

The Changing Landscape of Hybridity: A Reading of Ethnic Identity and Urban Form in Vancouver

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Recently a tendency has arisen in cultural criticism to reactivate the notion of hybridity as a way to open a new path for the rethinking of resistance and dominance. However, by conceptualizing hybridity as a timeless form of oppositionality, this new critical direction has tended to succumb to the temptation of homogenizing multiple realities. Through a comparison of the urban forms of Vancouver in the early and late portions of the twentieth century, this essay suggests that, while the hybrid pattern of Vancouver during the first quarter of this century was more likely a boundary-based arena, one major character of the hybridity of late-twentieth-century Vancouver is that “the other” has emerged within the constitutive core. Analysis of the differences between these two historical periods shows how various degrees and forms of hybridity appear to shift continuously with changing relations of power. The essay calls for greater attention to the temporal dimension of hybridity in attempts to understand the complexity of opposition and domination in any specific place.

Jack Lee, a developer in the city of Vancouver, has a dilemma. His project, a C\$60-million hotel, shopping and community center financed by would-be Canadians from Lee’s native Taiwan, is almost complete. As reported in a recent *Maclean’s*, a fountain is going to be built near the entrance to the modernist-style building, where “water will splash from the open mouth of one fish into that of another.” One of the fish will be a carp and the other a dolphin — the former standing for the East and the latter for the West. For Asians, water is a symbol of money, and thus the fish that receives the water should represent the beneficial side. Lee asks himself: “Which fish should receive it? And which should spit it out?”¹

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This is just one scene from a changing urbanscape that reflects Vancouver's rapid integration with Pacific Rim markets and societies. Since the mid-1980s the city has experienced rapid growth in population, labor force, investment, output and trade.² Many of these changes have been associated with the arrival of thousands of Asian immigrants, mostly from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This rapid influx, together with the large amounts of investment capital the immigrants have brought, has not only enlivened the economy of Canada's third largest city, it has brought tremendous change to the built environment. As some parts of Vancouver have become increasingly similar to Hong Kong in physical and cultural terms, however, many locals have started to refer to their city as "Hongcouver," and harsh criticisms and protests have emerged at the local level. Meanwhile, stories and debates about this "new" hybrid have reverberated through the Western media.³

Why should such severe alarm arise at a time when hybrid products have become so widespread in Canadian daily life? This essay approaches this question by focusing on a comparison of Vancouver urbanism during two periods in the last century. It argues that while the hybrid urbanism of Vancouver during the first quarter of the twentieth century was more likely to have constituted a boundary-crossing mixture, a major characteristic of the city's hybrid nature in the late twentieth century has been that "the other" is now constitutively inside the core.⁴ It has been this invasion of a previously privileged "white" landscape by an alien "other" that has given rise to such astonishment over built forms like the city's "monster houses."

HYBRIDITY: A SHORT HISTORY

Since the argument of this essay is closely related with the larger cultural debate over hybridity, I will begin by situating my views within existing scholarship. In this essay, the word "hybrid" is used to describe things, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, "derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements."⁵ Despite this seemingly simple definition, however, it is impossible to use such a word without recognizing that it comes with a loaded history. As R.J.C. Young has written, the notion of the "hybrid" originally developed from biological origins. It was defined by Webster in 1828 as "a mongrel or mule; an animal or plant, produced from the mixture of two species." However, by 1861 the *OED* was also using the word to denote the crossing of people of difference races. Especially during the remainder of the nineteenth century, the term "hybridity" then became deeply inscribed in discourses of scientific racism, specifically to connote the negative consequences of sexual cross-fertilization and racial intermarriage.⁶ It was only during the 1980s that the association of hybridity with colonial and white-supremacist ideologies started to be broken. Specifically, as a growing number of postmodernist theorists discarded binarized frames of analysis and began to examine

the fragmented, mobile and ambiguous nature of culture, the concept of hybridity become reactivated as a key component of cultural criticism, particularly within postcolonialist theory.⁷

In part, the new orientation can be traced to Mikhail Bakhtin, whose philological model of intentional hybridity for the first time proposed an ideological framework which set different elements against each other within a conflictual structure.⁸ Homi Bhabha, one of the most active contemporary advocates of the notion of hybridity, went beyond Bakhtin, however, to develop the potentially subversive side of the concept. In various essays, Bhabha approached the issue from different angles to illustrate specific moments of colonial encounter. However, one common characteristic of his formulations was always to avoid a simple dichotomy of margin and center. For example, in his "Signs Taken for Wonders," he analyzed how natives in colonial India accepted the Bible differently from the way their colonizers imagined they would.⁹ For Bhabha, authority and its texts were split when the colonized raised such questions as "how can the word of God come from the flesh-eating mouths of the English?"¹⁰ In the process of hybridization, within which authority is both doubled (reproduced in translation) and reduced (separated from what it used to be and rearticulated within a different range of knowledge and positionality), "new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power" are produced.¹¹ Bhabha conceptualized hybridity as a form of resistance that "is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture."¹²

Bhabha's formulations of hybridity have appealed to cultural critics who see them as opening new possibilities to rethink resistance and dominance. And together with such related notions as "third space" and "borderlands," hybridity has today entered circulation as a positive concept connoting subversive multiplicity and progressive agency. Yet the tendency in much of this usage has been to appropriate Bhabha's notions, originally derived from sophisticated readings of defined moments of colonial encounter, as if they represented a universal, timeless schema. For example, Edward Soja, in his *Thirdspace*, summoned Bhabha's notion of hybridity to build a trialectics of "thirthing-as-Othering." Citing Bhabha's comment that "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity," he argued that "This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives. . . ." Soja then claimed that Bhabha "explicitly challenges hegemonic historiography."¹³ But this was never Bhabha's true goal.

Such a reflexive desire to move from the specific moment to the general space is a weakness in many cultural critiques, one which Bhabha, himself, has not avoided entirely. For example, in "The Commitment to Theory," Bhabha cited A. Duff's 1839 book *India and India Missions* as an instance of hybridity. Then, from this example, he developed the notion of "cultural difference" to highlight the continual splitting between the subject who is enunciated and the subject who enunciates.¹⁴ For Bhabha, "all cultural statements and systems

are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation.” This space, which Bhabha termed “third space,” constitutes “the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, rehistoricized, translated, and reread.” Once this uncontrollableness of cultural transformation is recognized, Bhabha argued, it becomes possible to grasp “why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable, *even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity* [my emphasis].”¹⁵ This distancing from concrete history may be deliberate, as revealed by Bhabha’s comment on Fanon: “it is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, I believe such an abrupt generalization of the hybridity model to all times and places succumbs to a temptation to homogenize multiple realities, a tendency Bhabha seeks elsewhere vigorously to avoid. It may even push the fluidity of the notion to “a new stability, self-assurance and quietism.”¹⁷

In their introduction to the edited book *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg have also pointed out how Bhabha’s notion of third space fails adequately to take the politics of location into account.¹⁸ To fill the gap, Lavie and Swedenburg advocated the concept of “third time-space.” While the two thus called for reconsideration of a time component, they did so in a different way than I am attempting to illustrate in this essay. What they sought to invoke was the “everydayness of this space and time” — that is, concrete lived experience as opposed to its textual representation.¹⁹ What this essay is concerned with has more to do with historicity.²⁰ Specifically, it hopes to contribute an appreciation for the weight of historicity to the study of hybridity through the development of empirical case studies.²¹

In the sections that follow, I will first examine the hybridization of Vancouver in the late twentieth century, as partly brought about by the arrival of wealthy Chinese immigrants. I will then turn the clock back to examine the hybrid nature of Vancouver urbanism during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The final section will compare the hybrid urbanism of the two historical periods.

A CITY ON THE PACIFIC RIM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Vancouver has always been Canada’s front door on the Pacific. This situation was determined by the location there of the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railroad and the Canadian National Railway, which have long provided a physical tie between the rest of Canada and the Pacific Rim. But the city’s cultural ties to communities of ethnic Chinese, Japanese, and Indians have also been of long standing.²² And recently, the city’s linkages with the Pacific Rim have only become broader, as a result mainly of growth in Chinese immigration and investment.

There are several reasons for this growth in Chinese influence. Among them was the decision by the Canadian government in 1978 to introduce a program allowing anyone willing to invest at least C\$250,000 (US\$190,000) in a Canadian business venture to enter the country as an “entrepreneurial immigrant.” In 1986 a second visa category, “investor immigrant,” was also introduced. Meanwhile, in that same year, the EXPO ’86 transportation and telecommunications fair helped show off the amenities and economic opportunities of the city, and British Columbia as a whole, to an international audience. Around this time considerable anxiety also surfaced among Hong Kong Chinese about that city’s future after its reversion to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. And in Taiwan, growing unease began to be felt as a result of the growing pro-independence movement. One result was a flood of Chinese immigrants into Vancouver, such that by 1994 the number of its residents who claimed Chinese ancestry had reached 350,000, or one-quarter of the total metropolitan-area population. The new arrivals helped boost the local economy, contributing a large portion of the US\$2.3 billion in new investment Canada received between 1986 and 1991.²³ With the rapid influx of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs and their capital, Vancouver not only saw its recession of the early 1980s give way to economic prosperity, but it began to emerge as a modest global city on the Pacific Rim.²⁴

Today it is clear that the growing presence of Chinese immigrants both as consumers and investors has produced major changes in the built environment. During my fieldwork in 1999 I was struck by the widespread Asian influence in the city. Walking along streets in Richmond, a rapidly growing south Vancouver suburb, I noticed a distinct similarity of scale and style between many of the buildings there and those in Hong Kong, or even a typical middle-sized Chinese city (FIG. 1). The *Maclean’s* article with which I began this essay described this hybridized landscape vividly:



FIGURE 1. Henderson Center, Vancouver. (Photo courtesy of Nan Jun.)

The elegant compound curves of Lee's mirror-sheathed President Plaza embrace both a Sheraton Hotel, due to open in April, and the country's largest Asian-food supermarket, which is already doing business. On its shelves, Old Dutch Potato Chips share space with Korean kim chi and cans of grass jelly drink; a live seafood section boasts tanks of eels as well as lobster. Three floors above the shoppers, seven Buddhist nuns and monks clad in plain ochre habits are preparing to dedicate a 5,000-square-foot temple, the heart of a community centre that will offer adult education in Asian languages and crafts. . . . Immediately to the south of President Plaza sits the Aberdeen Centre: despite its Scottish name, the bustling complex of shops and restaurants is owned by investors from Hong Kong. . . . To the north of Lee's building stands the Yaohan Centre, the first Canadian link in an international chain of supermarkets and department stores owned by Japan's Wada Group.²⁵

Investment from ethnic Chinese reached its peak in 1988, when the former site of EXPO '86 was sold for US\$200 million to Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-Shing and his associates. Eventually to cover one-sixth of downtown Vancouver, this project will eventually include 204 acres of office buildings, high-rise condominiums, parks and public facilities. While it will take ten to fifteen years to complete, the mammoth high-rise apartment towers that have been built as part of Li's development have already reconfigured Vancouver's urban core (FIG. 2). Compared with other high-rise residential projects in North America, these buildings are slimmer and their footprints are generally much smaller, and as such, they seem to have much in common with typical residential buildings in Hong Kong. Yet during the late 1980s local anxiety about this project had less to do with its architectural form than with the fact that some of its apartments were put on sale in Hong Kong weeks before they were offered in Vancouver. Many Vancouverites felt this reduced their chances of purchasing certain parts of their own city, and local opposition subsequently forced Li's company to change its sales strategy. Now the claim is that "Vancouver is two weeks ahead of Hong Kong."²⁶

Big commercial and residential projects such as these within the metropolitan core have been accompanied by equally extensive suburban housing development. According to one developer involved in housing construction on Vancouver's west side, during the recession in the early 1980s some developers lost almost everything. But during the mid-1980s, "things started to move, . . . and 99 percent of it was triggered by foreign, mostly Hong Kong and Taiwan, investors."²⁷ In order to derive maximum profit from such ventures, local developers seized upon incipient cultural differences and articulated a new style of housing and landscaping for their principal client group, Hong Kong Chinese. In many local developers' minds, what wealthy Hong Kong home buyers wanted were palatial houses with sumptuous decorations representing family power. Many of these new consumers also believed in *feng shui*, a tradi-



FIGURE 2.
Concord Pacific,
Vancouver.
(Photo courtesy of
Nan Jun.)

tional Chinese geomantic practice based on careful attention to the flow of *qi* (cosmic energy) and the balance of *yin* and *yang*. And many preferred houses that would allow aged parents to live in the same household as their adult children. Such aesthetic and spatial nuances were immediately captured by Vancouver developers and reworked into a hybrid housing style in the city's residential and suburban areas. Although such houses appeared stylistically "Western," they also shared certain features that enunciated a readable "Hong Kong Chinese taste." For example, most were much more spacious than their neighbors. Their entranceways were particularly large and often had double doors. Quite a few were box shaped, clad in colored brick, and distinguished by large window areas on the front facade. Finally, their yards were often paved by stark cement and surrounded by a stylized hedge or fence (FIG. 3).

Locals started to use the term "monster houses" in the late 1980s to satirize the aesthetic qualities of these huge dwellings of wealthy immigrants. And although resentment against them spread throughout the metropolitan area, it was their impact within elite neighborhoods, such as Kerrisdale and Shaughnessy, that raised the most vociferous local opposition. The resentment may have been partly due to the dramatic inflation in house prices in these neighborhoods caused by the influx of foreign money. (The assessed value of some west-side houses rose as much as 300 percent, which not only forced long-term homeowners in these areas to pay more in municipal taxes, but also priced the market beyond the means of many local buyers.²⁸) However, even more bitter complaints were devoted to the monster houses' "unacceptable" scale, "bad" taste, and "unneighborly" spatial arrangements. Kerrisdale, for example, had initially been established as an upper-middle-class British suburb, characterized by a relative

FIGURE 3.
An example
of a "monster
house" in
Kerrisdale.
(Photo cour-
tesy of Nan
Jun.)



FIGURE 4. A typical single-family detached house in Kerrisdale.
(Photo courtesy of Nan Jun.)



uniformity of architectural style, incorporating rural English architectural motifs as well as English picturesque landscaping (FIG. 4). In terms of population mix and appearance, the community had also remained largely unchanged between World War II and 1980. But since the mid-1980s, when the so-called rich Chinese immigrants began moving in, many older houses have been sold and replaced by “monster houses,” while mature trees have sometimes been cut down to make room for them. Such transformations have triggered harsh criticism and protest, with the city government receiving thousands of letters addressing the issue.

In criticizing changes in neighborhood character and defending their struggle against it, protesters have invoked the notion of a specifically Canadian identity and sense of place. One petitioner wrote in a letter to the *Western News*: “Canadians see monster housing as an arrogant visible demonstration of the destruction of Canadian culture. Yes, we have a Canadian identity and Canadians should beware of persons who say we don’t while they try to rebuild Canada in a different mould for their own purpose and profit.”²⁹ In their efforts to keep Chinese capitalists from buying houses in their neighborhoods, many petitioners have thus equated “Canadian heritage” with British culture. In their minds, people of other than “Anglo” descent can never truly be part of this heritage. Jud Cyllorn, the founder of a local organization that advocates the preservation of Western cultural values, claimed bluntly in an interview that Canada’s “British culture, which is based on trust,” has given way to an “Asian culture [of] individual greed.” He further lamented: “In 22 years, we have completely changed who we are and what we believe in. . . . Anything I say is not to raise hatred against anyone, but only to raise disgust at our own laxity and stupidity in surrendering our country without even a whimper.”³⁰ This line of criticism was dramatized in a graffiti spray-painted on one monster house in large, black, letters: “Genius Loci?”³¹ (*Genius loci* is a Latin phrase which means “the spirit of a place.”³²) In invoking the phrase, one might assume the graffitist presumed that the “place” in question was of pure European heritage, and that this implicitly excluded the possibility that newcomers of Asian ancestry might reside there. But history tells a very different story.

“A CITY OF COSMOPOLITANS”

In his address to the Union of Canadian Municipalities in 1910, L.D. Taylor announced, “I am the mayor of a cosmopolitan city — I should rather say of a city of cosmopolitans whose sense of cityhood . . . has . . . self-consciousness and the self-importance of youth.”³³ Vancouver has been a multicultural mix since its very beginnings. Indeed, as early as 1891 the census of Canada documented more than 42 countries of origin among the 14,000 people living in the young city. Orientals even outnumbered whites from continental Europe: 840 to 560.³⁴ In fact, Chinese were among British Columbia’s first immigrants, drawn from California by the Fraser River gold rush of 1858. Between 1881 and 1885 17,000 Chinese arrived, most of whom were hired to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. At least 600 died during the construction, but many of the survivors were eventually able to move to Vancouver, where they gradually created a solid presence in the city.³⁵ Following the 1890s a surge of Japanese immigration into the area brought Asians to more than 10 percent of Vancouver’s total population. As more Japanese came, they developed “Little Tokyo” adjacent to Chinatown.³⁶ Then, in 1904 immigrants from East India came to the province for the first time. Their poverty and distinctive customs, such as the wearing of turbans, made them seem even more obviously “foreign” to the city’s British majority. Although small in numbers, the presence of East Indian immigrants eventually caused a violent reaction from this majority, including an anti-Asian riot in Chinatown and Little Tokyo on September 7–8, 1907.³⁷

Because Asians remained the largest and most visible non-British group in the city, many researchers on Vancouver’s history have come to an easy association between “foreign” and “Asian.” However, as R.A.J. McDonald has rightly observed, historical records reveal that the city’s category of “outsider” was much broader than this.³⁸ For example, it included not only nonwhites but also non-British white foreigners. And it referred to such marginal groups as aboriginals and loggers. Since urbanization had almost completely separated them from non-Native peoples, it is not surprising that aboriginal people were considered to be in this group: in fact, they were almost entirely absent from civic discourse. But the situation of loggers was more curious. Although they could be of Canadian, British or American origin, they were considered outside the mainstream of respectable society because of their distinct life pattern. This was typified by their being single men without family, living in a masculine community, and being isolated much of the time in forest camps.³⁹

The situation of Italians, however, may offer the most insight into dominant social thought in the city in the early twentieth century. During the pre-World War I boom a large number of Italian laborers came to the city, until by 1913 its Italian population had exceeded 4,000. Italians were able to compete successfully as unskilled laborers because of their ability to outwork Englishmen on street- and drain-construction projects. Nevertheless, because they were southern

European, Roman Catholic, and poor, Italians were thought to threaten Vancouver's "British character." As one longshoreman told the BC Commission on Labor: "Italians live on macaroni and the Russians on salt herring and bread. . . . That is impossible for us."⁴⁰ In general, both Asian and non-British white immigrants, most of whom lived in untidy and crowded conditions, were said to threaten the public health of the city.

The presence of such a hybrid population soon came to have physical manifestations in the landscape. Settlements for immigrants were largely located in the inner city, among which Chinatown and Little Tokyo were the most visible. Early Chinatown's two-story, frontier-style buildings were originally leased from whites. But between 1900 and 1910 Chinese merchants bought land and erected their own buildings.⁴¹ The new buildings adopted a hybridized architectural style, constituted by both Western and Chinese features. Among Western features were bay windows and "cheater floors" (bay windows were widely adopted in Chinatown because they increased the amount of interior floor space; the cheater floor was a low-ceilinged mezzanine, so named because tax assessments were based on the height of a building, and intermediate floors were not taxed). Chinese architectural features included tiled roofs, latticed windows, moon-shaped doors, and recessed balconies. To some extent such features made many Chinatown structures resemble town buildings of south China.⁴² Unlike those in Chinatown, buildings in Little Tokyo had few distinctive architectural features. Its residents also showed a greater willingness to adopt Canadian clothes, furnishings, and religious practices.⁴³ Nevertheless, a hybrid urban culture still developed in Little Tokyo which separated it strikingly from the rest of the city. According to one author:

The area was apart as if a ghetto wall defined it. It was possible to shop at Japanese-owned stores, to live in Japanese-operated boarding houses or hotels, to congregate at street corners, to sit in soft drink and ice cream parlours, to eat traditional Japanese foods in cafés. . . .⁴⁴

Most immigrants lived in cheap hotels and crowded rooming houses in downtown areas. Lacking home and controlling little private space, they lived much of their lives on city streets. These streets served as meeting places for people from different cultural backgrounds engaged in both recreational and practical pursuits. As one observer put it, during the pre-World War I years,

. . . the street corners were filled with music, on one corner the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) singing 'Solidarity Forever,' on another a religious group singing 'There is honey in the rock for you my brother,' and on yet another the Salvation Army band booming out 'We will understand each other when the mists have rolled away.' . . . The streets also fulfilled economic needs. For some, like Greek ice cream peddlars, they were a place of business. For others, such as transient labourers, streets were the equiva-

lent of the union man's Labour Temple, where between seven and eight o'clock each morning the city's 'unorganized element' scanned the boards of employment offices in search of work.⁴⁵

When loggers were bored of the forest, they usually headed for Vancouver's Gastown, the downtown heart of the city. Their presence there inscribed a distinct masculine character into the urban landscape. As M.A. Grainger described at the beginning of his 1908 novel *Woodsmen of the West*:

As you walk down Cordova Street in the city of Vancouver you notice a gradual changes in the appearance of the shop windows. The shoe stores, drug stores, clothing stores, phonograph stores cease to bother you with their blinding light.

You come to shops that show faller's axes, swamper's axes — single-bitted, double-bitted; screw jacks and pump jacks, wedges, sledge-hammers, and great seven-foot saws with enormous shark teeth, and huge augers for boring boomsticks. . . .

You see few women. . . . Your eye is struck at once by the unusual proportion of big men in the crowd, men that look powerful even in their town clothes. . . . You are among loggers.⁴⁶

Like Chinatown and Little Tokyo, the area where most loggers moved was also geographically circumscribed. It centered on the waterfront and sprang up along a section of streets lined with saloons, hotels, employment agencies, and cheap recreational facilities such as movie houses and shooting galleries. Finally, it was bounded by the brothels of Chinatown and Shore Street.⁴⁷

Facing social isolation and the absence of family, "outsiders" of all types had made streets, hotels, and gambling houses their homes — the places where they could talk and laugh. With each ethnic group carving a niche in the landscape, the city became a place of differences. Vancouver has thus never been a city of a pure British heritage; it has always been a hybrid city.

SOMETHING IS DIFFERENT, BUT WHAT, WHY, AND TO WHOM?

If Vancouver urbanism has been hybrid in character since its beginnings, what makes the hybridization of the late twentieth century so different? Why today have so many newspaper articles been devoted to it; so many petitions been produced; so many protests been held against such hybrid creations as "monster houses?" What, indeed, makes these forms of hybridity so threatening?

I argue that there has been a considerable spatial shift in the hybrid pattern of Vancouver urbanism between the two historical periods. In the past, in the face of prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory policies, the Chinese-origin community responded by

turning inward and constructing self-contained ghettos. Thus, the densely populated Chinatown not only shielded its members from racism, but allowed them to draw on culturally constituted resources of sociality and mutual aid for survival. Since Chinatown and other minority settlements (such as Little Tokyo) clustered in a central location in the inner city, the hybridized urbanism of Vancouver at the turn of the century appeared as a boundary-crossing mixture. It was limited in certain geographical zones, and it still enabled its elements (various urban forms and urban cultures) to draw parameters around themselves, even if they were sometimes blurred. Such a pattern of hybridity enabled the domain of respectable society to stay socially and geographically intact, separate from “foreign” elements.

Such a residential pattern remained largely intact for a long time. In fact, as late as 1971, when approximately one in six Vancouver residents lived on the urban fringe, people of Chinese origin accounted for only one in every forty suburban dwellers.⁴⁸ It has only been since the mid-1980s that the presence of Chinese immigrants has started to become more pervasive. Now the rich among the newcomers conduct large-scale real estate transactions and redevelop land for profit. And they have bought homes in the settled suburbs that were previously the preserve of the Anglo-Canadian middle class and elite. While they have been invisible as capitalists behind investments in downtown commercial properties, wealthy Hong Kong Chinese are now highly conspicuous as investors in suburban homes, where they have inserted different lifestyles and patterns of consumption into the very heart of the “white” landscape. Compared with the earlier patterns of hybridity, a major feature of the hybridity of the late twentieth century is that “the other” has chosen to constitute itself at the core in Vancouver, rather than on the margins.

This shift in the spatial configuration of hybridity has been very disturbing to white communities. As one informant told me: “I don’t mind if they build their own buildings at Chinatown or any place downtown. But when they build these [monster houses] within our neighborhood, it touches my nerve and heart.”⁴⁹

To understand why this change should cause such severe alarm, it is instructive to take a closer look at examples of both Chinatown architecture and the newer suburban monster houses. Both are apparently hybridized built forms. On the one hand, they have largely imitated local Western-style buildings (which may be a sign of immigrants’ desire for approval within the host society). Yet, on the other hand, they have always remained different, with certain elements being adopted from their owners’ home countries (which to some extent may express their owners’ native life patterns and aesthetic preferences). Hence, both hybrid built forms result from a combination of sameness and otherness. In particular, one might observe how sameness is used to camouflage otherness so that otherness can safely dwell in sameness. It should also be noted that such a dynamic of hybridity embodies an inherently imbalanced cultural exchange, in which the margin

always mimics the center, seeking to make itself into a copy of the stronger culture. Such mimicry is never complete, however, and whatever traces of difference there are become crucially important for the center.⁵⁰ In fact, when the center looks at these hybrids, it never takes them as part of itself. Rather, the center often only sees the difference that marks them as being from the margin. Such an analysis may partly explain why so many reports about Vancouver’s monster houses describe them as a new genre, when in fact they are hybrids, partial doubles of the “white” houses.

But the privileged status of the center against its imitation is far from stable. To maintain the vague, wavering line between itself and its copy, the center often needs more transparent reference(s) to circumscribe its identity. In the case of Vancouver, the center historically relied on a spatially inscribed hierarchy to fulfill this need. Thus, for a long time Chinatown was described in local discourse as a filthy, erotic and dangerous ghetto.⁵¹ It was a world “out there,” far from the world “here” where the dominant community dwelled. Members of respectable society only showed up in Chinatown as visitors, consumers or researchers. Consequently, the hybridized architecture in Chinatown never seemed to menace the identity of the dominant group. No matter how much they resembled mainstream built forms, with a spatial brand marking them as “other,” Chinatown hybrids lacked power to challenge the center’s sense of self. By contrast, the monster houses built in elite neighborhoods have called into question this very privileged status of the center. They no longer belong to the world “out there”; they are situated right in the core of the “here.”

What this situation highlights is that as the binarized division of “us” and “them” previously imprinted into Vancouver’s geography has been compromised, it has become increasingly difficult for the center to distinguish itself from its imitation. In the face of the intrusion of monster houses, two responses have thus arisen. One has been to dramatize the dissimilarities between monster houses and “authentic” English houses. Thus, although monster houses are not as stylistically divergent as Chinatown buildings from the Anglo-Canadian norm, they nevertheless appear completely outlandish to many Anglo-Canadian residents. The other response has been to provoke a search for a distinctive “Englishness” as the natural essence of the place. This has been achieved by selecting one of many possible sets of experiences from the history of the city. However, the recent actions, ostensibly undertaken in the name of “cultural defense,” are, in fact, little more than disguises for the anxiety of the center over its loss of difference. I argue that it is precisely this crisis in the identity of the center, caused by the changed spatial configuration of hybridity, that has accounted for the extent of alarm over the latest phase in the changing nature of the city.

As might be expected, such changes in the forms and nature of hybridity have ultimately been the product of a shift in the geometry of power. In the early twentieth century most immigrants arrived with little capital (in both economic and

symbolic sense). They contended with incredible social and economic hardship, and were willing to accept whatever work was given and whatever place was afforded. The making of Chinatown, as K.J. Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown* has explained, was a process in which the dominant society constructed the Chinese as "other" in both a discursive and spatial sense.⁵² Thus, hybridization for earlier generations of Chinese immigrants was a process of alienation filled with fear and pain (although they sometimes managed to rearrange the master codes to adapt them for their own sly purposes — recall the example of "cheater floors"). Meanwhile, having successfully constructed a differentiated identity for the immigrant cultures and marked it in space, those born to membership in the dominant society were able to view the hybridized urban forms of their city as satisfying a fantasy for the "Oriental," while they themselves possessed an undisrupted self-identity as "original."

In contrast to the earlier generations of immigrants, the middle- and upper-class Hong Kong Chinese who have now arrived in the city, occupy an ambivalent position in the new geometry of power, in that the former dividing line of race has been intersected by another line of class. As international capitalists, these Hong Kong immigrants possess both wealth and knowledge of how to use the universal global grid designed to facilitate capital mobility. Some are considerably wealthier and skilled at using the mechanisms of international business than are the members of the host society. Accordingly, they have considerably greater freedom to choose what they want in terms of type of work and places for residence than did their predecessors. The image of Chinese immigrants has long been of contract laborers (*coolies*) who took work from whites by accepting below-average wages and living conditions. But this has now been altered by local newspaper stories about Hong Kong millionaires who "toured the city for twenty minutes, bought ten luxury houses, and flew back to Hong Kong."⁵³ To borrow P. Werbner's words, if the former are bees and ants who "build new hives and nests in foreign lands," the latter are butterflies in the greenhouse of global culture who "travel among global cultures, savouring cultural differences as they flit with consummate ease between social worlds."⁵⁴

Despite these advantages of wealth, as people of an ethnic origin that has long been subject to bias in the city, these Hong Kong capitalists have still been forced to camouflage their difference, and they have still suffered the bitterness of being resisted in their bid to enter the mainstream of the host society. This subtle position is expressed in the style of the monster houses. Similar to Chinatown buildings, these hybrids to some extent are copies of local "authentic" built forms. Yet they are bigger, stronger, and grander than the models they are seeking to imitate. Monster houses thus turn up in the landscape as caricatures of the degenerated economic status of some members of the dominant group. To consolidate themselves against this disturbing assault, the newly economically marginalized "local" people have resorted to reasserting their privileged position through expression of the continued cultural hegemony of the Eurocenter over the margin. Their resis-

tance against the monster houses brings to mind what Sigmund Freud called the "dream-work," in which acceptable representations (criticisms about the size, style, and spatial arrangement of monster houses) are created for unacceptable wishes (to stop the invasion of Hong Kong immigrants that brought about the weakening of their economic status and destabilized the hierarchical division of ethnicity).⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the above discussion, hybridization in Vancouver is far from a process of harmonization. Instead, it involves unequal exchanges and constant struggles. As the global power geometry has changed over time, the forms and natures of hybridity have shifted from one pattern to another, and different social forces have obtained their own set of experiences in the process. But it is also clear that these findings are inseparable from the methodology that has been used to arrive at them: reinserting a "pastness" into the study of the present. This case study therefore also demonstrates the power of the temporal dimension of hybridity as a tool in the study of the complexity of oppositions and dominations in a specific place.

Such a resort to historicity, however, runs counter to the general tendency to privilege space over time that has arisen in cultural analysis since the 1980s. Before I end this essay, therefore, I would like to elaborate my position in this debate. The attempt to establish the centrality of space in social theory was represented by Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*, a book in which its author advocated that "an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory" should be replaced by a new critical human geography which gives a privileged position to the spatial dimension.⁵⁶ Although I feel sympathetic with this endeavor, I also believe that neglect for history will tend to generate simplistic readings of social space. In fact, had this case study of Vancouver not connected what is happening today to what happened at the beginning of the twentieth century, its conclusion might have been very different.

In a recent article entitled "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity," Katharyne Mitchell also raised the example of Hong Kong capitalists in late-twentieth-century Vancouver.⁵⁷ Her article provided a careful examination of the narrative of nations and roots generated by Anglo residents against redevelopment in their neighborhoods, as well as the counter-narrative created by the Hong Kong capitalists. Mitchell rightfully argued that it is problematic to equate diasporas and hybridity with a progressive agenda. Yet her inattention to the past situation of Chinese immigrants in Vancouver also led her to neglect the different subjective positions that Hong Kong Chinese immigrants possess — not just as members of the capitalist class, but also as members of an ethnic group that has long been socially marginalized. This neglect may have driven her to depict Hong Kong-Vancouver capitalists as purely reactionary, which indeed misses some important aspects of the picture.

In the essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Fredric Jameson identified the disappearance of a sense of history, manifested by a pervasive denial of various "depth models," as the "supreme formal feature" of postmodernism.⁵⁸ Later, he claimed that only a new "cognitive mapping," which unifies past, present and future, can link contemporary ideological positions with contemporary imagination.⁵⁹ As does Jameson, I also maintain that the weakening of historicity will lead to "a new kind of superficiality in the

most literal sense."⁶⁰ But unlike Jameson, I would advocate a sense of historicity that gives position to localized and plural histories, rather than seeking to construct one grand history which binds distinct narratives together into a linear and centralizing schema. Only when various trajectories of the temporal movement of things are taken into account can people understand the spatial connections between things at any specific moment. One might term this way of seeing space — to paraphrase Jameson — a "depth model of space."

REFERENCE NOTES

An earlier and different version of this article was presented at the "Megacities 2000" International Conference, held in Hong Kong, China, in February 2000.

1. C. Wood et al., "Lessons of Vancouver: Immigration Raises Fundamental Questions of Identity and Values," *Maclean's*, Vol.107 No.6 (February 7, 1994), pp.26-31. The quotations are from p.27.
2. A.H. Thomas, "City profile: Vancouver," *Cities*, Vol.11 No.4 (August, 1994), p.219-39.
3. For just a few examples, see T. Peter, "Hong Kong Yacht People Buy Up Vancouver," *Sunday Telegraph*, June 4, 1989; J. Blain, "Couple Turned Activists When Dozers Arrived," *Vancouver Sun*, April 16, 1990; A. Malcolm, "Where Minorities Find Riches and Resentment," *New York Times International*, March 17, 1990; and S. Barrington, "Canada Speaks to Chinese Markets: Vancouver Takes on Flavor of Hong Kong," *Advertising Age*, Vol.68 No.2 (January 13, 1997), pp.112-13.
4. I owe the idea of "hybrid urbanism" to many discussions with Nezar AlSayyad, and to chapters in his edited volume *Hybrid Urbanism* (Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, forthcoming).
5. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., CD-ROM (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
6. For a comprehensive account of the concept of hybridity within nineteenth-century scientific racism and British colonialism, see R.J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), chapter 1. The quotes are from p.6.
7. For a critical analysis of the contemporary usage of the word, see AlSayyad, "Introduction," in *Hybrid Urbanism*.
8. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.361.
9. H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.102-22.
10. *Ibid.*, p.116.
11. *Ibid.*, p.120.
12. *Ibid.*, p.110.
13. E.W. Soja, *Thirdspace* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), p.140. The quote is from H. Bhabha, "The Third Space," in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.211.
14. This division can be illustrated by the following example. In the sentence "I am not speaking," it is clear there exists a split between the subject of the proposition and the subject of the enunciation. While the "I" who is spoken is not speaking, the "I" who is telling the fact that "I am not speaking" is speaking.
15. The above quotations are from Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.37.
16. *Ibid.*, p.42.
17. Young, *Colonial Desire*, p.4.
18. S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg, "Introduction," in Lavie and Swedenburg, eds., *Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identity* (Duke University Press, 1996), pp.1-26.
19. *Ibid.*, p.24, note 11.
20. My emphasis on historicity is largely inspired by the introductory chapter in Alsayyad's *Hybrid Urbanism*.
21. Toward this end, in June 1999 I conducted fieldwork in Vancouver — among other activities interviewing more than thirty local residents, architects, and city planners.
22. D.W. Edgington and M.A. Goldberg, "Vancouver: Canada's Gateway to the Rim," in E.J. Blakely and R.J. Stimson, eds., *New Cities of the Pacific Rim* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
23. P. Le Corre, "Canada's Hong Kong: Vancouver is Being Revitalised by Chinese Immigrants," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol.157 No.6 (February 10, 1994), pp.36-37.
24. Edgington and Goldberg, "Vancouver," p.28.
25. Wood et al., "Lessons of Vancouver," p.28.
26. Le Corre, "Canada's Hong Kong," p.37.
27. K. Mitchell, "Fast Capital, Race, Modernity, and the Monster House," in M.G. Rosemary, ed., *Burning down the House* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p.206.
28. Interview with planner, Vancouver, June 24, 1999. In this article the names of individual informants are not revealed, based on a promise from the author.
29. Mitchell, "Fast Capital," p.204.
30. Wood et al., "Lessons of Vancouver."
31. Mitchell, "Fast Capital," p.198.
32. J. Sime, "Creating Places and Designing Places," in K. Dovey et al., eds., *Place and Placemaking* (P.A.P.E.R. Conference Proceedings, Melbourne, 1985), p.275.
33. P.E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1980).
34. Wood et al., "Lessons of Vancouver."
35. P.S. Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998).
36. K. Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).
37. R.A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), pp.205-6; and J. Norris, *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia* (Vancouver: British Columbia Centennial '71 Committee, 1971).
38. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, pp.206-14.
39. *Ibid.*, pp.213-14.

40. Ibid., p.208.
41. P. Yee, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988), p.21.
42. D.C. Lai, *Chinatowns: Towns within Cities in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988), p.69.
43. Ibid., p.131.
44. Adachi, *The Enemy that Never Was*, p.131.
45. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, p.224.
46. M.A. Grainger, *Woodsmen of the West* (London: E. Arnold, 1908), pp.1-2. Also see McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, p.214.
47. McDonald, *Making Vancouver*, p.214.
48. D. Ley et al., "Time to Grow Up? From Urban Village to World City, 1966-91," in G. Wynn and T. Oke, eds., *Vancouver and its Region* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), p.250.
49. Interview with west-side resident, Vancouver, June 26, 1999. Interestingly enough, a San Francisco architect expressed a similar concern when commenting on physical changes brought by immigrants. From this, one can see how such disturbing effects of hybridization may not be confined to Vancouver.
50. My idea of "mimicry" is inspired by H. Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp.85-92), although my point of departure is quite different from Bhabha's. In the essay, Bhabha formulates mimicry as one colonial process.
51. For a description of the making of Chinatown, see K.J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991).
52. In *Vancouver's Chinatown*, Anderson provides a spatialized interpretation of Said's notion of Orientalism.
53. A. Ward, "Vancouver: Good Luck City," *National Geographic*, Vol.181 No.4 (April, 1992), pp.94-121. The quotation is from p.111.
54. P. Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in P. Werbner and T. Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1997), pp.11-12.
55. S. Freud, "The Dream-Work," in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1998), pp.311-546.
56. E.W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London and New York: Verso, 1989). The quotation is from p.15.
57. K. Mitchell, "Different Diasporas and the Hype of Hybridity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol.15 (1997), pp.533-53.
58. F. Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *New Left Review*, Vol.146 (1984), pp.53-92. The quotations are from pp.62 and 60, respectively.
59. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.418.
60. Jameson, "Postmodernism," p.60. It should be noted that the connotation of Jameson's "historicity" is much broader than my use of the term. His use not only refers to the sensibility of history in the literal sense, but also stands for awareness of other kinds of "depth models": for example, the hermeneutic model of inside and outside, the dialectical one of essence and appearance, and the Freudian model of latent and manifest.