

**Under the Shadow of Mackenzie King?
—Narrative Spatialization as
Working-Through in Kerri Sakamoto’s
*The Electrical Field****

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Abstract

The novelistic presentation of “the electrical field” in Kerri Sakamoto’s eponymous novel—that is, the emotional entanglement of the characters as filtered through Asako’s mind—can be seen as the narrative space of its protagonist-narrator, Asako, through which she both acts out and works through her traumas. Instead of being binary opposites (with one superseding the other), acting out and working through are “countervailing forces” in Asako’s traumatized mind, functioning against one another as they overlap. Asako’s fragmentary narration thus reveals both the symptoms of her traumas and her difficult means of working through them. The symptoms include protective numbing, emotional outbursts, and repeated dreams and rationalization, which

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are seen as both responses to her social constraints and expressions of her desire for social interaction. Asako's narrative working through is then read "spatially"; that is, in terms of its spatial form (with narrative fragments and recurrent motifs) and of Asako's spatial practices in the yard, on and beyond the electrical field, and on Mackenzie Hill. Her narrative spatialization, in other words, is her way of working through traumas and weaving a complicated network of causality, motif and human connection, through which trauma and death are understood from multiple perspectives, while communication and sharing are confirmed.

Key Words: Kerri Sakamoto, narrative spatialization, trauma narrative

It was my fault, all my fault—not the war, not the government, not some hakujin stranger named Mackenzie.¹ (Sakamoto, 1998: 301)

The cycle of things, the routine. And yet. It dawned on me that this was how they [Stum and Angel] fell in love. Sharing a worker's specialized knowledge, a secret from the outside world, a secret of life under the dim light of hanging bulbs, the shadow cast by the rice-paper wrapped around them; an indescribable smell, the *pip pip* of newly hatched chicks. Girls here, boys there. It was simple, really. (305)

Kerri Sakamoto's debut novel, *The Electrical Field* (1998, hereafter *EF*), though making a gesture of homage to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), differs significantly from its predecessor. From the perspectives of their introspective and traumatized female protagonists, both texts narrate the lives of Japanese Canadian characters during the 1970s—characters haunted by their memories of the internment during World War II. Both novels,

¹ In the novel, "Mackenzie" is the name of the mountain looming over the electrical field, and the name is chosen to refer to the longest-serving Prime Minister of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King. In 1940's, it was King's government that "attempted to drive Japanese Canadians from the fishing industry, halted Chinese immigration, limited Japanese immigration to 150 persons per year, and continued to deny the right to vote to Asians despite a strong appeal by the Japanese Canadian Citizens' League" (Sunahara, 2000: 10). It was King's government, too, that enacted the War Measures Act to send "nearly 22,000 individuals [of Japanese descent] to road camps, internment camps and prisoner of war camps" (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, n.d.: 1). In 1944, moreover, King claimed that it was "[t]he sound policy and the best policy for the Japanese Canadians themselves . . . to distribute their numbers as widely as possible throughout the country where they will not create feelings of racial hostility" (as cited in Miki, 2004: 39). As Roy Miki analyzes, King's political rhetoric represents the Japanese as a "problem to be solved," and "the Canadian state as an actor that upholds 'principles of fairness and justice'" (2004: 41). In seeing Japanese Canadian as the "enemy," King "confirmed that the mass uprooting, dispossession, dispersal and deportation were a necessary political solution to B.C.'s century-long 'Japanese problem'" (2004: 50).

with their quiet and observant narrators, imagine the different responses of fictional Japanese communities to this traumatic history. In *Obasan*, the differences can be perceived among the three generations (Issei, Nisei and Sansei) and between the opposite sexes (the protagonist Naomi Nakane and her brother Stephen). *EF*'s protagonist Asako Saito is also confronted by other characters' differing views of the war era: her neighbor Masashi Yano's outspoken activism; her father's immobility—seemingly a psychological effect of the fixating power of the past; her younger brother Stum's memories of the camp; the lack of any experience of the camp by post-war Japanese immigrants, such as Chisako.

One significant difference between the two texts: while *Obasan* juxtaposes Naomi's personal and poetic voice with Aunt Emily's political perspectives, *EF* focuses exclusively on Asako's first-person fragmentary account, in which the other characters' words appear even more fragmentary. For Marlene Goldman, Sakamoto's narrative, in responding to the cultural politics in Canada since the publication of *Obasan*, "focuses more sharply and pessimistically on the complex and dangerous emotional circuit powered by depression and loss that was inscribed at a particular moment in history" (2002: 367). Indeed, if *Obasan*, or more specifically, its canonization, has been written into the teleological accounts of the redress movement, which culminated in the redress settlement in 1988, and thus seemingly suggested some form of closure of the historical wound, *EF*, published ten years after the redress settlement, resists "surrendering" (to borrow Miki's word [2004: 325]) the history of the internment to national history to be resolved and then reduced to oblivion.² Rather, it

² *Obasan* itself, of course, does not thematize any closure of this historical wound. However, it was cited in Brian Mulroney's official announcement that a redress agreement has been reached (Miki, 2004: 7). Several critics have pointed out a similar side-effect of historical closure and forgetting in both the redress settlement and the canonization of *Obasan*. As Miki analyzes, the achievement of redress also means that the period of Japanese Canadian history gets "surrendered" or "absorbed into the nation and . . . retold through the official

presents the traumatic past as “unassimilable” because it is “irrevocable” (Goldman, 2002: 367) and “a site of otherness” (Howells, 2003: 142).

However, does this mean that *EF* is “pessimistic” and the emotional circuit it presents, “dangerous” as Goldman suggests? I disagree. Loss, though irrevocable, can stimulate understanding. I argue in this paper that the novelistic presentation of the “electrical field”—that is, the emotional entanglement of the characters as filtered through Asako’s mind—can also be seen as Asako’s narrative space, through which she both acts out and works through her traumas. If moving beyond trauma is impossible, Asako nonetheless presents a narrative of not only a broader social context, but also an affirmative network of small and interlocking emotional circles formed by the characters. In the following sections, I will first explain why Asako’s trauma narrative is fragmentary, or seemingly non-progressive, with reference to the concepts of acting-out and working-through defined by Dominick LaCapra, and then explain how this fragmentary narrative can be read “spatially” for its meaning patterns to emerge. The first type of meaning to detect concerns the social implications of Asako’s traumatic symptoms: protective numbing, emotional outbursts, and repeated dreams and rationalization. I argue that these symptoms serve to either respond to her social constraints, or to express her desire for socialization, and it is this desire that provides momentum for her to work through traumas past and present. More meanings concerning self and community reconstruction can

history” (Beauregard, 2009: 73). Likewise, Apollo O. Amoko cogently argues that the readings of *Obasan* as individual and national healing, “[p]redicated on the certainty of the historical counter-knowledge, the intelligibility of pain and the possibility and necessity of closure and healing, . . . remember purportedly forgotten injustice precisely in order to “have forgotten it,” or, more properly, to get over it in the fullness of national narrativized time” (2000: 54). Citing Guy Beauregard’s (2001) and Amoko’s analyses of *Obasan*, as well as Joanna Clarke’s study of the mnemonic erasure in the discourses on redress and its settlement, Vikki Visvis then defines this ambivalence between memory and forgetting as “a new social amnesia” (2007: 68).

be found if we read Asako's narrative "spatially," instead of sequentially for a resolution in plot or a singular explanation of character motivation. In Section III, then, I will analyze how the narrative develops both its spatial form (i.e. with narrative fragments and recurrent motifs, such as invisible tea stains and marks, kamikaze and flowers) and Asako's spatial practices over the yard, on and beyond the electrical field, and in Mackenzie Hill. Asako's narrative spatialization, in other words, is her way of working through trauma and weaving a complicated network of causality and human connections, through which trauma and death are understood from multiple perspectives, while communication is confirmed and differences respected.

I. A Spatial Reading of Trauma Narrative

Many critics have noted the novel's bleak atmosphere, Asako's inactivity, and the narrative's uncertain ending. For several critics, the healing or social integration of Japanese Canadian characters in *EF* is just not possible because the characters, especially Asako, are restrained both physically and mentally by the bleak and confining environment—represented by the electrical field. Just as Goldman sees, among the characters, a "complex and dangerous emotional circuit powered by depression and loss" (2002: 367), Mari Peepre sees electrical fields as "the fields of death," or "the borderland of shame and death" (2002: 58) that entraps, imprisons, and stifles the characters. Charlotte Sturgess, likewise, finds the novel's language as limiting as the electrical field: a "semiotic field of prescribed, yet often ambivalent, positionings constraining the characters even as they adhere to them" (2006: 93).

Asako is regarded by some critics as especially passive or deathlike. Peepre thinks that she lives in a "deathlike trance" under the shadows of the electrical towers, "*never* able to deal with her grief and her shame and . . . *never* been able to catch up with herself or grow as a mature human being" (2002: 60-61; emphases

added). From a Freudian and Kristevan perspective, Andrea Stone further argues that Asako, in menopause, which suggests the “congestion” of her sexual life and regression to the pre-pubescent stage, is dominated by a death drive, such that her life is disrupted and her abject body hastening towards its dissolution (2007: 41-51). Along the same line of argument, Visvis finds that, amidst the novel’s prevailing “indeterminacy and pessimism” (2007: 76), Asako demonstrates symptoms of hysteria such as “sensations of suffocation,” “deceitfulness,” “death states,” “wanting (craving, longing)” and a fixation with the lower body stratum (72). Coral Ann Howells and Goldman are more positive concerning Asako’s development and the novel’s ending, though for them these matters are still uncertain. For Howells, Asako only tentatively gestures “beyond loss and trauma into wider social spaces” (2003: 142). For Goldman, Asako’s younger brother, Stum, is more socialized in his love relation with Angel (who is of Filipino descent); however, the two of them cannot find their way out of the chicken farm, which is “still governed by racist and sexist principles” (2002: 384).

Sakamoto, on the other hand, admits that Asako is not very likeable, but she wants to “challenge the reader into feeling some compassion” (Cuder-Domínguez, 2006: 140). For her, although Asako is “very much stalled and frozen” and that “[t]here’s not much chance for her to break out of that mould,” by the end of the book “[Asako] has moved a little” in a way that is significant for herself if not for some readers: “she has opened her heart a little more” (140). There are actually reasons for these critics’ not seeing or confirming the “little” movement Asako makes beyond her “frozen” state, since her changes happen mostly in her mind. In her quiet observation and fragmentary and circular narrative, rather than in action or communication, she shows more understanding of herself, of the others, and the tragedies.

The “little” changes she undergoes are actually quite significant, since Asako’s apparent silence, or her difficulties in talking about her traumatic memories, is historically representative

of most Nisei (second-generation Japanese Canadians) in the 1970s—the novel’s present time, before the redress movement entered public discourse. The collective silence of the Nisei has been well noted by critics such as Roy Miki and Pamela Sugiman. As Miki explains, the Japanese Canadians who suffered from the internment “did not have the language to account for the unspeakable monstrosities that manifested themselves internally as shame and guilt for being singled out . . . and labelled the ‘enemy alien,’” so they tended to resort to either silence or common phrases expressive of compromise and acceptance (that the uprooting was a “blessing in disguise” or that “it can’t be helped” due to wartime hysteria) (2004: 260). It was the spreading of the redress movement and its ultimate achievement in the ’80s that encouraged Nisei to break their silence (Miki, 2004: 255-260; Sugiman, 2004: 363).

Understandably, then, both *Obasan* and *EF* thematize the protagonists’ silence as a contrast with that of the more outspoken characters’ expressions and narratives of trauma, but Naomi and Asako break their silence in different ways. *Obasan* juxtaposes the titular aunt’s silences, and Naomi’s self-repression, with Aunt Emily’s diary, historical documents and letters. It is Aunt Emily’s historical documents that stimulate in Naomi the “narrative memories” which, according to Susan J. Brison’s definition, demonstrate her distance from the trauma, as well as her “greater control over the memories themselves, making them less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to be integrated into the rest of [her life or text]” (1999: 47). As isolated as Naomi, but lacking a mentor like Emily, Asako breaks her silence internally, for the most part, as she is brought gradually to face the tragic consequences of both the past and present traumas. Her narration, therefore, involves more “traumatic (non)memory,” which is “uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic” (1999: 40), or, in Mieke Bal’s words, “a solitary event” that is not “addressed to anybody” (1999: x). However, Asako’s is still a narrative that develops and produces both meanings and social

contexts as she responds to the present and reminisces about the past; her narrativization of the past and present traumas is her way of making sense of them.

In other words, instead of seeing Asako as death-driven, hysterical, or awakened from her death-like trance only at the end, I argue that Asako slowly “works through” her traumas as she “acts them out,” with the alternating responses of protective numbing (repression, immobility and memory lapses) and emotional disruptions (repetitive memories and impulsive actions). If the first traumas—the uprooting, dislocation, and the death of her brother Eiji—were repressed for a period of time, the wound cries all the louder when Asako is caught up in Chisako’s affair and Yano’s murders and suicide. This more recent sequence of events, however, does not serve to awaken her because Asako has never been completely numbed, self-repressed or self-enclosed. Instead, in her broken narratives concerning her relations with her family, Sachi, and the Yano family, she repeatedly expresses a desire for liberation and socialization, and it is this desire, as well as her sensitivity to the environment, that provides momentum for her continued attempts to understand the past.

Here, I analyze Asako’s trauma narrative in light of LaCapra’s explanation of acting-out and working-through as two interrelated forms of remembering (or writing about) trauma. Contemporary discussions of mourning and melancholia tend to start with, or respond to, Sigmund Freud’s eponymous essay, though, unlike Freud, theorists such as LaCapra, Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben tend to de-pathologize melancholia. In acting-out, as LaCapra points out, one is “haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the *compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes*” (2001: 21) which reveals one’s confusion of self with other, and of past with present. Working-through, on the other hand, involves

the possibility of *making distinctions or developing articulations* that are recognized as problematic but still

functions as limits and as *possibly desirable resistances to undecidability*, particularly when the latter is tantamount to confusion and the obliteration or blurring of all distinctions. (2001: 22; emphases added)

In other words, acting-out, or compulsive repetition of traumatic events or symptoms, “corresponds to what Freud called melancholia, while working-through . . . emerges from the process of mourning” (Middleton & Tim, 2000: 108-109). These two mental responses, as LaCapra explains it, are “intimately related parts of a process” which does not involve a clear movement from one to the other (Goldberg, 1998: 2-3). On the psychic level, first of all, what needs control and balance—the protective numbing and the disruptive emotion [of acting-out]—is “not entirely accessible to consciousness” (Saul Friedlander as cited in LaCapra, 1994: 211). Also, working-through can hardly be complete, because undecidability is an ever-present factor both for the seriously traumatized and for those who try to understand others’ histories, not to mention traumatic histories.

Acting-out and working-through, therefore, should not be seen in terms of “either-or” binary opposites (with one superseding the other); rather, in the minds of the traumatized, they are “countervailing forces” functioning simultaneously against, and even overlapping with, each other (Goldberg, 1998: 6). Such interactions and overlapping mean that complete closure of the past is usually not possible, but they do not involve a complete blurring, or foreclose the possibilities of working-through to gain a better understanding and mental balance. Melancholia and acting-out, though paralyzing or even self-destructive at times, are actually indispensable to mourning and its working-through, or in other words the self-understanding of the traumatized and the articulation of trauma. For instance, although acting-out usually signals a fixation on the past, the “performance” of repetition compulsion can also involve creative troping, which suggests both

attachment to the past and its objectification.³ In other words, the losses that occupy a traumatized mind can initiate not only repetition compulsion, but creative variation, which is actually an endless process of interpretation and sense-making. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian explain that Freud, in *The Ego and the Id*, reverses the argument he made in “Mourning and Melancholia,” and points out that melancholic attachment to the lost object cannot be totally broken. Although the ego is inevitably “composed of the residues of its accumulated losses,” this “realm of traces [is] open to signification, [is] a hermeneutic domain” (2003: 4). Over this “realm of traces,” then, the traumatized can work-through his/her trauma in order to re-engage in life.

In this way, understanding and representation of trauma must be paradoxical, since “the past is irrecoverable and the past is not past; . . . loss fractures representation itself and loss precipitates its own modes of expression” (Butler, 2003: 467). In other words, concurrent with the loss of totality and precision in a traumatic account is “the loss . . . of the event’s essential incomprehensibility, the force of its *affront to understanding*” (Caruth, 1995b: 154; italics in the original). As we try to understand Asako’s responses to her traumatic memories in *EF*, therefore, we do not so much witness an open wound or its progressive healing, as enter a narrative field presenting both reactions to losses and their interpretations—or an “electrical field” with interlocking positive and negative charges exerting forces in and out of it. The “little progress” she makes is not in her moving beyond this field, but in

³ Repetition compulsion, likewise, can suggest both attachment to and gradual distanciation from one’s obsession. Freud defines the “compulsion to repeat” as a desire for inertia: “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces . . . [an] expression of the inertia inherent in organic life . . . an expression of the conservative nature of living substance” (1995: 612). However, he also admits in the same article the multiple interpretations of fort-da game (as an act of renunciation, for revenge, an instinct for mastery, or an artistic play), not to mention the possible variations and creativity involved in all human repetitions.

her ability to understand it, contextualize it, and thus expose the giant authority figure casting a shadow over it.

Analyzing Asako's mental work in *EF* in light of contemporary theories of trauma and melancholia suggests ways of understanding how the collective trauma of Japanese Canadian internment could remain inaccessible and unresolved. It should be noted here, however, that my approach is connected only indirectly to the more generalized or ontological theorizations of history as the "history of a trauma" (Caruth, 1996: 64), or those of melancholy as "a culturally prevalent form" in response to the losses compelled by a set of culturally prevalent prohibitions (Butler, 1997: 139).⁴ These theories contribute to our understanding of the limits of historical understanding, and the rejected/retained layers within our psychic topography. Anne Anlin Cheng's theorization of racial melancholia, in particular, can serve to explain how different dominant codes of identification can be introjected by racialized characters (such as Chisako in assuming the role of Oriental woman, and Asako and Yano in their self-abjections) to cause gaps in their identities and communication. However, I follow LaCapra

⁴ Cathy Caruth re-reads in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* the Jewish history "the traumatic separation from the father, ultimately leads to a belated attempt to return to the moment before the murder, to Moses's doctrine of chosenness" (1996: 69). She then sees the traumatic structure of patricide in monotheism as well as in all civilizations and thus argues that history itself is founded on trauma. On the other hand, for Butler and later for Cheng, loss, or the melancholic withdrawal to the self and simultaneous rejection and incorporation of the lost other, is constitutive of one's ego. Butler sees a culturally prevalent form of melancholia in "the internalization of the ungrieved and ungrievable homosexual cathexis" (1997: 139) and argues that, under the ritualized prohibition of homosexuality, subjectivity is the effect of melancholic internalization of the loss and "masculinity and femininity emerge as the traces of an ungrieved and ungrievable love" (1997: 140). Cheng, by extension, sees American (white) racial identification as also a melancholic act involving "exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (2001: 10). Correlatively, under the so-called "inferiority complex" of racialized others, there "lies a nexus of intertwining affects and libidinal dynamics—a web of self-affirmation, self-denigration, projection, desire, identification, and hostility" (Cheng, 2001: 17). My thanks to Bennet Fu for directing me to Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*.

in his distinction between historical trauma and “structural trauma,” or loss and absence. For LaCapra, losses “are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones on a personal level or, on a broader scale, the losses brought about by apartheid . . .” (2001: 49). On the other hand, absence (together with its narrativized forms, such as the loss of innocence, of full community and of the imaginary unity with the mother) is more fundamental and “tranhistorical” (or structural), signaling the absence “of/at” the origin that appears in different ways in all societies and all lives (77). Although the two are interconnected experientially, conflation of the two on the conceptual level can lead to either totalitarianism or endless melancholy. As LaCapra notes,

[w]hen absence [or lack] is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into . . . absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (46)

Consequently, Asako’s fragmentary recollection, as a fictional embodiment of Japanese Canadians’ traumatic experiences of internment, should not be considered on the same general level of history as survival (of trauma), or identity as constituted by loss (“absence” in LaCapra’s vocabulary). Rather, her narration should be understood in terms of its own historicity and spatiality. Although the mother is absent from Asako’s family, the losses *EF* deals with are historical ones: the text does not convert the Japanese characters’ losses into absences, nor does it configure a pre-internment imaginary plenitude for endless melancholic attachment. Rather, it shows how Asako’s inhibition is historically pertinent to the era before the redress movement. Asako’s narration, on the other hand, demonstrates its distinct spatiality,

with the protagonist spatializing physically and in her narration, simultaneously “acting-out” in the form of denial, confusion and emotional outbursts and working through to tentatively produce some “judgment that is not apodictic or ad hominem but argumentative [or dialogic], self-questioning, and related in mediated ways to action” (LaCapra, 1994: 210).

My connection of Asako’s spatialized narrative to her spatial practices is based on Lefebvre/Soja’s perspective of “space” as being produced dialectically by all the elements operating in a space. In the trialectics of space as Edward W. Soja (1996) expounds it, one’s conception, perception and lived experience of space are inextricably connected to one another, and so, too, are Asako’s spatialized narrative (“conceived” space), perception of her own house and the electrical field (“perceived” space) and her spatial practices (“lived” space). The role of space is especially foregrounded in Asako’s narration, as it develops more spatially than temporally. Sugiman points out that for the female Nisei she interviewed “place—that is, geographic location-- seemed to carry more meaning than the duration or passage of time” (2004: 366), partly because “time stood still” for them during internment. Similarly, Asako’s narration is apparently neither progressive (no changes happening to Asako externally) nor conclusive (no resolution of conflicts); instead, it shows how she, in the seventeen days after the disappearance of the Yano family, makes recurrent visits physically and mentally to the related scenes and sites of the past and present tragedies. In other words, her sensitive perception of her space, like her spatialized narrative (spatial representation), prompts her to act in spatial practices, which, in turn, broadens the scope of both her spatial perception and representation.

More specifically, Asako’s narrative involves two forms of spatialization. First of all, there is the “anti-temporal” and “a-temporal” spatial form; that is, it moves back and forth in time, defying chronology and developing through a network of motifs (that is, recurrent words, images and dreams; see Punday, 2003: 75). Another form of spatialization is found in Asako’s spatial

practices, through which she perceives and interacts with the spaces she inhabits and produces their meanings. The understanding that Asako verbalizes as an individual has to be limited (or “simple”): as the two quotations with which this paper opens show, breaking out of her self-repression, she first admits to, and exaggerates, her role in the traumas, and, towards the end of the text, she appreciates the simple sharing of a secret between Stum and Angel. However, reading her narrative spatially—connecting the spatial form of her narrative and the spatial practices embedded in it—produces a web of motifs that helps situate Asako’s individual tragedies in broader social contexts, and reveals not only her efforts at self-understanding and socialization, but also her relative openness in her acceptance of mortality and appreciation of sharing in life.

II. Socialization in Protective Numbing, Disruptive Emotion and Repeated Dream

Asako exhibits traumatic symptoms of protective numbing, disruptive emotion and compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes; however, implied in her symptomatic responses are continuous attempts at socialization and a desire for meaningful human connection. The initial responses of Asako to Eiji’s death are typical of those traumatized and/or in the initial stages of mourning; they then develop into traumatic neurosis. Due to a strong sense of guilt, Asako wished to die, but felt that she did not deserve to die with Eiji. Instead, her death instinct found expression in her refusal to eat or sleep, and in closing her body to the enjoyment of sensation; she was “alive” only to her misery (220). These initial responses then developed into neurotic symptoms of repression, self-denial, fixation as exemplified in her premature menopause, and repetition compulsion as expressed in recurrent dreams and flashbacks. These recurrent traumatic responses are historically significant:

if PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (Caruth, 1995a: 5)

The “history” Asako buries deep within herself is not only the death of Eiji, or its circumstances, but also all the hardships she and her family endured in the double dislocation: from her home to the camp during World War II, and, afterward, to an alienating city, and then to its margins by the electrical field.

Although Asako, traumatized, fails to comprehend her roles in the history of Japanese internment and dislocation, she “responds” to it through different forms of protective numbing—ranging from self-repression and denial of change, to outright lies, confusion and forgetfulness concerning recent events. These responses, moreover, reveal her desire for socialization and meaningful human contact, just as the impact of her individual trauma becomes prolonged and intensified by social circumstances. The first form of denial, Asako’s self-repression, is both a consequence of, and a response to, internment and dislocation. It started in Asako’s teenage years as a post-traumatic symptom, but then it developed into a survival tactic in the face of the family responsibilities she had to shoulder at a young age during and after the internment. The first psychosomatic symptom Asako developed was menopause, which signaled her sense of guilt over the onset of puberty that drove Eiji away. However, Asako’s physical “stasis,” together with the subsequent emotional repression, was also inextricably connected with her family duties and attempts at socialization. More than once she expresses awareness of her self-repression and its connection with the family duties imposed on her: at the age of fourteen she stopped bleeding, but she was not worried because she knew “what [her] life was to be” (151). And when they moved to the city and she became the only connection between the family and the outside world, she stopped being fascinated by the male

sexuality represented by her father and came to know “what she could expect of herself” (52). Trying to fit into society, Asako was emotionally repressed but intellectually active: she became an avid reader of books “of all kinds, on all topics under the sun” (68-69), and newspapers, and even crossword puzzles. The paradoxical statement she makes about her English learning—“I was *petrified*, in spite of the progress I was making, of sliding back” (69; emphases added)—suggests the precarious position she takes in society despite her intellectual and linguistic progress. When her burden was aggravated by her father’s first stroke and subsequent immobility, she had to repress her feeling of helplessness. It is no surprise that she then developed self-protective amnesia and turned taciturn a few months before the father’s second stroke—evidenced in her not remembering Eiji’s friend, Sumi Yamashiro, and not talking about Eiji to her younger brother, Stum.

Despite the severe repression of her sexual desires and memories, Asako’s desires are more ambivalent than deadened, and her denial of meaning is actually a frail attempt at holding a mental seal over an abyss of memories surging beneath. For instance, while her frequent attention to her unsightly body (“mouth pinched and drooped . . . [body] growing ugly and growing old” [25]; “ankles . . . thickening . . . fluids pooling” [40]; “pale, veined legs . . . [which are] hideous, . . . mottled and old” [126]) bespeaks her shame over her abject body, she satisfies her sexual desire through holding urine or stool the whole morning while doing the household chores and then releasing them (37, 169), and, more tellingly, through the vicarious pleasure she gains in peeping at Sachi and Tam’s secret games and sexual explorations. Developing these secret pleasures, however, does not mean that Asako has regressed to a prepubescent stage, since she also possesses an unspoken desire for Yano. Despite, and probably because of, the affection she has for Yano, she tells Stum that “[Yano] is a weirdo. He smells, he’s dirty! He shames us all. Even his wife” (134). But narrating the story by herself, Yano’s smell is something she wishes to shake off without success; it is “alive and pungent, insistent, a

man's odour probing [her] all over" (5). Paradoxically, Asako also tries to deny and retain history. She told the teenage Stum there was "nothing" to say about the past; for her what she said on Eiji's memorial service "meant nothing," just as the dates on the memorial leaflet "told nothing . . . about [Eiji]" (182). However, she keeps the leaflet of Eiji's memorial services, and it still pains her to look at Eiji's name on it. She could not remember Yamashiro's first name, yet she "[dreads] the sight of [the photo the latter has with Eiji]" (182).

The second form of Asako's denial is her refusal to face impending change, and her assumption of calmness when encountering such. Her first response to the news of Yano's taking the kids away from school is that it is "[n]othing that unusual," simply "a father taking his children out of school for the afternoon" (3). When driving with Sachi to the parking lot, where, as they both know, Chisako had her tryst and then was killed, Asako tries to drive past it "so that no news, good or bad, could ever reach [them]" (39-40). Likewise, she tries to sleep off her worries, and shove "[the thought of Stum's changes] to the back of [her] mind" (100).

These acts of denial of recent or impending changes in Asako's life reveal her desperate need to keep the community she maintains precariously around her, just as she simultaneously worries about, and prepares herself for, being left alone. Housekeeping has been both her means of maintaining self-composure and denying her feelings; likewise, she only owns up to her love of her family and Sachi, but not the complicated relationships she has with Yano and Chisako. When Sachi asks if she is lonely, she uses her family as a defense: "I have my family to look after . . . I have no time to be lonely" (158). As Sachi sleeps in her room and Asako washes rice in the kitchen, the rhythmic movements of the hand circling in the water and the "bloodless" water circling down the drain give her a false sense of security: "*There was no death, no Chisako, no Yano, no Tam or Kimi to worry over. Papa upstairs drowsing as usual. Stum in his room. And now, Sachi in mine*" (85; emphasis added).

When the news of the Yano family's disappearance first breaks out, Asako displaces her worries over the Yano family onto Sachi and believes "these terrible things [of Sachi's running about or of Yano family's deaths?] would never have happened" had she kept Sachi close (36). She believes that soon she will be deserted by everyone, but she is "calm" about it, no longer panicking as before (47). Even when she cries in her heart "*Don't leave me! Tsutomu* [Stum's Japanese name]!" (196), she appears to remain nonchalant, and refuses to reciprocate when Stum expresses his fear of change.

The third form of denial, lying, is a logical consequence of the previous two kinds: self-repression and denial of change. To keep her family together, Asako first shoulders family responsibilities and represses her own memories and emotions, then denies the fact of change, and then, when hard-pressed to face the harsh or ugly reality of the past or present, her immediate response is to lie about those realities or her roles in them. Asako seems to have lied several times. For instance, she tells detective Rossi "pleasantly" that only she and Stum live there (130), forgetting to include her completely immobilized and smelly father; she tells Sachi that she saved Eiji, but for Sachi, it is a lie ("You keep telling that story when you know it isn't true" [275]). Whether Asako's story about Eiji is true or not, I will discuss in the next section; suffice it to say that Asako's focus on happy moments in the past, like her futile attempts at forgetting negative elements in the present about Papa and Yano, suggests that the "histories" buried in, and happening around, her are still too much to comprehend.

Asako's confusion and forgetfulness about recent events, like her lies, also reveal that she is shocked and emotionally perturbed in face of the recent trauma: the disappearance of Yano family. As she is preoccupied by it, Asako sometimes loses her short-term memory, for instance, concerning her walk in the yard the previous day (145) and whether or not she has fed Papa. Asako is most confused and silent about her last meetings with Yano and Chisako, respectively, before the tragic killings in order to avoid facing her premonition as well as her roles in the tragedy. When she first

hears about Chisako's death, she feels that she has not spoken to Chisako "in a long while," though what seem like months is only a few days (17). Asako is also unclear about when she last saw Yano, as the dates get blurred in her mind and she merely says, "[s]everal days earlier . . . [a]t least" (128). Obsessed with the tea stain she left in Chisako's room during their last meeting, when the latter revealed the intimate secrets of her affair (204-205), she tries in vain to displace it with another, happier, meeting with Chisako, whose dominant impression is of the latter's joking about Mr. Spears' pronunciation (97). But Asako cannot help thinking about the last meeting, when she was confronted with Chisako's passion and her own lack of sexual experience. To both Stum's question about what Chisako says to her, and Rossi's question about whether she tells Yano about the fateful parking lot, she can only say she does not know ("No, no, no,' . . . unclear about what [she is] refusing" [136]; "I don't know. I don't know" [239]).

If her desire for family and human connection provides momentum for Asako to work through the entangled histories and relations of both traumas, it is the second trauma—losing both Yano and Chisako—that drives her to confusion and emotional disruption, to finally work through the entanglements and recognize her roles in them. All of Asako's attempts at (self-)denial—remaining asexual and calm, denying change and maintaining the status quo, forgetting the past and her roles in it—are futile in face of the development of Yano family's tragedy and Stum's socialization. Instead, she tends to move back and forth between protective calmness and emotional disruption. With her genuine concern for Sachi, Stum and the Yano family, Asako's emotions and dreams disrupt the calm surface and take over her mind more and more frequently. Some of these emotional disruptions are brief, causing a few ripples on the calm surface of her life. For instance, after deciding that Yano's taking the kids out is "[n]othing that unusual" (3), Asako goes off to her garden and suddenly remembers Yano as "a sensation [rises] inside [her]," "riling" her in her placid afternoon (4). She is calm about Stum's

coming back late when it first happens, but when she sees the tiniest feather on Stum's shirt collar, she feels breathless. The psychic defense is so strong that she feels "calm, numb" (14) when reading the news about Chisako's death, but then she runs to the electrical field, wanting to be "seized" and feeling "shallow and light" (15). When the news of Yano's having bought a gun is disclosed, she maintains calmness by clipping and collecting the news article, as she does with the previous news article about Chisako's death. However, "before [she knows it]" (95), she goes over to Yano's house in her slippers, and before she can narrate the event, she is weeping while taking care of her father, to the surprise of both the father and Stum (98).

As explained above, Asako's acting-out is part of her working-through because most of her acts of protective numbing and emotional outbursts either emerge out of her desire to connect with others, or her fear of losing them. Moreover, in between these two major kinds of recurrent emotional responses, there are repeated rationalizations, dreams and memories whose meanings she learns to work out by and by. These mental works and psychic functions initially reveal her fixation on her "family" and confusion about her relationships with others, though they also drive her to face change, to act, and to be more self-aware. Having to shoulder all of the family duties, Asako positions herself as a mother to Stum, Sachi, and even to Papa in different ways. Stum is already an adult, and yet in her eye's, her "baby brother" (33). Papa, having lost his mind, is for Asako a creature, "less than an infant" (102). When she weeps, the two of them look like "helpless, helpless children" (98). Being possessive, Asako sees not only Stum as a fool, but also "the foolishness of [her] life" (21; emphasis added). She screams at him, "Baka! . . . Stupid!" when he guesses that Yano is the murderer, not because she has to deny what he said, but because she wants to "hurt him" and "[r]eturn him from the carelessness of his dreams . . . to [their] life, to [her]" (62).

Another example of Asako's confusion of "self-other" relation can be found in her feelings for Sachi. As is with Stum and Papa,

there is in Asako's relation with Sachi both genuine "motherly" love, and introjection and projection. As is mentioned above, when she peeps at Sachi and Tam, Asako introjects the image of Sachi and her sexual pleasure into her own psyche. On the other hand, Asako also projects her self onto Sachi, thinking that Sachi, like her, lacks maternal love and is a "finely tuned receptacle for others' impulses and confidences" (4). Asako, therefore, plays the role of mother to both Sachi and Stum, and, when she takes Sachi and the dog to the murder site, she "[enjoys] the charade of appearing as a family" (156). More counter-transference happens as she believes that Sachi imagines her relation with Tam to be similar to Asako's with Eiji (78). Adding to this circuit of projection and counter-projection, Asako sees a parallel between the triangular relation among Kimi-Tam-Sachi and that among herself-Eiji-Sumi (and-the other girls), the only difference being that Tam's sister, Kimi, "let go" while she did not (221).

As I will explain in the next section, Asako's "motherly" love for Stum and Sachi is no mere fixating fantasy, as she does learn to act on it by trying to save Sachi, and to let go by being open to Stum's girlfriend, Angel. Even what appear to be signs of Asako's fixation and repetition compulsion—Eiji's photo and Asako's dreams about him—reveal some traces of her working-through. She keeps Eiji's photo and dreams about him frequently, but both, instead of being a mere repetition of the same compulsion for a return to stasis, send messages suggestive of her gradual distinction of the past and the present, and of her detachment from the past. Before the Yano family's tragedy, Asako displaces her love for Eiji onto Chisako, so that a look at the former's photo warms her towards the latter. However, since Chisako's death, Eiji's smile seems "callous," and he is no longer consoling (21, 90).

Asako's dreams about Eiji and Papa also reveal some of the psychic reality her mind learns to recognize as she works through the meanings of present-day events: that she feels estranged from both the Eiji in the photo and Papa during the day. For instance, she has two dreams which express her sense of Papa as family

burden: in one, she displaces her desire for freedom onto Eiji, who wants to leave by sea and blames Papa for leaving Japan and emigrating “here”; in the other, she dreams of carrying Papa on her shoulder as if he were a child, or baby monkey, and then finally dropping him. Although the dreams’ messages of desire for liberation are all too clear to the readers, Asako’s first response to the Eiji dream is denial: that it is “deceptive” since Papa was not in a wheelchair at Port Dover, and Eiji had never been that angry. The other type of dream, which Asako calls the “dream of pure memory” (218), is not deceptive for Asako; their meanings, however, are acknowledged or discovered by Asako by and by. In one of these dreams, she is seahorse-riding on the sea with Eiji (53-54), and in another, Eiji hands her an apple blossom in an orchard (218). Only towards the end of the novel does Asako recognize that dreams conceal secrets “behind a closed door” (298). And it takes her seventeen days’ waiting and watching by the window, repetitive searching in the sites beyond the electrical field, as well as mental narrativization of the past moments, to finally recognize these secrets: that she holds on to her family too tight, and that pretty things like Eiji and his flower “. . . can’t last . . . can even turn ugly” (218).

III. Narrative Spatialization as Working-Through

Inseparable from Asako’s acting out her traumatic responses—denial, confusion, amnesia, emotional outbursts, introjection/projection, and repeated dreams—is a gradual process of working through trauma. As mentioned above, if her self-denial and denial of change bespeaks her need of a family and friends, her repeated rationalization, dreams and repeated recollection of the traumatic moments bring her to face her guilt, her desire, and, more importantly, what actually happened: that Eiji died of pneumonia after getting her out of the river at midnight, and that Chisako, the kids and Mr. Spears were all killed by Yano after she

told Yano of Chisako and Mr. Spears' secret affair. In her acknowledgement of her role in Eiji's death, Asako says that it was "all" her fault, not the war's, nor the government's. However, in her spatialized narrative, which develops through both spatial form (i.e. narrative fragments and motifs) and spatial practices, Asako weaves a complicated network of social causality and human connections, through which she learns to accept death and appreciate life from multiple perspectives.

The first mode of spatialization is her fragmentary and "anti-temporal" narrative. Despite her conscious and unconscious attempts at amnesia, her memories surge and swirl, mostly centered around Eiji and her meetings with Yano and Chisako. Her narration of these episodes is so fragmentary and seemingly inconsistent that Sachi and some critics find her deceptive.⁵ Asako's narrative may be selective (half spoken, and half worked out in her mind) and partly self-justificatory, but, for me, it is not deceptive or dogmatic. Rather, she recounts the past moments—her swimming episodes with Eiji and her meetings with Yano and Chisako—again and again—to put the two tragedies in a broader context and present them from multiple perspectives. Her repeated visits to the past, indeed, show that she is obsessed, or haunted, by it; at the same time, as Asako herself points out, "[isn't] this running through of events in my head a way of making sense of all that had happened, of the unspeakable act Yano had committed?" (261).

⁵ For instance, Stone argues that Asako's contradictory retellings of the past signal her need to master the situations "resulting in death, situations for which she feels responsible" (2007: 39). One way to do it, then, is "*elide her role* in her brother's death (she repeatedly contradicts herself with claims that she saved him) and similarly *erase her part* in the murder-suicide (she argues Yano already knew about his wife and Mr. Spears before she told him)" (39; emphases added). Visvis thinks that Asako admits her role but she still finds Asako unreliable: "Asako takes responsibility for the indiscretion on several occasions (234, 242, 277, 302); however, her consistent unreliability and the competing narratives of her brother Stum (239) and Sachi (242, 276), both of whom also confess to revealing the affair to Yano, disrupt any underlying certainty" (2007: 76).

The past memories of Eiji are evoked in two ways: self-induced through dreams, and as forms of response (verbal or mental) to Sachi, to the obituary of Yamashiro, and finally to Yano. In Asako's memory fragments, there are four swimming scenes: first, the seahorse riding (with Asako on Eiji's back) at Port Dover, Ontario, where Asako almost drowned Eiji by holding on to him too tightly; second, their seahorse riding all afternoon in a river near the camp, witnessed by Sumi; third, Asako's saving Eiji from the river, where he scraped his toe and fell; and finally, Eiji's following the recklessly suicidal Asako to the river at midnight and dragging her out of the river. Whether the four episodes are four separate ones, or variations of the same, they suggest something of Asako's gradual understanding of her relations with Eiji. The first episode of the Port Dover seahorse riding, resonant with the Old Man Gower episode in *Obasan*, places the fatal family drama of separation (between the mother and daughter in the one, and between the brother and sister in the other) in the larger context of World War II and Japanese internment. On the personal level, while Naomi is initiated into a world of shame over being sexually molested by a white man, Asako enters the world of jealous and lonely adolescence. Through recalling and facing the subsequent episodes (of Sumi as a witness, of Asako's rescuing Eiji and Eiji's rescuing her), Asako comes to acknowledge her fault: that she, as "a drowning person . . . drowning another," tries to hold on to her brother "too tight" even after the experience of their almost being drowned (183). Asako's admission of personal guilt thus provides a balance in the text to Yano's putting all the blame on the government of Mackenzie King. However, the other stories she tells to Sachi serve to put the single factor of adolescent jealousy in a broader social context. For instance, Eiji's physical weakness and the family's poverty, which, together with the lack of proper medical care when Eiji was ill with pneumonia, make the wayward behavior of teenage Asako take on fatal and lifelong consequences.

Whereas the story of Eiji's death, not to mention the internment and subsequent relocation, remains sketchy, Asako

painstakingly tells and re-tells of her meetings with the Yano couple, offering multiple perspectives on their relations as well as her involvement. The reconstruction of Asako's meetings with Chisako and Yano can be divided into three parts: some memory fragments in Chapter Two first making a contrast between the beautiful Chisako and the ugly and crude Yano; longer episodes of the Yanos' first arrival and the subsequent ikebana lesson in Chapters Three and Four suggestive of the problems in the family, and, from Chapter Six onward, fragments of the last meetings with Yano and Chisako reflecting and refracting their different views of the affair, the understandings of each of the three of one another, the cultural factors behind the tragedy, and, finally, the mixture of envy, sympathy and love that Asako feels for the Yano couple. Psychologically, Asako's mind works through fragmentary memories to understand what happens and to face her own contradictory motivation in divulging the secret; textually, recurrent motifs resonate with one another both to situate individual tragedies in the contexts of social discrimination against Japanese Canadians, and to form bonds of sympathy among the broken relations.

Asako's fragmentary reconstruction of the past, in other words, suggests her growing understanding of their social position, as well as her sympathy with the Yano couple. The first two parts of the text (before Chapter Six) apparently establish a contrast between the beautiful Chisako and ugly Yano, but actually suggests a social factor in the family tragedy: that the couple use contradictory cultural codes of identification, bespeaking a mismatch between their desires in their positions of racial otherness. As a matter of fact, both characters are melancholic subjects: Chisako in postwar Japan internalizes white superiority and casts herself as a desirable Oriental woman; Yano, to make up for the incorporated Japanese "self-as-loss" (Cheng, 2001: 127), goes for the "authentic" Japanese in Chisako, even mistaking her as coming from Hiroshima, another site of Japanese trauma in World War II. Ironically, according to Sturgess's cogent analysis, "if Yano looked

outside Canada for authenticity [as embodied in Chisako], his wife Chisako chose [him] . . . precisely because he [being a Nisei] was not Japanese in her eyes” (2006: 93). Another irony is that, while Chisako rejects the Japanese with disdain (25), finds ikebana “a little silly” (117) and Nisei “too stiff” (118), she has to take on another “Japanese” sign—that of Japanese femininity, or of Oriental womanhood—in her affair with her boss, Mr. Spears, in order to “feel” accepted by white society. What breaks up the family, then, is not so much Mr. Spears as the system of racial hierarchy, the system that incorporates Chisako as a stereotypical Japanese beauty while rejecting Yano as crude, smelly, and “crazy.”

Although the social hierarchy seems to draw Chisako away from Yano, Asako’s recollection of the words of husband and wife reveals—or constructs—a deep bond of understanding between them. In the last meeting between Asako and Chisako, Chisako reveals her ambivalent feelings towards both Mr. Spears and Yano. While she feels captivated by Mr. Spears’ eyes and feels that she is “special” to him, she knows that Mr. Spears will not leave his wife for her, and that perhaps he is not “truly special” for her (214). In the meantime, she defends Yano: his appearance (“not ugly” [198]), his treatment of her (“Yano would never harm me” [201]), and his meetings and letters for redress. In Asako’s memory of Yano in their last meeting, he is in “rage and jealousy” (216). However, as Asako further explores that meeting in her memory, she shows Yano to be more tolerant of Chisako, viewing the affair in the context of race relations. For instance, he does not blame her because he finds his own sense of shame “not attractive” (231); instead, he blames the affair on Mr. Spears, thinking that it is the “same old story”; that “[t]hese hakujin [whites] think they can do anything they please” (259) and that they have “a taste for nihonjin women” (230).

Besides her growing understanding of the couple and their mutual understanding, Asako, from one narrative fragment to the next, comes to face her complicated motivation for telling Yano of the secret affair. In the first extended account of her meeting with

Chisako, in Chapter Six, Asako is caught in a difficult and embarrassing position due to her own sexual ignorance, envy at Chisako's experience, and desire to hear more. Chisako's painful intimations reduce Asako to the position of a peeping Tom who is stricken with a stunning sense of shame and embarrassment. This mixture of hurt feelings, shame, and envy, drives Asako to demand that Chisako tell Yano the truth. Her vindictiveness is contagious, so when she says to Stum that "[Chisako's] gotten what she deserved," Stum, too, echoes Asako's moral indictment in "anger and envy" (216).

While owning up her own jealousy and moral righteousness as two "personal" factors responsible for the fatal revelation, Asako reveals her other contradictory purposes in her second reconstruction of the last meeting with Chisako (Chapter Seven) and of Yano's evening visit (Chapter Nine)—she does not wish to mess with their family matters though she is personally and emotionally involved. In Chapter Seven, as she tries to respond to detective Rossi without success, Asako passes out, amidst "a hive swarming with voices," as a sequence of scenes flips through her mind. Her mental reconstruction then of Chisako's "cry for help" (to talk to Yano) can be seen as an attempt at self-justification, since Chisako's need is not really expressed in words (225). Even more significantly, while claiming that the mess is "not [her] business," Asako skips in her mind her evening meeting with Yano, to the fact that she tried to avoid meeting Yano the next morning (226). This mental omission, much like her avoidance of Yano, is suggestive of her fear and awareness of her emotional involvement with the couple, as what is revealed in that evening is not just Chisako's affair but Asako's emotional intimacy with Yano.

With all her attempts at denial and evasion, Asako is all honest about her emotional needs in the last account, in Chapter Nine, of her meetings with Chisako and Yano, where she presents to her own mind the evening scenes of both her rubbing Yano's chest in her bedroom and her wanting Eiji to go after her and save her from the icy river. While thus owning up, in her mind, to her

responsibility for Eiji's death, she cannot "help" telling the secret of Chisako's affair in order to urge Yano to confront the reality of his family, instead of placing all blame on the internment.

Presenting, fragmentarily, the multiple versions of the same or related events, then, the spatial form of Asako's narrative—as the first mode of narrative spatialization—opens the story to multiple interpretations—and to my reading of the multiple purposes of the three central characters. These fragments can be connected through their recurring motifs, which serve to further complicate the characters' relations and the network of causality in which they operate. Two details of the meetings occupy Asako's mind early in her narration—the invisible marks on Chisako's skin (23, 42, 60) and the stain on her carpet (97)—and take on more meanings in later accounts of the last few meetings. When the invisible mark is mentioned in the first two occasions, it seems to suggest violence, as it is associated with Chisako's sobbing and calling Yano a "monster" in the first case, and with her death site in the second. However, strangely, Asako thinks of the mark when Stum announces his falling in love, and its association with love and sex is further confirmed when Chisako, asked by Asako if Yano hurts her, says no and calls Asako "Baka-rashii sa [Like a fool]" (201), seeming to suggest that Asako is ignorant of sexual and love relations. This invisible mark is thus a floating signifier connected to violence in the different contexts of love and vengeance, and involving the characters in multiple purposes.

The tea stain is another motif that can be variously interpreted: it suggests genuine sympathy among the three, and, in a broader semantic network, problematic definitions of contamination. Coincidentally, Asako accidentally spills the tea in her meetings with both Chisako and Yano, on the carpet in the one meeting, and on Yano's shirt in the other, and both the husband and the wife courteously reassure Asako: "green tea doesn't stain" (205, 260). Although for Asako the stain means her "stain" and her "clumsy presence" (97) in the two different contexts, it actually reveals how Asako is nervous around the couple when intimations are made

about the affair that will/may take place, both in Asako's tea gazing for Chisako on the one hand, and in Yano's complaint about Mr. Spears on the other.

On the textual and semantic field, furthermore, the tea stain as a motif can be associated with the invisible mark on Chisako's skin, Asako's urine (which looks like "green tea" [36]), disfigured body and bodily fluids, and even Papa's odor, urine and vomit, to suggest symbolically that Japanese Canadians are a socially abject group during World War II, being seen as unsightly, unclean and thus to be cleansed, removed, or contained. For Sturgess, this image connection is "signifying slippages" triggered in the text by interrogations on cultural purity and contamination, war and destruction: "historical breaking-points [thus] become poetic contact points" (2006: 95). I, however, will push further to see "slippages" in a network of motif association, in which the statement "green tea doesn't stain" cancels out the negative denotations of all the images associated with stain. These related images of stain and bodily discharge, each with different causes and distinct meanings in its context, together challenge our habitual conception of the clean vs. the soiled, and, by extension, national integrity vs. racial "contamination." After all, who caused the unclean and the unsightly when a group of Japanese Canadians was sent to live first in horse stalls, and then in mining ghost towns in British Columbia?⁶

Shame is related to "stain" in that it is a response people may have when internalizing social stigmatization. As shame is a common feeling among the Nisei in face of "the unspeakable monstrosities" of internment (Miki, 2004: 260), the text's descriptions of shame in Asako and Yano suggest a causal connection, however indirect, between the collective trauma and individual ones. On the other hand, the motif of shame forms, in

⁶ For historical footages of the horse stalls and ghost towns, please see the documentary *Enemy Alien* (1975) produced by Wolf Koenig, directed by Jeanette Lerman.

the text, another line of association and revision, starting with the first reconstruction of Asako's meeting with Yano. Here the sentence "she has no shame," spoken by Yano about Chisako, will later find an echo in what Chisako says about Asako—"you have no shame"—in her last meeting with Asako; both revise the statements' usual connotation of "having no sense of decency." In neither case is the sentence uttered as a criticism. When Yano says that about Chisako, he means it in contrast to himself and Asako, who, as melancholic subjects, "are so full of shame . . . [who] hide away, afraid that [the government will] lock [them] up again" (231). In the latter case, Chisako, when pointing out Asako's love for Yano, "[chides Asako] with a harsh, teasing laugh," revealing her understanding of Asako and the latter's fear of admitting her feelings (285).

More than owning up to the facts and her sense of guilt and shame, then, Asako reveals a deeper sympathy among the three characters in the last two reconstructions, together with the echoes and parallels between the meetings and their resonances on the socio-historical levels. Such deep levels of understanding and/or sympathy are also suggested by another recurrent sentence: "A man knows his wife" (206-207, 232), or, "A man knows his wife. As she knows him" (285). When Chisako first utters it to show that she's afraid he knows, Asako finds the expression trite ("She must have learned this from one of her soap operas" [207]), and wonders if Chisako "play[s] the Japanese coquette" to Mr. Spears. However, later she says it to detective Rossi respectively in defense of Chisako and of Yano, claiming that Yano knew about the affair all along, and that Chisako loves him and knew what would have happened had he known it. With her repeated confirmation of the couple, Asako seems to have brought this broken family back together in their mutual understanding. This should not be the object of Asako's wishful thinking: in their respective conversation with Asako, each of them utters an incomplete sentence to intimate that they did know what (would have) happened (Yano: "Everything would have been different. . . . And she" [299-300];

Chisako: “He’s not that kind of man, Asako. If he knew . . .” [285]).

Understandings and conjectures of the couple aside, another recurrent sentence—“Everything would have been different”—serves to outline the affectionate link between Yano and Asako. Asako, as Chisako points out, is afraid of her feelings for Yano, so she wants to see him as a monster, and hides her feelings deep inside . . . even from the reader of her narration. However, besides the daily walk on the electrical field, which includes a nod and a smile “to loosen the clenched fist” and to confirm his values (282), and her massage to ease Yano’s wheezing fit, they do come still closer in the evening meeting in Asako’s bedroom. Here, intimacy is implied in Yano’s baring his chest and later in the two’s lying on her narrow bed to look at Eiji’s photo, while Asako “might have giggled, like the girl [she] had been with Eiji” (288). Is there empathy, sibling love or sexual attraction between the two? We do not know. But in her internal narration, Asako names what she keeps dearly in mind about Yano: “the last kind thing” Yano whispers in her ear “[t]he last time he would think of [her] and only [her]”: “Things would have been different for you too, Asako” (302). Uttered after his saying that Asako should not have told him about Chisako’s affair, the line is endlessly suggestive: it evokes the discontent and melancholic self-denial of both over the course of their lives of degradation and isolation in and after the internment; it confirms the potentiality of their better selves, which could have been developed, had they have received an education, or enjoyed familial support; it also suggests that Asako would have been less lonely if Yano did not need to destroy everything around himself.

Through Asako’s anti-temporal narrative fragments and a-temporal motifs, then, *EF* offers multiple perspectives on the emotional complexities of the Yano family tragedy, while suggesting an intricate network of causal connections between the collective and individual traumas. Instead of presenting a clear progress of Asako, the text shows her mind working torturously

through her memories in response to present changes in order to understand herself and the others in the midst of their traumas. The text's anti-temporal and a-temporal spatial form, for me, is her way of working through the traumas because it provides not only multiple perspectives on the events, but also different ways of contextualizing them and connecting the characters—which means, in effect, carving up in the social and causal networks a small circle of mutual sharing and respect among the Japanese Canadian characters.

The motif of the kamikaze serves to further explain how the narrative fragments develop the idea of understanding and respecting difference. Stum calls Yano, Eiji and his fireflies by this name to suggest their recklessness, which, in turn, reveals both his childish ignorance of Japanese culture and language, and his jealousy of Eiji. Not knowing what the word means, he absorbs the cultural stereotype which appears as “[p]hotographs of Japanese soldiers in magazines, squashed faces, hundreds and hundreds of them, all the same” (256). Yano, however, corrects the stereotype of kamikaze as reckless or violent by saying that kamikaze cleanse themselves before going to die for the emperor, suggesting that their manner of death is a dignified act. This correction of the stereotype of kamikaze, in effect, sends a message of respect for cultural and human differences—and speaks to what Yano does before he visits Asako: cleansing himself in order to enter her “temple” (258). Asako, in turn, expresses genuine sympathy and respect in her interpretation of Yano's killings. Although she sees the killings as brutal acts and thinks that “Yano had meant to leave no burden behind, but he had” (262), she understands that “everything was ruined for him” and, for him, his act means “not holding on tight” (283). In her sympathy, she visualizes “in [her] mind, in Yano's mind” the place he chose for the family deaths: “[a] temple in the forest” (251). A lot, then, is suggested in her answer to Rossi's question of whether or not Yano is crazy: “No, no. Yes. Maybe” (282)—which is, again, not a self-contradictory response, but one that implies multiple perspectives.

Through the image of kamikaze, Asako learns to respect Yano's radical act; through that of flower, she confirms the beauty of Chisako, and of her own flowers, while accepting their mortality. Unlike the ugly Asako, Chisako is always associated with beautiful flowers, both because of her knowledge of ikebana and her "blossoming" in front of Asako (25). After Chisako's death, and as Asako waits for the news of Yano and his children, she tends the garden less and less often, and the yard becomes "a cemetery filled with deaths," and her flowers "[rising] out of a dark pit" (102). In this way, Chisako is associated with the image of death, just as is Eiji, in her dream, as the "utsukushii (pretty)" flowers he holds look more like wiggling insects, and the flowers on the tree "[curl] up and [blacken]" (218). The dream takes on more meanings when Asako thinks of it again after the visit of Sachi's mother, Keiko, to show her appreciation of Asako's saving Sachi. However, this time she recognizes the beauty of her own flowers ("[m]y roses here were velvet up close; no ugliness in them at all" [289]), while accepting their mortality by throwing the cut flowers onto the weeds.

With the discussion of Asako's yard and garden, my discussion turns to the second mode of spatialization: Asako's spatial perception, representation and practices. As an introvert, Asako is quite sensitive to what the spaces mean, as well as to how she interacts with them. For instance, with the impending revelation of the death of the Yano family, and despite the comforting support of her daily routine, she is aware that the house is collapsing (50), desolate like "a grey slab" (102), its air growing "staler" (19), and Papa's room "[making] everything stop" (36). Seen from outside, moreover, her porch light "[flashes] a message of [her] loneliness" (28). Even Asako's empathy with the others is visually and spatially oriented. When she thinks of Chisako, she says: "Chisako *came* to me again" (16; emphasis added), and when she finally remember Sumi, she "*sees* [Sumi] in [her] mind" (183; emphasis added). Asako's worries over the Yano family is also expressed in spatial terms: she imagines herself to be in Yano's house twice (20, 100),

the second time seeing it grown moldy, and she goes there once, wanting to put drapes in its window.

The last example demonstrates Asako's development from spatial representation to spatial practices. Asako is indeed relatively homebound, being ridden with traumatic memories and heavy family duties. However, her responses to the external changes and her perception of the spaces suggest a gradual mental release from the shadow of trauma, if not from the whole system, as represented by her perception of, and practices on, the electrical field and Mackenzie Hill. Her frequent position at home, when she is not washing and feeding Papa and cleaning the house, is by the window, watching the electrical field and the two households on the opposite side. This watching is expressive of both her attachment to the past, and her desire for company and a social life. She sometimes conflates the present outside space with the sea of her dreamscape, or Vancouver childhood. For instance, she feels as if the electric field were a sea, "the reedy grasses swept in waves . . . [and] Eiji . . . [were] treading them like a current" (271). Also, when Stum walks out, it is for her like "walking out to sea" (180). On the other hand, the electrical field is a social place (though ironically limited for Nisei). When the Yano family moves in, she watches "whenever she [can]" (66), and when Chisako visits her and takes her window view, she "[feels] exposed" but also "relieved" (26) that someone else comes to know her. In the present time of the novel, she frequently watches over the electrical field to wait for Stum or Sachi to come to her, or for the school children to leave school and disturb the field's desolate quietness.

As the electrical field is her socialization space, Asako is aware that, instead of just watching, one has to be "in the midst of things" to be affected or changed (16). Asako is indeed emotionally involved, as suggested by two of her frequent spatial practices: her daily walk on the field, and visiting Chisako at her house. During the seventeen days when the Yano case is in suspension, she is urged by her own impulses, and Sachi's requests, to take action more frequently, to move back and forth between home and the

outside world. The places she visits—the garden, the creek, the electrical field, McKenzie Hill, the ravine in the woods, and finally the chicken farm—take on symbolic meanings in her spatial practices. One major meaning produced is release: twice in the first week of worry and pressure, she takes off her stockings and goes out to the garden to gallivant and shake off her worries over Papa and Yano (5-6), or to open herself to the experience of Sachi's feelings, “[a]ll churned up like the mouth of a current” (106).

The second meaning produced in the spatial practices of both Asako and Sachi is memory reconstruction. Sachi asks Asako to go with her to search for Tam—twice down the creek to the willow tree, twice to the parking lot on the hill, and finally to a park with a temple where Yano ends his, and his children's lives. Although their searches are futile, memories are inscribed on these places not only because of the past events (Tam and Sachi's games and Chisako's tryst) that happened there, but also because of Sachi's and Asako's active memory reconstructions. There are three kinds of memory reconstruction. First of all, the histories evoked by their use of words—such as Sachi's “Go back. You can't stay. *Not this time*” (9; emphasis added), and Asako's calling the willow spot “all too-familiar place” (75) suggestive of their preceding events. Secondly, history is “written” and inscribed as both Asako and Sachi actively tell their stories at these sites: both on top of Mackenzie Hill and at the park, Asako tells and re-lives a story in the past, while Sachi inscribes her name, and Tam's, on the park's ground and “re-lives” their story by giving them voice there. History, however, cannot and should not be “re-lived”; thus the third and most important meaning of their memory reconstruction: it is revised in the present with Asako's attempt to rescue Sachi. At this moment, Asako admits to her roles in the two traumas in an attempt to save Sachi. Taking on the guilt of telling Yano about the woods, Asako tries to rid Sachi of her guilt in telling Tam about it (and thus of her desire to die with him). At the very moment of her attempt to save Sachi in the water, moreover, she admits to Sachi that she does not save Eiji. As she plunges into the river, the voices

of Sumi and Eiji ring in her ears, not for history to repeat itself, but to be revised in her active attempt to save Sachi and to recognize her past roles.

The third and most important meaning produced in Asako's spatial practice and representation is her perception of the electric towers and Mackenzie Hill, as opposed to Yano's. There are some significant differences between Yano's and Asako's views of the internment. If Asako tries to survive by repressing her past memories, Yano continually talks about them in public and wants the government to offer redress. While Asako focuses on her personal trauma and blames herself for it, Yano tends to generalize about hakujin (white people) and their wrong-doings. These differences can be exemplified in their views of Mackenzie Hill. For one thing, Yano thinks that Mackenzie Hill is named for William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister who signed the War Measures Act to endorse the relocation and detainment of Japanese Canadians. But for Asako, "[i]t's not the same Mackenzie" (157). Living in sight of the hill, according to Asako, makes Yano's wounds "fester" (157), while for Sachi, Tam, Chisako, Mr. Spears and even vicariously for Asako, the hill, like the creek flowing south away from it (74), provides space for pleasure and sexual exploration. Asako, however, is not blind to the ironic and symbolic meanings of the hill or the electrical field—though she, again, sees them more on a personal level. For instance, as Yano curses the hill in her bedroom ("wrong, wrong, wrong" [283]), Asako sees the irony of his being blind to another wrong-doing happening at the same time: Chisako's sleeping with Mr. Spears. Without conflating the personal with the political in order to assign blame, Asako recognizes a symbolic link between the acrid smell from the Mackenzie Hill made of garbage (of politics or history?), and "another scent from long ago, of burning flesh"—that of Eiji's cremation (40), thus linking the two cases of racial oppression and abjection in a broader network of racial hierarchy. The electrical field suggests further symbolic meanings to Asako: it is a giant dwarfing her, and a cage confining Chisako.

Finally, she sees the futility of Yano's shaking the beams of electrical tower, and her clinging to them, which makes them "two ants struggling in that empty field" (286).

Is Asako, then, still under the shadow of the internment past and its emotional confinement as they are symbolized respectively by Mackenzie Hill and the electrical field? The past is always present, though not necessarily in the form of a shadow. Asako's most positive and meaningful spatial perception and recollection is of her observation of Stum and Angel's work on the chicken farm. There, she witnesses the absoluteness of sexual categorization of the chicks and the violence involved, but she also confirms the love and sharing of knowledge between Stum and Angel. The "shadow" that catches Asako's attention, then, is no longer that of Mackenzie Hill, nor the electrical towers, but that of the rice paper around the hanging light bulbs in the chicken farm. Under both the shadow and the dim light, Asako perceives the meanings produced and shared by Stum and Angel in their hard work: "a secret from the outside world, a secret of life . . ." (305) not only of their simple daily togetherness, but also, for Asako from my perspective, of a past that was and could have been.

After recognizing her roles in history, further signs of Asako's working through the impasse of her traumas may be found in her final acts of acceptance and understanding of others. Asako does not confuse Stum and Angel with Sachi and Tam, the reality and the dream (303); likewise, the social and emotional resonances produced in her last spatial perception and practices do not result from her confusion of the past and the present. Rather, it is the textual parallels that serve to connect the tacit understanding of Stum and Angel on the one hand, with that of Asako and Eiji, Asako and Papa, Asako and Chisako, and, finally, Asako and Yano at different moments of her life. Such moments of private sharing thus reverse the destructive powers of both past internment and the white-dominated secret affair in the present, as well as the subsequent fragmentation of Japanese Canadian community.

IV. Conclusion

I ask the question again: Is Asako still under the shadow of the internment as symbolized by Mackenzie Hill? Yes, and no. The repetitive traumatic symptoms Asako manifests testify to the fact that it takes time to accept and comprehend traumatic experiences. These symptoms also reveal the momentum propelling Asako to work through her traumas: her desire for human contact. As is suggested in the scene of Stum and Angel's working in the chicken farm, the systems of gender or racial segregation and violent elimination of differences are still firmly in place in the characters' daily practices. Asako, however, is not so thoroughly dominated by present or past systems of oppression that she cannot discern her roles in these tragic events, or a multitude of other factors. Although she herself does not seem to move beyond her traumas, her narrative spatialization is her way of working through them in the confining electrical field of emotional entanglements, a means of producing positive meanings in her small circles of human relations. By linking up her narrative fragments, recurrent motifs and her spatial practices in a complicated discursive field of meaning and human connections, we perceive a field for private sharing and understanding in the social system of categorization, but away from the shadow of the harsh racial discrimination represented by Mackenzie King.

As a whole, *EF* suggests that the history of internment is not a page in national history easily turned with the achievement of redress; rather, it places the history of some individual characters in a broader context and network of causality. A final example of the text's network of motifs forming a larger social context is the contrast between the "beautiful" (*utsukushii*) wife on the one hand, and, on the other, the "monstrous" and abject bodies which smell (Papa and Yano), reverse their courses or fail to function properly (Asako's withholding urine and Yano's difficulty in breathing), and which turn hideous (Eiji's dead flowers and Papa's being covered in

vomit and excrement). Unlike *Obasan*, which shows the mother to be naturally “yasashi” (sweet and kind) and gentle, that which is seen as “beautiful” in Chisako can result from her absorption of Orientalism. Likewise, the “natural” maternal beauty in *Obasan* is destroyed by the nuclear bombings, while *EF* diversifies the causes for its characters’ “unpleasant” physical features. Indeed, Yano’s asthma is related to his experience of internment and the subsequent factory work, but the others’ are caused by habit and bodily aging, and are only indirectly related to the internment.

Our reading of traumatic narratives like Asako’s, as LaCapra points out, is also a matter of working-through. Provided with only some fitful glimpses, or some narrative fragments, we need to grapple with their gaps and contradictory messages. This entanglement in trauma narratives may seem endless and intellectually frustrating, and far less comforting than if we were to deal with those modes of trauma “fiction” (such as Hollywood disaster films and war movies) that celebrate heroic acts and offer easy resolutions. Setting such trauma narrative as Asako’s against Hollywood-style trauma “fiction,” I would like to conclude with two interrelated questions. What constitutes the basis for sympathy: full understanding, awareness of its incomprehensibility, or respect of otherness? Since full understanding is impossible, and as incomprehension can lead to apathy or antipathy, how do we imaginatively put ourselves in others’ shoes, or sympathize from a distance, without undue self-projection and introjection?

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敘述空間化與創傷消解：坂本凱莉的《電場》

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摘要

坂本凱莉的《電場》呈現主角朝子藉由敘述同時「展演」與「消解」她的創傷，而這個敘述空間就好像是一個電場一般，在破碎的敘述中充滿情感與歷史因素之糾葛。「展演」與「消解」在受創者心中是兩個並存也互相衝突的力量，而非二元對立，或先後出現。因此，朝子的敘述同時展演了她的創傷症狀和反應她如何逐漸消解創傷。首先，她的受創症狀（如麻痺自保、情緒爆發、縈迴夢境與自我合理化）既反映了她所受到的限制，也表達她對重建人際關係的慾望。其次，以空間角度閱讀朝子的敘述——也就是閱讀她的空間化的敘述與空間實踐——可以看出她如何逐漸消解自己的創傷：藉由敘述編織一個複雜卻寬廣的社會因果脈絡，因此得以由多元角度了解與接受死亡及創傷，同時肯定人我之溝通與分享。

關鍵詞：坂本凱莉、敘述空間化、創傷敘述