lines occurs when the characters note that their "historic conference is being brought to [the audience] by [them]—the Brown Balls Collective, or, as they comically abbreviate, "BBC" (Abalos 7). The characters then begin to dissect the signification behind the title of the play with a series of stichomythic lines:

JP: You're thinking, 'Why Brown Balls?'

Charles: Why not 'Yellow Balls?'

Paul: Or 'Blue Balls?'

JP: Well, we represent different colours in a rainbow of Asian nations—I'm Chinese, PJ's Korean and Charles is half Filipino and half white/

Charles /Scottish/

JP /and to identify as yellow would not only be internalizing racist labels but also visually inaccurate.

Paul If you don't believe us, I can prove it. (Paul undoes his belt. JP and Charles intervene.)

- Charles We thought it would be best to combine it all and just call it brown.
- Paul I like brown. When I was in kindergarten, I learned that when you mix all
the colours of finger paint together, you get brown.
- JP Tonight we will utilize the term 'brown' to denote 'other.'
- Charles And by 'other' we mean 'not white.' (7)

This exchange highlights several things: that ethno-racial labels are not accurate, and importantly, collectives do not rely on homogeneity. Indeed, as JP describes, all three characters have different ethno-racial backgrounds. Interestingly, Abalos did not choose the term “yellow,” so bound up in the history of Asian American and Asian Canadian activism as well as the hostile concept of the “Yellow Peril” which originated in the West. Instead, as he explains through the characters, he chose the word “brown” because of the murky consequences of mixing together finger paints. According to Yen Le Espiritu in her book on Asian American panethnicity, “[f]ollowing the example of the Black Power movement, Asian American activists spearheaded their own Yellow Power movement to seek ‘freedom from racial oppression through the power of a consolidated yellow people’ (Uyematsu 1971: 12, qtd. in Espiritu 32). At the same time, there was an internal hierarchy within the movement, mostly dominated by people of Chinese or Japanese descent. As she explains, Filipinos who were also part of the movement rejected “yellow” as an ethno-racial epithet because they saw themselves as brown (32). Being Filipino Canadian himself and having included a half-Filipino character in the play, it is also telling that Abalos went with the colour “brown”. As the characters elaborate though, these coloured terms are not only inaccurate, they obscure other identification markers such as national belonging. Even though “whiteness” tends to be regarded as a privileged racial marker, in this case Charles

insists on specifying his Scottish identity when JP introduces him as “half Filipino and half white” (Abalos 7). It is apparent that for this character and for Needa, the label of “whiteness” is incomplete. Both of them need further specificities when talking about their identities.

5.5 Live Dramaturgy and Bodies on Display

The scene above on ethno-racial colouration spills over into the audience when the characters begin to elaborate on who they want to include when discussing “the other,” a group they have just designated as “brown”. As Charles explains, “other” for them means “not white” (Abalos 7), while Paul also adds that they mean “not black” (Abalos 8). Compared to *FACE*, while Needa’s engagement of audiences resides in her auto/biographical performance structure, Abalos’ play takes the form of a conference presentation and has three actors in character broaching the audience space, singling out different members for illustrating various points. At one point, for example, Paul mentions the ethno-racial marker “black,” and Charles continues, “[h]e means not Black, African, Afro-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian or whatever you identify...” (Abalos 8). In conjunction with this, the stage directions indicate that the actor playing Charles—David Yee in this case—“goes to the darkest skinned person in the audience” (8). In a moment ineluctably filled with nervous tension and awkward laughter, Yee says to the person, “I’m sorry.” Depending on audience response, Yee can then time his next line for comic effect: “Please choose to hear the term that is least offensive to you” (Abalos 8). This exchange is an example of live dramaturgy, where actors have to improvise on the spot with a specific set of audiences in

order to create the show. Although all live theatre can be regarded as ephemeral, *Brown Balls* adds to the experience for both actors and audiences by injecting an element of risk and chance. Given the various directions to actors for engaging audiences, they all have to be highly alert from the beginning, perhaps even preparing themselves during the pre-show as to whom they might be calling upon. In this case, the actor Yee, in his character Charles, is expected to find the “darkest skinned person in the audience” (8). On one hand, if he does find someone who has dark skin, audiences are made to witness an instance of dramatic interaction, based on a consciously performed act of selection informed by the actor’s own visual perception. The selected audience member himself or herself could choose to respond to and acknowledge Yee’s statement or decide to remain silent. In any case, Yee’s interpellation of what he deems the “darkest skinned person in the audience” draws attention to this type of gazing practice in real life. On the other hand, if there happens to be no “black” audience members during a performance, ironic humour might ensue if Yee has to find the “darkest” anyway, and the chosen audience member happens to be “brown,” “yellow,” or, rather unlikely but still possibly, “white”. Almost reversing this, if Yee is in a position where he has to say his line to someone not “black,” the interaction might be meaningful anyway in its incongruity. Given that early Asian American activists had actually identified with the black power movement, this could be interesting for audiences with this knowledge or experience. Thus, this live set-up allows the scene to be played out in different ways with wildly different outcomes. Ultimately, the potential disturbances inevitable in such a scene underline the constructedness, instability and arbitrariness of colour categories.

Following on from the frisson of witnessing an actor’s interpellation of an audience member as “darkest skinned,” the characters next launch into an explicit articulation and

auto-correction of clichés and stereotypes about various ethnic groups. The salacious Paul unleashes a torrent of points regarded as taboo in a politically correct social environment while the other two admonish him and try to temper his outbursts:

Paul	Because you know what happens when black people get mad.
Charles	What?!
Paul	Beatings, looting, fires...
JP	PJ!
Paul	Remember the L.A. Riots?
JP	Uh...we'd also like to clarify that we are not taking the Indian experience under consideration.
Paul	You mean like, Pocahontas? Or Slumdog Millionaire?
Charles	PJ, a little respect!
Paul	What? What am I supposed to call them? How am I supposed to know who we're talking about if they're both called Indians?
Charles	You're supposed to refer to the um...original inhabitants of Canada as either Aboriginal or First Nations and the one's [sic] you associated with Slumdog you're supposed to call South Asian. (8)

Referring to the violence associated with “blacks,” as well as the confusing label of “Indian” used to refer to two very different ethno-racial groups, Paul articulates and indeed allows a bit of space for these statements to be heard. What makes the scene effective is that these are actually commonly held assumptions. Their uptake not limited to any one group, Abalos highlights how anyone could potentially be an outside observer making ignorant comments

about someone else. By citing *Pocahontas* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, Abalos shows, through the character Paul, the power and impact of cultural representation on public knowledge. With no other easy access, people gain conversational currency on others through popular culture. This is why British East Asian and Asian Canadian artists want to be able to take part in representing their own stories. By correcting Paul's language, Charles reiterates the official, politically correct and socially accepted way of referring to certain groups of people. In this way, he imparts "correct" ways of speaking toward the audience, but functions also as educational device-in-action, displaying the process whereby this "corrected" language is filtered through society.

Compared with Yellow Earth Theatre's explicit use of the colour "yellow" in its company branding, this rich scene in Abalos' play shows how colour lines could easily be redrawn. It reveals an irreverence acceptable and perhaps even expected of fu-GEN's work in the Canadian context that stands in contrast to the generally more understated yet no less powerful nature of Yellow Earth Theatre's work that is in some ways impacted by the pressures of coming into formation amidst metropolitan standards in London. The scene above brings out into the open a series of viewpoints that sometimes get suppressed because of charges of racism. In enabling these opinions to be expressed and acknowledged, fu-GEN provides audiences with an outlet to address them rationally and even in witty, satirical ways. As an example of form, this scene is one of many in which the audience's presence is vital to the show's completion in performance. In fact, Charles tells the audience later on, "Your participation tonight will be crucial. But let me assure you, we will not single you out. All that we demand of you is honesty" (13). This honesty is geared towards achieving the larger aims of their "First Asian Canadian Cultural Conference for Unified Understanding"

(FACCCUU), with the following manifesto:

Paul We intend to create a paradigm for a new understanding
of Asian male sexuality within the Western cultural context.
Asian men have been persecuted by a harmonic [hegemonic]
hierarchical system instituted by Coke assassins [Caucasians]
and maintained by the Western world. We demand an eagle-Italian
[egalitarian] system of masculinity for Asian men. We pledge to
create a unified understanding of the experiences of Asian North
American men that is self-authored and reflective of actual experiences
rather than those prescribed by the dominant mainstream culture (14).

According to stage directions, “Charles corrects [the] words” so that audiences see the ones in square brackets (14). By deliberately having wrong words in the manifesto, only for them to be corrected “live,” Abalos creates moments of absurd word associations that make the correct words stand out more. Following Paul’s declaration, JP calls out to the “Asian brothers,” telling them that “[they] have been enslaved. Not by jail bars or chains, but by public perception” (14). The three also agree that their oppressors are the collective term of “the WHITE man!” (14) The presenters tell the audience that they are particularly concerned with “reclaim[ing] [their] rightful place in the sexual hierarchy” in which their positions as “Asian” men have been diminished. Indeed, JP says, “the greatest tragedy is that we have forgotten about our own virility” (15). This segment ends with all three characters getting the audience to “support [them] by following [them] on twitter,” Facebook, their mailing list, and so on. In a rousing sequence, the three also incite audiences to join them, and Paul

“attempts to start a chant” saying, “We want you! We want you! We want you! FACCCUU! FACCCUU! FACCCUU!” (16) Depending on whether the audience does join in, the homophonic effect between “FACCCUU” and the expletive “Fuck You” creates a riotous yet liberating atmosphere, particularly as both performers and audiences shout it together. This scene also parallels the atmosphere in a part of *Banana Boys* as earlier mentioned when the character Dave gives a presentation that ends in a similarly energized channelling of the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

On her part, although Needa’s interaction with the audience does not necessarily require active participation, and indeed, despite the direct address, could lapse back into the traditional aesthetic distancing, the presence of her specific body is important. The contrast between her material body and voice-overs reveals her closeness as well as distance from some of these issues in the act of creating and performing *FACE*. With every iteration of her performance, Needa repeats a journey of self-discovery that is incomplete, ongoing, and unresolved. Due to its original commission in 1998, the show ends with Needa revealing that she was in Hong Kong in 1997, a witness to its return to China. Using words that draw attention to the body and especially to her earlier walking mime, she says:

The heat and humidity forced me to sink under and inside my
skin for the first time in my life it seemed. I love the sweating.
That oily wetness of body and heat. I walked and walked. For miles.
My feet ached. It was as if they spoke to me. I gave them my
attention. Stroked them. Rubbed them softly at night. And listened
to them as they touched the ground. I knew where I stood. And I
also knew that I would keep on walking, along my path. (72)

As Heddon notes in her analysis of autobiographical performances that make use of walking, there is a “phenomenological quality of walking,” and “we ‘know’ the world through our physical, bodily experience of it and our literal contact of body with environment is thought to provide a privileged mode of knowledge (and, of course, different bodies produce different knowledges)” (105). In this way, *FACE* reveals to audiences a specific individual’s life, and as Heddon also reminds us, “not only do such performance narratives debunk ‘expert knowledge,’ these performances and the performers also provide possible role models, perhaps prompting further coming to voice” (34) of, perhaps, other stories around Eurasian identification. While Needa’s audiences remain, in some ways, an anonymous mass watching her perform, they also serve to witness her telling of her story, just as she acknowledges their presence in a shared time and space.

Aside from these scenes of audience engagement where the actors roam around the audience space and cast various people into the spotlight, *Brown Balls* also challenges audiences in other ways such as in the segment, “A Brief History of Erotica in Asian Arts: From Shunga to Hentai” (Abalos 16). Presented by Charles, this segment creates an environment at once humorous due to the blatancy of the erotica shown, and risky, as it pushes at the boundaries of propriety due to the risqué nature of the images. Some of these pictures include a jade statue of a heterosexual couple copulating, and various Japanese erotic illustrations featuring giant phalli, same-sex couplings and bestiality, in this case, an octopus mating with humans. In effect, this segment puts the audience into a situation of communal voyeurism. Although the images veer away from pornography in the sense that they are not photographs or films of real humans, but illustrations, these graphics are still

sexually explicit in nature. The shockingly titillating tone of this scene leads to the characters raising several questions for their audience. As JP elaborates:

Ladies and gentlemen, despite this strong history of eroticism
in Asia, the Asian male is oddly missing from sexual discourse
in North America. Where are we now? Why are we missing?
And why is there a skewed normative view of Asian masculinity
in North American culture today? (Abalos 22)

In a sense, this blatant display of erotica emerging out of “the East” has been appropriated by an Asian Canadian show as evidence of their own sexual presence and visibility. Using audience members as props, then, the actors again select, this time at the opposite end of the skin colour spectrum, a “white man in the audience” who fits a description JP gives:

The ideal man is a white, heterosexual, patriarchal, middle-class,
college-educated and gainfully employed conservative Christian,
with a healthy height and weight, good complexion and nice teeth,
who is also tough, aggressive, and non-emotional with a history of
success in sports and an appetite for red meat—cooked rare. (Abalos 23)

As indicated in stage directions, “Paul stops at a white man who seemingly fits the description of an ideal man,” and says, “Found one!” (Abalos 23). This example of “da man” (Abalos 22), as JP goes on to explain, “is the most prevalent type of man in North America” (Abalos 23), and worst, for Asian men, “these [endorsed types] are the guys who [they’re]

told [they] should want to be like” (Abalos 23). The actors continue to engage audiences at various points in the play through various means. These include a game of charades, in which they first “challenge [audiences] to name 5 famous Asian men who are portrayed as sex symbols” (Abalos 25) and then when that yields “few or no answer” (Abalos 25), they ask audiences to “[n]ame 5 famous Asian men for starring in martial arts or action films” (Abalos 26). Using this as a basis, the actors conduct a live Google search, showing data that proves “Asian women are hyper-sexualized whereas Asian men are completely de-sexualized in popular thought” (Abalos 26). The three characters then go on to poll the audience through a survey designed to “assess attitudes and perceptions of Asian men and their sexuality” (34). Using mobile phone technology, projectors, and some improvisation, the actors are able to assess their audiences live and show survey results on the projection screen. All these strategies combine to create a dynamic, interactive, and somewhat improvisatory production that is shaped in the moment and co-created with each particular audience.

5.6 From Community to the Personal

Interestingly, one of the other parallels of Abalos’ *Brown Balls* to Leon Aureus’ play, *Banana Boys*, is the eruption of the “mother-of-all-arguments” (Aureus 258). In the latter play, the five boys had a huge row that culminated in Rick punching his best friend Mike and then leaving his old friends behind as he descended into instability and, eventually, death. In *Brown Balls*, however, the huge argument that takes place has the effect of moving the cynical, in-ye-face tone of the presentation-style show to one that is softer and more personal. For the first time in the play, audiences get a glimpse into sad childhoods where the

three characters had either endured racism, hard work, or family abuse. This descent is significant because it leads to the finale where they announce:

Things didn't quite go according to plan tonight. We came here to examine Asian masculinity. We wanted to get rid of the Asian male stereotype. We wanted to be the voice of Asian men everywhere. I don't know if we succeeded—I don't know if it's even possible. (Abalos 45)

As is evident in the way the show unfolds at the end, finding a unified response or some form of solution is difficult. The show's concluding intimation is that change takes time and requires the participation of many. While their "conference" clearly did not succeed in its aims for a quick fix, the characters still appear hopeful. Handing audiences a fortune cookie each, the characters say their farewells and wish audiences "wisdom, prosperity and good fortune" (Abalos 46). Abalos' play, like Needa's show, ends on an unfinished journey. For both, there is clearly still more work to do.

These two plays, then, attempt to engage audiences directly, while demonstrating certain aspects of being British East Asian and Asian Canadian. As Helen Freshwater reminds us, however, in her book *Theatre and Audience* (2009), "the common tendency to refer to an audience as 'it' and, by extension, to think of this 'it' as a single entity or collective, risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context, and environment which condition an individual's interpretation of a particular performance event" (5). Indeed, as Wayne Leung, Managing Editor of theatre review website *Mooney on Theatre*, notes in his review of *Brown Balls*,

I'm well aware that I'm probably the choir this show is preaching to and spent much of the evening emphatically nodding in agreement. My non-Asian play-going companion told me he learned quite a bit about the Asian-American male experience that really surprised him as he'd never thought about these issues before. However, the nervous laughter of the non-Asian audience members seated behind me at what I thought were inappropriate moments makes me question whether this show will have a reach beyond its niche audience. (Rev. of "Brown")

Leung's differentiation of his own experience from that of his theatre-going companion and others reveals that while artists prepare interactive shows like this with a range of possible audience responses in mind, the actual attendees will always leave with different interpretations of their experience. Given the community-based tone of Needa's show, existing reviews tend to refer to its run in Hong Kong, and comment on the post-show tea and chat with the artist herself. Both productions thus have very different ways of approaching audience interaction. Whereas Needa begins with a personal story in which she speaks *for* and *as* a British Hong Kong Eurasian, thereby becoming representative *of* and *in* a broader group, *Brown Balls* starts from the collective, with the characters putting forth a shared critical position, before erupting into touching personal stories of individuals who lived through the pain of racism or other attacks on their identities. Both shows "occupy" audiences, a term loaded with meaning since the rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement that emerged in 2011, placing them in a position of witnessing and participation through the spatial and temporal conventions of theatre-watching, that is, being stuck in the auditorium

for the duration of a show. The primacy and efficacy of these two shows also lie in the explicit framing and display of performers' bodies, bodies that are important media for the shows' meanings. Indeed, Needa's *FACE* could only make sense when performed by and through her specific body. On the other hand, even though other actors could be cast in Abalos' play, the three actors who did perform in the play's premiere were of ethnicities specific to the characters. In addition, the play's connection to Leon Aureus' *Banana Boys*, in which Yee also performed, adds layered interpretive and experiential possibilities for audiences who have seen the former play, and who now view the latter. The actors' bodies in these plays are the ultimate *Darstellung* portraiture, and their presences allow for audiences to tread in their shoes, creating a shared sense of *Vertretung*. Reading these two plays together reminds us of the power and unique capabilities of bodies in effecting empathy and understanding, two responses dearly desired in the formation of British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

I was first drawn to compare Yellow Earth Theatre and fu-GEN because I felt there were shared impulses evident in the two public forums I attended at their respective sites, each concerned with inequitable casting opportunities and racist performance practices. YET and fu-GEN have both used theatre to bring into the public sphere a sense of the complexities that attend, respectively, British East Asian and Asian Canadian identities. As I researched the companies' distinct mandates, production histories, public engagement, related critical press and dramaturgical strategies, I was struck by both the shared and distinctive impulses at play in each context, impulses that I felt might be best understood through comparative analysis. This sense was amplified as I began to study the different plays and productions produced at each site. Although they emerged in different contexts, I discovered that many of YET and fu-GEN's plays adopt similar dramatic forms and representational strategies. Moreover, as my comparative analyses of the six plays suggest, their strategies are contingent upon individual artistic preferences, shared ideals and ideologies, and ultimately reveal the multifarious positions that trouble the unifying implications of identity labels such as "British East Asian" and "Asian Canadian". While company mandates serve as guidelines for the artistic direction of each company's repertoire, the works themselves do not always fall neatly into predetermined categories. In so doing, they reinforce the idea that such coalitionist groupings, whether in a socio-political context or an artistic context, are ineluctably constructed and undergoing continued changes and ruptures.

As I noted in Chapter One, the specific groups of five artists for Yellow Earth and thirteen artists for fu-GEN came together to form their respective artistic coalitions because the individuals involved wanted to create something bigger than themselves—fairer cultural representation for British East Asians and Asian Canadians. This notion of achieving representation is complicated by the two senses of the word as theorist Gayatri Spivak has delineated—*Darstellung*, representation as a kind of portrait, and *Vertretung*, political representation by proxy. As artists, company members such as David Tse, Nina Aquino, Kumiko Mendl, David Yee, Leon Aureus, and Veronica Needa strove to create through theatre a community group portrait of sorts for their companies and the ethno-national communities they were imaging as well as imagining. Whether appearing on stage themselves or directing actors in what they presented as British East Asian and Asian Canadian plays, the artists involved highlighted the potentials of bodies not oft seen in what have traditionally been very mono-ethnic dramatic displays in their countries. Indeed, from the martial prowess of Tom Wu as Paul, to the absurd antics of Ins Choi's Willy, Biff and Happy; from the variegated tones of the actors playing "Banana Boys," including the mixed-heritage David Yee, to the complex, passably white body of Veronica Needa whose identity and upbringing arguably makes her an "inverted banana woman," reading the companies' plays together reveals the rich ethno-racial spectrum that simultaneously diversifies, yet causes tension in the tapestry of ethno-national cultural production.

Thus, where the plays as group portraits reveal previously unseen and unheard stories that enable a deeper understanding of what it means for someone to occupy that ethno-national fault-line of being British and East Asian, or Asian and Canadian, they also fail to fully encompass all experiences of those who stand on the periphery of the imagined and

embodied communities. Therefore, the companies' plays most often tell the stories of and showcase Chinese bodies, with Filipino, Korean, and Japanese bodies occupying less stage and narrative space. As explored in Chapter One, this has further been compounded with longstanding casting issues. In a professional theatre industry where realism dominates as the chief aesthetic medium, casting is complicated by arguments for freedom of artistic licence, as well as by the push for fairer casting practices. On one hand, directors want to cast actors whom they deem the best for a role, or whom they envision as perfectly suited based on a panoply of reasons, even personally idiosyncratic ones. On the other hand, with increased awareness about institutional racism, some directors have been open to casting more widely, even to the extent of colour-blind casting, where the visual impact of an actor's ethnically marked body is either wilfully ignored or gainfully deployed for dramatic statement. In the former, complications arise because audiences will inevitably read and assign interpretive possibilities to actors' bodies, especially in the face of perceived incongruence. In the latter, one might say that the director is using an actor as a coloured property, a kind of cultural shorthand, but one that undermines the actor's individuality as an artist. In addition, given that white actors are often cast across nationalities and cultures as long as they look right and can act the part, similar expectations can arise where East Asian actors are expected to be able to act outside of their own nationalities and ethnicities. Given the inherently troubled representational field, however, this can be viewed negatively by some. Thus, on one hand, while an ethnically Chinese artist like David Tse had been cast to play a Japanese character, and therefore gotten employment as an actor, the effect pales in comparison to the impact that Byron Abalos' *Brown Balls* and Veronica Needa's *Face* have created in mobilising specific bodies on stage for purposes of audience engagement. In both companies' works,

then, representation by proxy is more problematic, because it is not easy to tread in everyone's shoes.

As seen in the preceding chapters, both companies have adopted similar strategies and themes in their creation of "British East Asian" and "Asian Canadian" drama. In particular, home life is often juxtaposed with social life, and the various characters are often cast adrift, where homes no longer feel safe and are, at worst, toxic environments that impede rather than help with developing the self. Although founded and operating in different national contexts, both have contended with racist or racialized portrayals of East Asians in the Western imaginary, particularly those from film such as *Fu Manchu* and *Charlie Chan*. It is striking that both companies have drawn upon and cited racialized references such as the song "Kung Fu Fighting," martial arts, and the exotic dragon lady femme fatale. In much the same way that some pejorative terms, such as "queer" and "gay," historically used against other disenfranchised groups, have been rehabilitated, reappropriated and used for self-empowerment, these echoes of exotica serve to recall a racist past as well as critique an ongoing struggle for fairness in cultural representation.

Indeed, both companies have favoured dramaturgical and production choices that emphasize dialectical ideas in live performance, where the conceits of the stage and the liveness of actors' bodies afford audiences relatively safe public opportunities to encounter discomfiting truths about how racial and cultural perception work in society. Rather than simply elide the racist ideas and performance traditions they seek to dismantle, both companies have tackled these ideas directly by producing plays with characters whose speeches carry weight because they parrot some of the extreme attitudes that some people hold towards "foreigners" in their "homeland". Thus, Hatch and Dave are allowed to spout

highly offensive comments that could be taken straight out of real mouths. At the same time, both companies also strive to show the humanity of immigrants, especially in representations of their identity and economic struggles. Audiences are given multiple points of view to consider and are often induced to draw their own conclusions, especially in the unresolved endings of such plays as *lady in the red dress* and *Play to Win*. For both companies, the bodying forth of their stages with East Asian bodies or, as in Veronica Needa's case, a mixed-race body that can pass for white, allows audiences a glimpse into broader representational possibilities.

In light of the companies' efforts to construct a cultural space based on ethno-national identification, these representational possibilities often foreground embodied hybridities, tied in with these bodies' struggles to fit in. Emerging as key shorthands of ethno-national work, the companies' plays often feature battles within bodies ridden with opposing elements. Thus, Needa's crises of identity where she feels misrecognised because her looks do not allow her to fit in as Chinese in Hong Kong, while her upbringing threatens her acceptability and palatability as a quintessentially English person when in England. In showcasing her body and telling her personal stories through *FACE*, Needa demonstrates the power of the body as a canvas of contestatory activity. As I described in the Introduction, scholars Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, in their study of Asian Australian cultural production, proffer "a useful dialectical model for understanding cultural interaction: "an organic hybridity, which will tend towards fusion, in conflict with intentional hybridity, which enables a contestatory activity"" (Young 22, qtd. in Gilbert and Lo 169). Whereas organic hybridity absorbs and blends cultural influences so that they lose their contextual significances, intentional hybridity recognizes and maintains the tensions and conflicts that occur when elements are

thrust together. Thus, in *Banana Boys*, Rick's attempt to attain financial and personal success through the adoption of behaviour associated with successful Hong Kong businessmen causes him to fuse with, and even become, a vampiric figure and lose himself and his soul. In contrast, his friends Mike, Luke, Sheldon, and Dave learn to let go of their self-victimising attitudes and accept the possibilities of seeking change outside of their own comfort zones.

In both companies' plays, personal traumas are often linked to wider social ills affecting an imagined community, whether they be the trials and tribulations facing an ethnic minority, being a Chinese labourer in Canada when the Chinese are not welcomed there, or simply being survivalists in a difficult world. As theatre companies representing British East Asian and Asian Canadian interests, Yellow Earth and fu-GEN have created timely and socially significant works that intervene in the cultural memories of the British and Canadian nations. For all theatre critic Lyn Gardner's criticisms about the dramaturgical quality of *58*, it is a valiant—and the only attempt so far—to narrativise and give voice to a specific tragedy whose circumstances remain unabated. As I write this, twenty-four Eritrean migrants were reported to have been “found in the back of a refrigerated yoghurt lorry in Kent after they were heard knocking and pleading for oxygen” (“Migrants ‘Pleading’”). In this way, although YET's play replayed and dealt with a tragedy associated with the Chinese community, *58* touches a social phenomenon with greater significance beyond this ethnic group. On their part, fu-GEN's presentation of David Yee's *lady in the red dress* is especially important because it allows for affective and imaginative engagement with the moral dilemmas surrounding Canada's historical prejudices against minorities. Through the use of humour, absurdity, and a range of intentionally hybrid cultural references from the exotic “Oriental” femme fatale to the citation of Arthur Miller's famous trio of characters,

Willy, Biff and Happy, Yee's play is a thought-provoking yet entertaining drama that seduces audiences into confronting their own ideas, feelings, and attitudes toward an uncomfortable issue. In many of the plays, time and space are manipulated, environments turned surreal, and ghosts or spirits raised to haunt the living characters. Often, these spectral agents work to goad characters into actions that lead to a sense of cultural and personal betterment.

Aligning with their respective artistic directors' ideas on British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre, Yellow Earth's works often refer to transnational networks and ongoing migrant experiences, while fu-GEN has localised and often delves deeper into Canadian identity within the city of Toronto, which has its own specificity of atmosphere. Thus, we see in the former's plays martial arts films, the reasons why some Chinese emigrants want to come to Britain and their struggle in doing so, and also lived experiences that cross and hover over borders. In the latter's plays, there is a strong sense of a Canadian identity, the urban landscape of Toronto, and a sensibility uniquely, irreverently fu-GEN's version of "Asian Canadianness".

In defining themselves as British East Asian and Asian Canadian theatre companies, YET and fu-GEN immediately situate themselves ethnically and nationally. As seen in the plays, however, the mandate of ethno-nationally labelled theatre does not necessarily read clearly, nor are the identifications with the British and Canadian nations always explicit. Although Needa identifies strongly with Hong Kong as well as England, seeking to claim belonging and acceptance in both national sites, the young Paul only wants to be accepted by his peers and to have the requisite accoutrements he deems entitled to as a young man in a capitalist country. Despite this, underpinning this desire for acceptance in his personal,

adolescent world is a wider yearning for the recognition of his needs as a second generation British Filipino child, and for his parents to also be given fair treatment. As seen in both plays on communal trauma, the 58 emigrants who died, along with Zhaodi as a second generation British Chinese, only want understanding and acceptance in Britain, which they view as home, or a potential haven from a harsher homeland. Similarly, Tommy Jade, treading in the shoes of the real victims of the Chinese Exclusion Act, is a poignantly delineated character who reminds us that racism existed, and should, in this day and age, be extinguished in a society that prides itself as civilised. Like Needa, and yet not quite like her, David Yee's Sylvia and Danny, mixed-race children in a predominantly white society, just want to fit in and not be alienated by either side. Engaging with real, live audiences, Byron Abalos boldly confronts Torontonians and those present with the uncomfortable topics of racial profiling, stereotyping, and prejudiced judgement that constantly go on due to ignorance and thoughtlessness. His live dramaturgy is a uniquely provocative device for activating audiences' participation as well as probing their ethical boundaries.

In these ways, then, this thesis shows that reading Yellow Earth and fu-GEN's works together allows us to appreciate the complexities of such "ethno-national" dramatic work, which thrives in the push and pull of togetherness and inner divisiveness. Much like the battles between sides in *lady in the red dress*, the companies' "fights" are not over. Indeed, the founding impulses behind each company insist on the continual reconsideration of shared humanity. YET, exploring "universal themes" and "celebrating cultural diversity through an integration of theatre skills from the East and the West," have to continuously re-examine their position as one of very few arts companies devoted to "British East Asian" cultural production and what that means. Since Kumiko Mendl took on the role of Artistic Director,

for example, YET has produced a range of short play showcases called *Dim Sum Nights*, as well as a site-specific show, *The Last Days of Limehouse* (2014), with a focus on mixed heritage tensions. On their part, fu-GEN has continued to support the development of emerging playwrights with their writers' programme, and also to explore Asian North American issues and the societal roles that come with that identification. Since David Yee took on the role of artistic director, he has continued to steer the company toward thought-provoking, comically irreverent plays that continue to question stereotyping and racism.

The main aim of this thesis is to open a window into "ethno-national" drama through a comparative study of two theatre companies that have followed remarkably similar trajectories despite having been founded in different cultural, temporal and spatial contexts. Aside from parsing their public faces through their websites, publicity materials, published interviews, and media releases, I have mostly focused on six plays, three from each company, which I discovered to have rich cultural meanings significant to each company's identity and to British East Asian and Asian Canadian on the whole. Given the nature of this project, I have chosen not to include any personal interviews, which might otherwise give the thesis a different trajectory. The possibilities that this could open up would be so wide that it would certainly be another book-length project. Most recently, cultural geographer Amanda Rogers has written *Performing Asian Transnationalisms: Theatre, Identity, and the Geographies of Performance* (2014) in which she investigates cross border partnerships and pollinations between East Asian artists in Britain, the United States, and Singapore. Her work reminds us that cultural networks are fluid and porous, and that although many artists work within their own national sites, there are also those who seek and gain inspiration, opportunities, and artistic synergies abroad. Much like the remaining Banana Boys who leave

Toronto to find love, work, and adventure in Hong Kong and Vancouver, British East Asian and Asian Canadian artists can branch out and find other like-minded individuals in other ethno-national theatre spaces such as Asian American theatre and Asian Australian theatre. Just as there are cultural shorthands in the works I have looked at in this thesis, so might the artists find shorthands--incisive, immediate points of understanding--with others in parallel situations in other cultural and national sites. Through this small window, I have juxtaposed two ethno-national theatre sites not often paired together. Reading the formative stories and works of Yellow Earth and fu-GEN in tandem reveals the dynamic potential of such works and suggests the value of more analyses of this sort for even greater understanding of the hard work of carving out an ethno-national dramatic space.

Bibliography

Abalos, Byron. *Brown Balls*. TS. The property of the author. 2011. Print.

“About: An Overview of Yellow Earth Theatre.” *yellowearth.org*. Yellow Earth Theatre. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“About: History/Future: David Tse Ka-Shing.” *yellowearth.org*. Yellow Earth Theatre. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“About Leon Aureus.” *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 1. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 199. Print.

“About Us: Chinatown Arts Space (CAS).” *chinatownartsspace.com*. Chinatown Arts Space: Supporting East Asian Performing and Visual Arts. 2010. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.

“About Us: Company History.” *fu-gen.org*. fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company. N.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“About Us: Mandate.” *fu-gen.org*. fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company. N.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“About VACT.” *vact.ca*. Vancouver Asian Canadian Theatre. N.d. Web. 31 Dec. 2011.

“Address by the Prime Minister on the Chinese Head Tax Redress.” *Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper*. N.p., 22 June 2006. Web. 29 Jul. 2011.

Aeschylus. *Agamemnon*. Trans. Louis Macniece. *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater*. 5th edition. Eds. Carl H. Klaus, Miriam Gilbert, and Bradford S. Field, Jr. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 24-48. Print.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Al-Solaylee, Kamal. “A frantic Banana Boys almost slips.” Rev. of *Banana Boys*, by Leon Aureus. Dir. Nina Aquino. *The Globe and Mail*. 21 Sept. 2004. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

---. “A Better Banana, if still a bit fleshy.” Rev. of *Banana Boys*, by Leon Aureus. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *The Globe and Mail*. 29 Sept. 2005. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Alvarez, Natalie. “Realisms of Redress: Alameda Theatre and the Formation of a Latina/o-Canadian Theatre and Politics.” *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Vol. Two. Eds. Roberta Barker and Kim Solga. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012. 144-162. Print.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.

Anderson, Wanni W. and Robert G. Lee. "Asian American Displacements." *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*. Eds. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2005. 3-22. Print.

Aquino, Nina Lee. Introduction. *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 1. Trans. David Yee. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. vii-xi. Print.

Aquino, Nina, Richard Lee and Byron Abalos, et. al. "A Note from fu-GEN." N.d. TS. fu-GEN Theatre Press Release. Print.

Aquino, Nina Lee, and Ric Knowles. "Introduction to Asian Canadian Theatre." *Asian Canadian Theatre. New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Eds. Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles. Toronto: Playwrights Canada P, 2011. vii-xvi. Print.

"Archive: Dim Sum Nights 2011." Yellow Earth Theatre. yellowearth.org. Yellow Earth Theatre. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

"Archive: Typhoon Festival." Yellow Earth Theatre. yellowearth.org. Yellow Earth Theatre. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Aureus, Leon. "Banana Boys." *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 2. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 199-274. Print.

Beauregard, Guy. "After Redress: A Conversation with Roy Miki." *Canadian Literature* 20 (2009): 71-86. Web. 20 Oct. 2011.

Beech, Hannah. "Eurasian Invasion." *content.time.com*. TIME magazine. 23 April 2001. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. Print.

Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Benton, Gregor and Edmund Terence Gomez. *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.

Berson, Misha. Introduction. *Between Worlds: Contemporary Asian-American Plays*. Ed. Misha Berson. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990. ix-xiv. Print.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Bryant, Julian. "The Equality and Diversity Agenda." *creatingtheatre.com*. Creating Theatre. 2007. Web. 5 Oct. 2011.

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Michigan: Michigan UP, 2003. Print.

Césaire, Aimé. *A Tempest*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. Print.

Chan, Elizabeth. "Chinese Britons Have Put Up With Racism For Too Long." *guardian.co.uk. The Guardian*. 11 Jan. 2012. Web. 30 Jan. 2012.

Chan, Marjorie. Preface. *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 2. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. iii-v. Print.

Chen, Anna, et. al. "British East Asian Artists Statement – 30th October 2012." *britisheastaa.wix.com/beaactors*. October 2012. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

Cherbonnier, Philippe. 58: *Yan Wai You Yi / Meaning Lies Beyond Language*. 2004. TS.

Yellow Earth Theatre Archive. Print.

“Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act.” *Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC)*. n.p.
n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2011.

Citron, Paula. “fu-GEN Asian-Canadian Theatre Company/Young Centre—David Yee’s
lady in the red dress.” Rev. of *lady in the red dress*, by David Yee. Dir. Nina Lee
Aquino. *The New Classical 96.3fm: the Nation’s Classical Station*. Classical 96.3fm,
n.d. Web. 8 Jan. 2011.

Clements, Neil. “Play about lorry migrant deaths opens at festival.” *Kent on Sunday*. 3
Oct. 2004. Print.

Coleman, Daniel and Donald Goellnicht. “Introduction: ‘Race’ into the Twenty-First
Century.” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 1-29. 1 Jan. 2002. Web. 11 Feb.
2012.

Conceison, Claire. “The Crucible, and: 4.48 Psychosis, and: King Lear, and: The Scholar and
The Executioner, and: Crows and Sparrows.” *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007): 491-493.
Web. 3 Oct. 2011.

“Contesting British Chinese Culture.” *reading.ac.uk*. University of Reading: Film,

Theatre and Television. Conference Programme: 24th-25th September 2011. N.d.
Web. 30 Jan. 2012.

Coulbourn, John. "Brown Balls an Edgy Asian Tribute." Rev. of *Brown Balls*, by Byron Abalos. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *torontosun.com*. Toronto Sun. 5 May 2011. Web. 2 April 2012.

Crew, Robert. "Play has the depth of gory video game." Rev. of *lady in the red dress*, by David Yee. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *thestar.com*. Toronto Star. 30 Jan. 2009. Web. 26 Aug. 2010.

"CRRF supports the call for redress." *Canadian Race Relations Foundation*. 9 May 2003.
Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

"David Tse Ka-Shing." *visiblechinese.com*. Visible Chinese: A Guide to Achievers in the UK's Chinese Culture. 3 April 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

"David Tse: Yellow Earth Theatre." *vimeo.com*. Victoria and Albert Museum on Vimeo. 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Davis, Geoffrey V., and Anne Fuchs, eds. *Staging New Britain: Aspects of Black and South Asian British Theatre Practice*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006. Print.

“Development History.” *fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company*. N.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Deverell, Rita Shelton. “When the Performer is Black.” *“Ethnic,” Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*. Eds. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009.1-7. Print.

Doran, Gregory and Catherine Mallyon. “Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) Facebook post.” *facebook.com*. 22 October 2012. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

Douglas, Carl. “Kung-fu Fighting.” By Carl Douglas and Biddu Appaiah. Pye Records, 1974.

Dunton, Emma, Roger Nelson, and Hetty Shand. “New Writing in Theatre 2003-2008: An assessment of new writing within smaller scale theatre in England.” *artscouncil.org.uk*. Arts Council England. Jul. 2009. Web. 4 Feb. 2012.

“*Eclipse Report: Developing Strategies to Combat Racism in Theatre*.” Brown, Stuart, Isobel Hawson, Tony Graves, and Mukesh Barot. (Working Party) Proceedings of Arts Council of England, East Midlands Arts Board, Theatrical Management Association and Nottingham Playhouse Working Conference, 12-13 Jun. 2001, Nottingham Playhouse. *artscouncil.org.uk*. Arts Council England. N. d. 1-86. Web. 4 Feb. 2012.

English, Ryan. "Following the bouncing brown balls: playwright Byron Abalos strips down gay Asian stereotypes." *fabmagazine.com*. fab: The Gay Scene Magazine. 5 Feb. 2011. Web. 2 April 2012.

Espiritu, Yen Le. *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992. Print.

Etchells, Tim. *Certain Fragments: Texts and Writings on Performance*. London: Routledge, 1999. Print.

"Exploring the Canon 2". The London Hub. *Exploring the Canon 2 Programme Book*, 2011. N.pag. Print.

Farrer, D.S. and John Whalen-Bridge, eds. *Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge: Asian Traditions in a Transnational World*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2011. Print.

"58 Programme." Yellow Earth Theatre Production Programme. 8 – 13 November 2004. Print.

Findlay, Stephanie and Nicholas Kohler. "RACE: 'TOO ASIAN'?": A term used in the

U.S. to talk about racial imbalance at Ivy league schools is now being whispered on Canadian campuses—by everyone but the students themselves, who speak out loud and clear.” *Maclean’s* 123.45 (2010): 76. Web. 16 Jan. 2012.

Fletcher, Jackie. “Lear’s Daughters.” Rev. of *Lear’s Daughters*, by the Women’s Theatre Group in collaboration with Elaine Feinstein. Dir. David Ka-Shing Tse. *britishtheatreinfo*. British Theatre Guide. 2003. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Gardner, Lyn. “58.” Rev. of 58, by Philippe Cherbonnier. Dir. David Tse. *The Guardian*. 10 November 2004. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

---. “Play to Win.” Rev. of *Play to Win*, by David Tse. Dir. David Tse. *The Guardian*. 7 Oct. 2000. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

GENesis: Asian Canadian Theatre Conference. Hosted by fu-GEN Theatre. Factory Theatre, Toronto. 3 – 9 May 2010.

Gilbert, Helen and Jacqueline Lo. *Performance and Cosmopolitics: Cross-Cultural Transactions in Australasia*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

---. “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 46.3 (2002): 31-53. Web. 25 April 2012.

Gilbert, Helen and Joanne Tompkins. *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*.

London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Godiwala, Dimple, ed. *Alternatives Within the Mainstream: British Black and Asian*

Theatres. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006. Print.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minnesota:

Minnesota UP, 2004. Print.

Griffin, Gabriele. *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain*.

Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.

Gunew, Sneja. *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalisms*. London:

Routledge, 2013. Print.

Hallab, Mary Y. *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture*. Albany:

State University of New York, 2009. Print.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*.

Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990. 223-224. Print.

Harvie, Jen. *Staging the UK*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005. Print.

“Heaven on Earth: The Yellow Earth Theatre Group.” *Cover Magazine: Covering Theatre*. Issue 10 (2004): 130-133. Print.

Heddon, Deirdre. *Autobiography in Performance: Performing Selves*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Hingorani, Dominic. *British Asian Theatre: Dramaturgy, Process and Performance*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Houston, Velina Hasu. Foreword. *Asian American Culture On Stage: The History of the East West Players*. By Yuko Kurahashi. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999. xi-xiv. Print.

Huang, Alexander C.Y. “King Lear.” Rev. of *King Lear*, by William Shakespeare. Dir. David Tse Ka-Shing. *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007): 494-495. Web. 3 Oct. 2011.

---. “Review of King Lear (directed by David Tse for Yellow Earth Theatre and Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre) at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, November 2006.” *Shakespeare* 3.2 (2007): 239-242. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“Initiatives: Yellow Voices.” Yellow Earth Theatre. yellowearth.org. Yellow Earth Theatre. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Jenkins, Lisa. "Liz Sutherland & Kumiko Mendl Interview—Yellow Earth Theatre Company." *nijimagazine.com*. Niji Magazine. 2012. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Jenkins, Richard. "Symbolic Violence and Social Reproduction." *Pierre Bourdieu: Revised Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2002. 103-127. Print.

John, Cindi. "Moving stories inspired by Dover 58." *BBC NEWS*. 10 Nov. 2004. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Kam, Winston. "Bachelor-Man." *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 1. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 157. Print.

Kaplan, Jon. "Brown Balls uses comedy to explore images of Asian masculinity in the West." Rev. of *Brown Balls*, by Byron Abalos. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *nowtoronto.com*. NOW Magazine, 5 June 2011. Web. 2 April 2012.

---. "Byron's Balls: Writer sends up Asian stereotypes." *nowtoronto.com*. NOW Magazine, 28 April 2011. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

---. "Yee is Seeing Red: Playwright David Yee Responds to Racism with a Colourful Look at History." *nowtoronto.com*. NOW Magazine, 21 Jan. 2009. Web. 22 Jan. 2011.

Kelley, Robin D. G. "Poetry & the Political Imagination: Aimé Césaire, Negritude & the Applications of Surrealism." *A Tempest*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985. vii-xvi. Print.

Keung, Nicholas. "Five Bananas in Search of an Audience; play focuses on Asian Canadians." *The Canadian Press* [Toronto]. *The Globe and Mail*. 16 Sept. 2004. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Khan, Naseem. *The Arts Britain Ignores—The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain*. London: The Commission For Racial Equality, 1976. Print.

Khoo, Tseen-Ling. *Banana Bending: Asian-Australian and Asian-Canadian Literatures*. Aberdeen, Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 2003. Print.

Kim, Christine. "Performing Asian Canadian Intimacy: Theatre Replacement's Bioboxes and Awkward Multiculturalisms." *Asian Canadian Theatre: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011. 183-194. Print.

Kim, Taehyung. *Performing Victimhood in Asian American Drama*. Diss. U of California, Irvine, 2009. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2009. 3365789. Web. 4 Feb 2012.

Koo, Camellia. "Improvising In and Out of the Box." *Canadian Theatre Review* 143

(2010): 55-59. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Knowles, Ric. "Performing Intercultural Memory in the Diasporic Present: The Case of Toronto." *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*. Eds. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 167-183. Print.

---. "'Between Home There and Home Here': An Interview with Nina Lee Aquino." *Canadian Theatre Review* 125 (2006): 75-82. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Knowles, Ric, and Ingrid Mündel. Introduction. "'Ethnic,' Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre." *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*. Eds. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. vii-xviii. Print.

"Kumiko Mendl." *visiblechinese.com*. Visible Chinese: A Guide to Achievers in the UK's Chinese Culture. 3 April 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Kurahashi, Yuko. Introduction. *Asian American Culture On Stage: The History of the East West Players*. By Yuko Kurahashi. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999. xvii-xix. Print.

"Lady in the Red Dress by David Yee." *PLCN Titles*. Playwrights Canada Press, n.d. Web. 29 Jul. 2011.

Laviolette, Byron. "lady in the red dress." Rev. of *lady in the red dress*, by David Yee. Dir.

Nina Lee Aquino. *Eyeweekly.com*. Eye Weekly. 2 Feb. 2009. Web. 26. Aug. 2010.

Lee, Robert. "Theatre Blog: Why I Stand by My East Asian British Musical."

guardian.co.uk. The Guardian. 30 Jun. 2011. Web. 30 Jan. 2012.

Lee, Robert G. *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999. Print.

Lee, Esther Kim. *A History of Asian American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

Lee, Josephine. *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997. Print.

Li, Xiaoping. *Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007. Print.

Leung, Parie. "Drama as Surgical Act: Operative Realism and the Chinese Canadian Redress." *New Canadian Realisms: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Eds. Roberta Barker and Kim Solga. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012. 163-181. Print.

Leung, Wayne. "Toronto's fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company present *Brown Balls*, Byron Abalos' irreverent play, examining Asian male stereotypes..." Rev. of *Brown Balls*, by Byron Abalos. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *mooneyontheatre.com*. Mooney on Theatre. 6 May 2011. Web. 2 April 2012.

Liang, Lia Wen-Ching. "Negotiating New Terrains: Yellow Earth Theatre's *Lear's Daughters* and *King Lear*." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 19.3 (2009): 289-297. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

---. "Assembling Differences: Towards a Deleuzian Approach to Intercultural Theatre." Diss. U of London, 2009. Print.

Little, John, ed. *Bruce Lee: Words of the Dragon, Interviews, 1958-1973*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1997. Print.

Liu, Siyuan. "Jade in the Coal and the Performance of Theatrical Interculturalism." *Asian Canadian Theatre: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011. 195-207. Print.

Luckhurst, Mary, and Emilie Morin, eds. *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Print.

Luk, Wai-ki. *Chinatown in Britain: Diffusions and Concentrations of British New Wave Chinese Immigration*. New York: Cambria Press, 2008. Print.

“Mandate.” *cahoots.ca*. Cahoots Theatre Company. N.d. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.

Maufort, Marc. “Multicultural Vistas: Dramatic Re-inventions of the Ethnic Minority Other.” *Transgressive Itineraries: Postcolonial Hybridizations of Dramatic Realism*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006. 85-119. Print.

McGavin, Harvey. “Play revisits tragedy of 58 Chinese immigrants who suffocated in lorry.” *The Independent*. 27 Sept. 2004. Print.

Metzger, Sean. “Charles Parsloe’s Chinese Fetish: An Example of Yellowface Performance in Nineteenth Century American Melodrama.” *Theatre Journal* 56.4 (2004): 627-651. Web. 25 April 2015.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman. Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater*. 5th edition. Eds. Carl H. Klaus, Miriam Gilbert, and Bradford S. Field, Jr. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2003. 868-905. Print.

Mitter, Rana and Akira Iriye. Foreword. *The Chinese in Britain, 1800-Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity*. Gregor Benton and Edmund Terence Gomez. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. xi-xii. Print.

Morrow, Martin. "Brown Balls: Asian stereotypes are nothing to laugh at." Rev. of *Brown Balls*, by Byron Abalos. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *theglobeandmail.com*. The Globe and Mail. 4 May 2011. Web. 2 April 2012.

Moy, James S. *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America*. Iowa: Iowa UP, 1994. Print.

Moynagh, Maureen, ed. *African-Canadian Theatre*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2005. Print.

Needa, Veronica. "FACE: Renegotiating Identity through Performance." Diss. University of Kent. July 2009. Print.

---. "One Woman's Identity and Belonging." *ishk.org*. Islanders International Alumni Network. 23 Oct. 1998. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Nestruck, J. Kelly. "Time Travel, Film Noir and the Head Tax." Rev. of *lady in the red dress*, by David Yee. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *The Globe and Mail*. 3 Feb. 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

"News: 100% Arts Council Cut to Yellow Earth Theatre." *yellowearth.org*. Yellow Earth Theatre. 31 Mar. 2011. Web. 5 Oct. 2011.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formations in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Once Upon A Time in China. Dir. Tsui Hark. Perf. Jet Li, Biao Yuen, Rosamund Kwan, Jacky Cheung, et. al. Golden Harvest Company, 1991. Film.

Opening the Door: East Asians in British Theatre. Devoted and Disgruntled Event. Hosted by Improbable Theatre. The Young Vic, London. 11 February 2013.

Osborne, Deirdre. "The State of the Nation: Contemporary Black British Theatre and the Staging of the UK." Ed. Dimple Godiwala. *Alternatives Within the Mainstream: British Black and Asian Theatre*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006. 82-100. Print.

Parker, David. "Going with the Flow? Reflections on Recent Chinese Diaspora Studies." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14.2/3 (2005). 411-423. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Parker, David and Miri Song. "New Ethnicities and the Internet: Belonging and the Negotiation of Difference in Multicultural Britain." *Cultural Studies* 23.4 (2009): 583-604. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“Past Seasons: 2009/2010 Season.” *fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company*. N.d.
Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
Print.

Pinto, Shiromi. “A Separate Piece?” *Connections*. (Summer 2002): 8-10. Print.

“Play Development.” *fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company*. N.d. Web. 9 Feb.
2012.

“Population Estimates by Ethnic Group 2002-2009.” *ons.gov.uk*. Office for National
Statistics. 18 May 2011. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.

Prashad, Vijay. *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth
of Cultural Purity*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002. Print.

“Press Release: Yellow Earth Presents: 58 by Philippe Cherbonnier, directed by David
K.S. Tse.” Emma Schad Publicity. Web. 2 April 2012.

Rayner, Alice. *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*. Minnesota:
Minnesota UP, 2006. Print.

- Rogers, Amanda. *Performing Asian Transnationalisms: Theatre, Identity, and the Geographies of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003. Print.
- Salverson, Julie. "Transgressive Storytelling or an Aesthetic of Injury: Performance, Pedagogy, and Ethics." *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*. Eds. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 54-67. Print.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. "Hamlet." *The Riverside Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. 2nd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1182-1245. Print.
- Shaw, George Bernard. "Pygmalion." *Stages of Drama: Classical to Contemporary Theater*. 5th edition. Eds. Carl H. Klaus, Miriam Gilbert, and Bradford S. Field, Jr. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 697-735. Print.
- Shimakawa, Karen. "Enunciating Asian Canadian Drama." *Asian Canadian Theatre: New Essays on Canadian Theatre*. Volume One. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino and Ric Knowles. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2011. Print.

---. *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

---. "Ghost Families in Sung Rno's Cleveland Raining." *Theatre Journal* 52.3 (2000): 381-396. Web. 10 April 2011.

---. "Asians in America: Millennial Approaches to Asian Pacific American Performance." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 3.3 (2000): 283-297. Web. 10 April 2011.

Shiomi, R.A. Preface. *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 1. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. iii-v. Print.

Sierz, Aleks. *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today*. London: Methuen Drama, A&C Black Publishers Limited, 2011. Print.

"Soho Theatre Company and Yellow Earth Theatre present Play To Win." *dimsum.co.uk*. DimSum: The British Chinese Community Website. 11 Sept. 2000. Web. 22 April. 2012.

Spiro, Sam. "Play puts Dover tragedy under the spotlight." *South China Morning Post*. 10 Oct. 2004. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Practical Politics of the Open End with Sarah Harasym."

The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990. 95-112. Print.

"Spotlight on Groups: The Mu-Lan Theatre Company." *dimsum.co.uk*. DimSum: The British Chinese Community Website. 9 Sept. 2000. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*. Berkeley: California UP, 1985. Print.

"Sustained Theatre: Raising the Roof: London Member Profiles." Booklet, 2010. N. pag. Print.

Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajay Heble, Donna Palmateer Pennee and J. R. (Tim) Struthers. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997. Print.

Taylor, Rebecca, ed. "Immigration: Dover Tragedy Dramatised." Timeout News. N.d. Print.

Teo, Stephen. *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009. Print.

“The National 2005-06-10 (Segment 013): ‘Still ahead tonight, Banana Boys’.” *The National* CBC Television Toronto. Proquest. 10 June 2005. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

“The Way I See It: Artists Tackle Ten Existential Questions: David Tse Ka-Shing.” *New Statesman*. 12 June 2008: 42. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Tse, David Ka-Shing. “Unheard Voices.” Dimsum: British Chinese Community Website. *Dimsum.co.uk*. 9 May 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

---. “Theatre Blog: It’s Time to Put British East Asian Theatre in the Spotlight.” *guardian.co.uk*. The Guardian. 6 Nov. 2008. Web. 30 Jan. 2012.

---. “It’s Time to put British East Asian Theatre in the Spotlight.” *The Guardian*. 6 November 2008. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

---. *Play to Win*. October 2000. TS. Yellow Earth Theatre Archive.

Ty, Eleanor, and Donald Goellnicht, eds. *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004. Print.

Walker, Johnnie. “Lady in the Red Dress.” Rev. of *lady in the red dress*, by David Yee. Dir. Nina Lee Aquino. *Torontoist*. St. Joseph Media. 4 Feb. 2009. Web. 8 Jan. 2011.

Wang, Ban. "Reimagining Political Community: Diaspora, Nation-State, and the Struggle for Recognition." *Modern Drama* 48.2 (2005): 249-271. Web. 27 Jan. 2012.

Wang, Ping. Rev. of James S. Moy's *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America*. *The Drama Review* 39.1 (1995): 150-152. Web. 1 July 2012.

Wasserman, Jerry. "Where is the Here Now?: Living the Border in the New Canadian Drama." *"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre*. Eds. Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 83-93. Print.

"Welcome to True Heart Theatre." *trueheart.org.uk*. True Heart Theatre. 2009. Web. 16 Feb. 2012.

"Who We Are." *esmeefairbairn.org.uk*. Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. N.d. Web. 26 Oct. 2014.

"World premiere of tale of immigrants' tragedy." *Faversham News*. 7 Oct. 2004. Print.

Wong, Adrienne and Julie Tamiko Manning. "*Mixie and the Halfbreeds*: Excerpt." *Ricepaper Magazine* 14.3 (2008): 61-65. Print.

Woo, Terry. *Banana Boys: A Novel*. Toronto: Riverbank Press, 2005. Print.

“Why the Lion Danced—Guildhall Bury St. Edmunds.” Rev. of *Why the Lion Danced*, by Carey English. *glenstheatreblog.com*. Glen’s Theatre Reviews. 26 Feb. 2011. Web. 22 April 2012.

Yeoh, Benjamin. “East is East: If ‘brown is the new black’, where does that leave yellow? Are Practitioners with East Asian roots sidelined in favour of South Asian and Black British work?” *sustainedtheatre.org.uk*. Sustained Theatre. N.d. Web. 5 Oct. 2011.

Yellow Earth Theatre. *Dim Sum Nights*. Performance. The New World Restaurant, London. 25 Nov. 2011.

Yee, David. *lady in the red dress*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada P, 2010. Print.

---. Preface. *lady in the red dress*. Toronto: Playwrights Canada P, 2010. vii-viii. Print.

---. “paper SERIES: Paper Dolls.” *Love + Relationships: A Collection of Contemporary Asian-Canadian Drama*. Volume 2. Ed. Nina Lee Aquino. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. 289-294. Print.

Yeh, Diana, “Ethnicities on the move: ‘British Chinese’ Art – Identity, Subjectivity, Politics and Beyond.” *Critical Quarterly*, Summer 4.2 (2000): 65-91. Web. 17 Jan. 2011.

Yoon, Jean. "Great show, definitely worth seeing." Comment on Crew. *thestar.com*. Toronto Star. 30 Jan. 2009. Web. 17 Jan. 2011.

---. "Reflections on the 'Roots' Panel and 'the Generational Divide.'" Aquino and Knowles 79-85. Print.

---. "Chinese Theatre in Canada: The Bigger Picture: A Toronto Perspective from a Korean Canadian." *Canadian Theatre Review* 110 (2002): 5-11. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

York, Daniel. "Invitation: Opening The Door: what are we going to do—right now—to end the marginalisation of East Asians in British theatre?" *Opening the Door: East Asians in British Theatre*. Devoted and Disgruntled Event. Hosted by Improbable Theatre. The Young Vic, London. 11 February 2013.

---. "Anonymous Letter to Equity." Dimsum: British Chinese Community Website. *Dimsum.co.uk*. 9 May 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

---. "On Yellow Earth's Funding Cut." Dimsum: British Chinese Community Website. *Dimsum.co.uk*. 25 April 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Young, Stephanie L. "Half and Half: An (Auto)ethnography of Hybrid Identities in a

Korean American Mother-Daughter Relationship.” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 2.2 (2009): 139-167. Web. 27 Jan. 2012.

Yu, Henry. *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Yu, Sydnia. “A production for future generations; Asian troupe has new perspective: Seeks end to ‘fresh off the boat’ plays: [Ontario Edition].” *Toronto Star*. Torstar Syndication Services, 1 Jul. 2003. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.

Zhao, Thomas. “Interview with Mr. David Tse – 26 January 2010.” Ming-Ai (London) Institute: The Evolution and History of British Chinese Workforce: *Oral History Archive Transcription*.” 1-12. Web. 2 April 2012.