

“Land of the In Between”: Nostalgia and the Gentrification of Calgarian Roots Music

GILLIAN TURNBULL

Abstract: Drawing on the notion that place is imagined through musical performance and the lens of nostalgia, the author argues that Calgarians imagine their landscape through an idea of what it once was, or is, but cannot be seen. The author investigates gentrification trends in the city and how they affect music consumption, as well as the programming practices of two roots music venues situated in the East Village, a perpetually gentrifying neighbourhood. Relegating roots music to such sites aligns with a tendency to contain nostalgia so it is unthreatening to Calgary’s public image of cosmopolitanism.

“Facing our landscapes inside outside
Four walls of answers cradle of questions
I guess we’ve all seen these landscapes before
Maybe within our past lives
But the cradle’s a model for architect tower
The cradle is our little world
Hot rain falling down from the sky
I hear you calling for a ride
Across the land of the in between
A bag of one life but many.”
(From “Land of the In Between,” Steve Coffey 2007)

The city of Calgary is a space, a place, and a landscape that is in between – in between real experience and imagination, in between the urban and the rural, in between change and stasis, in between progress and heritage. The lyrics of Steve Coffey’s song, “Land of the In Between,” tread the line between the personal and the collective, the past, the present, and the future, all of

which are embodied in the lived spaces of Calgary and its surroundings.

The song opens with strums on a solo acoustic guitar, which back Coffey's urgent vocals. Throughout the first verses and into the chorus, the slow build of intensity in his voice is paralleled by the increasingly layered accompaniment, which includes a soaring pedal steel guitar and distorted electric guitar. As the country-imbued rock song progresses, it seems to embody the inherent contradictory and complex relationships that inhabitants of Calgary sustain with their surroundings. The distant whine of the pedal steel signifies the open expanse of Alberta's prairies, while the insistent descending electric guitar slides and crashing cymbals reflect the charged atmosphere of a busy metropolis. Urban chaos is further illustrated by layers of strained high register background vocals that echo Coffey's growled lyrics. These elements build to a climactic point, breaking off with the pedal steel playing solo to represent somewhere outside the singer's personal space. Here, the echo of the pedal steel acts as "a kind of sentient...spirit of place" (Doyle 2005:138), its spatial distancing from the other instruments evoking the distancing of broadly spaced rural areas. The build of the full band returns, fading away with a final cymbal wash which all together suggest the encroachment of urban life on rural experience so frequently expressed by Calgary's inhabitants.

The landscape is considered to be central to Calgarian identity – those who live in or near the city feel deeply attached to the land; those from outside comment frequently on its emotional and physical impact. A discussion of that connection between identity and place needs to be taken further into an investigation of how notions of place are embedded in the life, culture, and collective- and self-expression of Calgary. Recent literature addressing music and place has reversed the trend of assuming a unidirectional impact of landscape on music and identity, and instead suggests that music *constructs* a place, creating an identifiable and unique soundscape (Cohen 1998; Connell and Gibson 2003; Doyle 2005; Feld and Basso 1996; Leyshon, Matless, and Revill 1998; Swiss, Herman, and Sloop 1997; Wrazen 2007:186). Thus perceptions of place are continually shifting as the sonic environment changes one's experience of it.

While I draw on theories of music and place here, they are used as a foundation from which I approach the complex relationship that Calgarian roots music artists and audiences sustain with their environments. Relying principally on the notion that place is not only remembered and re-imagined through musical performance, but is presented through the favourable lens that nostalgia provides (Wrazen 2007), I argue that Calgarians actually imagine their landscape¹ much in the way that diasporic populations do, through a nostalgic idea of what it *once was*, or is, but cannot be seen. This nostalgia for

that which is physically real but visibly absent in daily life, or for that which is of an imagined past way of life, functions to construct the contemporary landscape of Calgary. As such, city planning, the layout of the city, the way inhabitants create paths and discourse around it, and ultimately, the soundscape that emerges from it, all rely on these imagined ideas of what the land is and does. I will begin with a brief overview of the city of Calgary and its roots music scene, and then will address more specific issues of how nostalgia and preservation efforts inform gentrification trends in Calgary, the use of space, and how that affects music consumption. My central argument here is that the predominantly middle class desire for an imaginary Calgary is fuelled by and dependent on the presence of a roots music soundtrack in gentrified regions of the city and that this music helps to create a simultaneously modern, urban identity as well as a traditional, rural one. The roots music scene of the city is directly connected to the perpetual quest for a definitive Calgarian identity, and is essential to the reconstruction of neglected neighbourhoods.

Calgary

The city of Calgary, located in the south-central section of Alberta, houses a growing and vibrant roots music scene. Calgary incorporated as a city in 1884, with a small population of only 506. By 1893, it had a population of just under 4,000 and received its city charter, the first urban centre in the area to do so (Artibise 1992:523). Calgary's growth between 1901 and 1916 is notable, from 4,392 to 56,514 (*Ibid.*, 516). Similarly, its physical growth witnessed a brief explosion: in 1884 it occupied only 1,600 acres, but by 1912, it had reached 26,000 acres, where it stayed until 1951 (*Ibid.*, 524). A desire for rapid expansion, which results in relatively sparsely populated areas, is typical of Calgary and other prairie cities. This expansion is exemplified by its low-rise landscape and, until recently, large uninhabited spaces.

Four prairie cities (Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, and Saskatoon) had the lowest population density ratios of Canada's twenty largest urban areas in the early twentieth century. Calgary had only 1,563 persons per square mile compared to 20,158 per square mile in Toronto in 1921 (*Ibid.*, 524-525). Calgary was chosen as the throughway for the railroad route to the West coast in 1883, and saw the line's completion in 1886. Similarly, the Trans-Canada Highway (Highway 1) runs through the centre of town, linking it easily to the rest of the country. These factors, combined with the early cattle industry, the burgeoning farming industry, and the impending oil discovery in Turner Valley, meant that Calgary was poised to become a hub of economic and cultural activity in

the West.

Calgary's identity is largely tied to these industries and the sensibilities they produce. The population more than doubled between 1970 and 2007, with a current population of just over one million. Calgary is situated in a geographically advantageous part of the province – to its east, south, and north sides lies a wide expanse of prairie; its west side borders the Rocky Mountains, which are only an hour's drive out of town. The diverse landscape, combined with mild sunny summers, and relief from the cold due to Chinook winds in the winters, make Calgary a desirable location for newcomers. Recently, Calgary's economy has grown substantially, attracting workers to all sectors from across the country. This growth has created a rise in salaries, rapidly expanding housing (which encroaches on the surrounding prairie), and a population boom, unprecedented for the city (some figures suggest 15 percent per year since the 1990s [Tyler 2004: 1]). The extra disposable income gathered by Calgarians is increasingly spent on arts events offered in the city, many of which are informed by its western roots. Country music is regularly featured at western-themed bars such as Cowboys, the Ranchman's, and Outlaws, while the city's central event, the Calgary Stampede, draws tourists from all over the world to its rodeo, chuckwagon races, and western fair and exhibition.

The roots and country music scene has grown significantly in the last ten to fifteen years, with increased support from numerous venues and local radio. Radio's support was first seen in the province-wide community station, CKUA, and expanded to campus stations like CJSW (at the University of Calgary) and CJSR (at the University of Alberta). The roots music industry in Calgary is quite localized, but promises to grow. Because the venue and radio support is solid, local record labels have also emerged and become successful.

Roots Music in Calgary

The roots music scene in Calgary includes artists who play forms of country, alternative country, blues, bluegrass, and folk, or combine elements of these genres freely. Although characteristics common to jazz, rock, and punk are also evident in these artists' work, those who occupy the roots community are more obviously drawing on traditions of country, blues, and folk. Roots appears to be the favoured term for these styles of music in Canada, particularly for programming purposes at festivals and on radio, whereas the preferred term in the United States is often "Americana." Americana highlights the genre's connections to significant developments in American culture in the early twentieth century, some of which include the emergence of blues

and hillbilly as marketable, uniquely American forms of music. Indeed, Mark Miller defines roots as “music at the ‘root’ of contemporary pop, including blues, country, bluegrass, Cajun and folk” (1992:176).

The majority of artists with whom I spoke during fieldwork trips to Calgary between 2001 and 2009 incorporated country music into many of their performances and recordings. Despite reluctance to contain their artistic output in what they felt to be limiting categories imposed by industry and radio formats, most identified themselves as alternative country (also known as alt-country or alt.country) in some way. The increasingly broad label of “alternative country music” is often used to account for anything that is not considered mainstream country. While numerous sub-genres that distinguish emerging styles and changing approaches have been created under the umbrella of alt-country, a sustained agreement on what constitutes the sonic particularities of alt-country has yet to be determined. Nevertheless, a stripped-down production style, country-identified instruments like the fiddle, banjo, and steel guitar, the amalgamation of disparate genres including country, punk, rock, bluegrass, and jazz, and an overall rustic aesthetic guiding sonic or costuming choices, are acknowledged by many as defining characteristics of alt-country. The literature on alt-country is limited at this point in time, although recently the body of work on the subject has grown, seen most notably in the volume edited by Pamela Fox and Barbara Ching: *Old Roots, New Routes: The Cultural Politics of Alt. Country Music* (2008). Other examples include Hill (2002), Peterson and Beal (2001), Lee and Peterson (2004), and Kibby (2000), which deal with sociological investigations of audience demographics, artist background, and audience interaction, as well as the use of technology. Those Calgarian artists who strayed away from country nevertheless had stylistic and performance practice commonalities to those who played country, contributing to an overall sonic aesthetic found frequently in roots music from Calgary and the surrounding region.

Perhaps the most identifiable aspect of this aesthetic is the sound of the voice. Roots musics, and alt-country in particular, often feature a non-virtuosic singing voice, frequent manipulations of vocal timbre, and the incorporation of vocal articulations from past forms of country music including honky tonk and hillbilly such as hiccups, cries, and yodels (Fox 2004, Mather 2008, Peterson and Beal 2001). Calgarian artists use these techniques regularly, both as a way of constructing originality in a music that inherently defies it by referencing multiple origins in other genres, and as a way of paying homage to past practice in a genre that upholds adherence to tradition as one of its main tenets. Furthermore, playing with extreme vocal registers and with the interactions between vocals and instruments often can signify a musical sensibility

that is claimed by many artists to be born of life on the prairies:

[I]t could very well be such things as stripping down the music. Getting to the guts of it...kind of an understated production... and that takes a lot of that prairie influence in there. The vastness. Few frills to me is space. So I think it probably works that way. In terms of the lyrics, I don't know, everybody has their own kind of thing, but it's interesting, you know. I think in this town, or in Alberta in general, actually across the prairies there's kind of almost a loneliness to a lot of the music. Whether it's lonely or just isolation, there's some kind of something. (Coffey 2004)

Steve Coffey's song, "Valley of Wildflower," constructs the landscape of the open prairies most identifiably through an evocative arrangement, particular instrumental timbres, and recording quality. Coffey is perhaps the musician most connected to the prairies. His identity as a landscape painter, his life growing up on the prairies, and his musical influences of earlier folk and country singers all contribute equally to his musical attachment to the land. "Valley of Wildflower" opens with a slide guitar whine that evokes a train whistle, while the underlying accompaniment of rapidly strummed acoustic guitar chords similarly suggests the chugging of a train's wheels across tracks. Here is a sonic reference to traversing expanses of place, thus rooting an experience of expanse and the more abstract sense of space. This type of mimetic playing is commonly found throughout the history of country recording, particularly with rhythm instruments, guitars, slide guitar, and harmonica (Ibid., 134). What is particularly notable on this track is the reverb quality on all of the instruments, which enriches their timbres and serves to fatten their individual roles within the arrangement. Yet, there is a simultaneous empty quality to the track, as though all of the instruments are located at vast distances from each other. Coffey's practice of recording tracks together as a band, which should make the resulting mix seem as though the members were in the same room, does not seem evident here. When Coffey sings the verses, he is augmented by high-register arpeggiated chords on the mandolin, which ring out into the air and fade away, similarly evoking broad, empty places.

Coffey's voice is strained, and when a second (male) vocal enters behind Coffey in the last verse, the harmonies are spatially distant; Coffey's voice retains its low register, while the accompanying male harmony vocal stretches to the upper reaches of its register. They are slightly rhythmically displaced from each other with the closing of consonants at the ends of words, which again implies a distancing from each other. The abrupt ending to the song, which

leaves a resonant trail of the final sounds, suggests that these sounds too are traversing a great expanse. Coffey's lyrics confirm the sense that this song is set on the wide expanse of the surrounding landscape:

“A valley of wildflowers, blues, pinks and orange
 rolling like a soft river swell reminds me of you my darlin’
 for I know this vision well
 And in the fall when the flowers are aged and dry
 the impending hush of winter’s edge
 the sun hardens its warm summer shine.” (Coffey 2002)

Other artists signify both the urban and rural landscape in a myriad of ways. The most common method for doing this is to refer to personal experiences couched in the context of Calgary's city streets or the rural expanse that stretches to the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the city. Honky tonk singer Tom Phillips sings of the gritty urban surroundings faced by the down-and-out country singer in “Hard Part of Town,” and in “Man of Constant Sorrow” (1999), the main character rejects a life of “bright lights and parties.” In “Alberta Song,” (2004), Phillips paints a proud picture of the physical setting of Alberta, using these traits to forcefully declare an Albertan identity:

“We got country tunes and an Alberta moon
 And we're dancing right under the stars...
 Well the wheatfields roll and the mountains soar
 The sun still sets in the west
 Don't think we're uneducated
 We went to school with some of your best
 We like our beef served rare and our coffee thick
 We like homefries on the side
 If you come on out to Alberta
 Someone will teach you to ride.” (Phillips 2004)

Others may use historical events or contemporary issues facing the inhabitants of Calgary and its surrounding region as subject matter for their songs. Country singer Matt Masters's song, “Centennial Swell” (2005), is from an album of the same name, which features songs on the topics of life in Alberta, cowboy history, and narratives of mythical heroes. The song is situated in familiar Alberta locales, unlikely known to an audience beyond the province's borders and connects the places to the weather, local events, and ordinary characters. Here, he refers specifically to the floods of 2005 (during

Alberta's centennial year) owing to unexpected and lengthy periods of rain in June that caused local rivers to overflow. Similarly, Dave McCann addresses the contentious issue of the environmental destruction caused by the oil sands in Northern Alberta in his rollicking country-rock song, "Gasoline and Sunshine" (2000). The preamble to the lyrics posted on his website reveals a light-hearted cautiousness behind his commentary:

Within the last 50 years the oil industry has really started to shape the world we breathe, (more evident in Alberta). Maybe one day, when all the Cod is gone and all the Trees are gone and all the Gas is gone and we are all suffering from some weird respiratory ailment we'll all be able to sit down and have a good laugh about it! (McCann website 2000)

While the main participants in the Calgary roots scene maintain stylistic differences, they are nevertheless supportive of each other's work and often collaborate in live jam sessions and on recordings. Many cite fellow songwriters in the city as inspirational for their own writing, and most singers share common influences of singers such as Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Gordon Lightfoot, and Hank Williams (Coffey 2004, Masters 2007, McCann 2004, Phillips 2002).

Most Calgarian roots artists tour minimally, staying within the confines of Alberta, and occasionally venturing further to the East Coast, British Columbia, or parts of Ontario to promote new releases. Opportunities for playing live in Calgary are markedly better than in other Canadian urban centres. This is partially due to the availability of local venues, to a dedicated audience willing to spend disposable income on live music, and to the limited competition between artists (especially compared with larger urban centres like Toronto). While venues can come and go, there are always a few to choose from that regularly feature roots music shows. Calgary has an especially high number of folk clubs, which all run subscription series, as well as an annual folk festival, cowboy- and western-themed bars, and rooms like Mikey's Juke Joint, the Ironwood Stage and Grill, and the Palomino, all of which are dedicated to roots genres. The Stampede, an annual exhibition and rodeo in July, provides additional lucrative opportunities for roots musicians to play. Most can make upwards of \$10,000 over the ten days playing corporate breakfasts and barbeques, shows on the fairgrounds, and venues that draw in large audiences eager to hear country music. The audience for these venues, with the exception of the tourist-heavy Stampede, is a largely white, middle and upper class one. I have observed this during my own attendance at the venues, and this is substantiated by research done by the Calgary Folk Festival (Calgary

Folk Music Festival 2008) and venue owners' observations:

I would say that our demographics are [age] 25-50, which is fairly broad, actually 25-55. And I'd say they're well-educated, they are predominantly white, but so is all of Calgary [laughs], you know, you come from Nova Scotia, I didn't really realize how white it is out here. But they're well-educated, well-heeled group of people who are all, I would say most of the people that come here are really fanatical music lovers. (Pat MacIntyre, owner of The Ironwood Stage and Grill 2009)

This audience constitutes the gentrifying class of Calgary, one which desires an authentic musical experience that solidifies nostalgic notions of the city's past identity. These venues are also frequently located in older sections of the city, some of which remain in continual states of renewal and transformation. As such, roots music often is associated with these areas and is representative of the constant shift between new and old, progression and tradition. The role that nostalgia for past times and rural places infuses gentrification trends in Calgary, providing an anchoring sense of identity in a rapidly changing city.

Nostalgia and the City

[T]he country life that I grew up in, it's gone now, you know, I mean it's part of the city now in general. That encroaching of the city on rural life kind of leaves me with a melancholy that I think may occur in my music in some ways. I realize it's gotta happen, there's no stopping it, but it just kind of makes me sad to watch all these people that I knew, the places being subdivided and gone... I would situate myself as one of those refugees, where, the country that I know, or the rural aspect that I know, it's gone. (Phillips 2002)

The city is a complex place where past and future are continually acted out in tandem. While cities such as Calgary focus on development and progress, a habitual looking back or towards landscapes beyond the city tempers such tendencies and characterizes processes like gentrification. Naturally, such processes take varying shapes depending on the city in question – Calgary's reconstruction is still outweighed by its spread to outlying suburban regions. The longing for rural life and its perceived serenity nevertheless pervades

Calgarian nostalgia; yet the landscape of the city allows for these longings to be acted out. Calgary functions as *context* for nostalgia, not as the *symbol* of it, since it rarely embodies the physical elements of place that are attributed to it (Ibid., 77).

Place provides those who are nostalgic with a context for remembering, yet the particularities of place are both individually forgotten and collectively imagined in recollection. This is manifested in Calgary in different ways: for the city's inhabitants, the places that are celebrated are often physically and/or temporally distanced from the typical urban resident. One may live in the downtown core and be thus removed from an easily accessible sight of the mountains; similarly that resident might never venture forty minutes to the north by car to experience the rural prairie area beyond the city limits. It is these outlying areas, existing mainly in Calgarians' collective imagination, that constitute the city's place-based identity. Thus citizens not only desire a return to the ways of past Calgarians, they desire an existence within a place to which they do not have immediate access, yet they believe they are perpetually *in* that imagined place.

The broad title of "Calgarian" used throughout this paper runs the risk of essentializing widely divergent experiences of the city and its landscape. What appeal does nostalgia for a bygone, rurally influenced city hold for new, urban-raised generations or recent immigrants with no attachment to that past? As such, I do not wish to imply that the relationship Calgary residents maintain with their surroundings is universal. Nevertheless, keeping in mind that many newer inhabitants of the city may not experience the nostalgia common to long-time inhabitants, I base my analysis on several sources:

- 1) My own experience of living in and thinking about the city's environment.
- 2) The place-based discourse I have encountered in personal conversations, daily experience in the city, and more formal interview settings.
- 3) Formal analyses of place-based experience in Calgary and Alberta, and more popular press-oriented documentation of connections between prairie identity and the landscape.

It was often evident in interviews that for those who had lived in the city for a very short time, even less than a year (Newson 2008; McCann 2004), that adopting a western identity, acclimatizing to the city's dominant culture, and enjoying the physical surroundings were not as difficult as had been anticipated. Nevertheless, there are many members of the population who do not

call themselves Calgarians, nor do they feel any affinity to the identity such a title suggests. Many segments of the population may feel marginalized or oppressed by the dominance of a western identity that is marked by conservatism and the valorization of pragmatism, self-reliance, hard work, and individualism. As such, I do not wish to suggest that mere co-habitation enables a sharing of values and identity. The focus of this paper is those who embody the typical markers of the middle class Calgarian experience and may identify with some of the sentiments raised throughout.

Contemporary inhabitants of Calgary may argue that the enveloping influence of nostalgia is not acting against urban renewal and change; in the architecture alone, the old is quickly demolished to make way for the new, and this aesthetic is celebrated across the city. There is a tension between the two effects of urban renewal: it is acting *against* nostalgia at the same time that renewal is *encouraging* nostalgia. By prioritizing the age of old neighbourhoods and preserving that which represents past years, urban renewal institutionalizes nostalgia through a renovation of it. I argue that three types of longing are happening at once in the Calgary urban mindset. Longing suggests a desire for that which is not currently available and signifies a distancing between that which is desired and that which is immediately accessible. Moreover, the object of longing may never have actually existed but may be the product of imagination, or is an altered object of desire, changed in the imagination by one's separation from it. The object of longing is also not necessarily unattainable, although its general state of near-perfection in the imaginary makes the object less attainable in reality. As such, the three types of longing experienced by Calgarians are as follows:

1. Calgarians long for landscapes that are accessible but physically/visually out of reach (in particular the mountains and prairies).
2. Calgarians long for a *way of life* that is implicitly linked to the outlying rural regions of the city.
3. Calgarians long for a *past city* that is partially resurrected by invented traditions such as the Stampede, but is also imagined and consciously recreated by gentrification processes.

These three longings often collide. Calgarians are conflating time and place, believing that outlying areas hold past ideals and simpler lifestyles that are not only fundamental to their identity, but remain static. Until recently, there has been very little preservation in Calgary, which is what Boym terms as a particularly "porous" city, one that embodies a variety of temporal dimensions in its physical space (2001:77). Thus, the increasing presence of institu-

tionalized heritage helps to alleviate the city of its unsettled identity.

Nostalgia and Heritage

Patricia Wood calls heritage the “aesthetic of history” (2000:34). Explained by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, heritage is “the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct...created through a process of exhibition...Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life” (1995:369), and is most obviously present in the dedicated sites of nostalgic historical re-enactments in Calgary such as Heritage Park and Fort Calgary. But heritage, as a marketing tool or self-affirming device, is also continually present in the soundscape of the city, whether through radio and festival programming, through the strains of live music emerging from venues, or through the discourse on the importance of roots and country music in shaping Calgarian identity. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that conscious recognition and exhibition of heritage is problematic – why protect something that has proven itself to be unsustainable (1995:370)? For her, heritage functions to “produce something new in the present that has recourse to the past” (Ibid.), allowing urban populations to find comfort in visiting heritage sites and view them as surrogate hometowns when their present landscape becomes unrecognizable (Lowenthal 1985:xv).

Despite the availability of heritage sites in Calgary, they are rarely visited by inhabitants,² but function to assure them that indeed the city has a history. This history is being well-documented and preserved, in however small a form, which allows a yearning, but not an actual search, for the past (Lowenthal 1985:7; 42) and alleviates the crisis of memory for a city that requires prostheses such as museums and commemorative events to create common spaces of memory (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:376). Wood examines Fort Calgary and Heritage Park through the lens of a consciously constructed aesthetic of heritage, which is more highly valued than historical accuracy. She suggests that this aesthetic works to confine the past to specific sites, which separates it from the political and economic drives of the city (2000:33). In this vein, Wood suggests that the act of confining heritage helps reinforce the role the past plays in a culture’s self-perception and self-definition (Ibid., 34). Of particular relevance here, although Wood does not examine the sonic or musical aspects of either site, is the place that Fort Calgary Historic Park occupies. Fort Calgary, its interpretive centre, and the Deane House Historic Site and Restaurant, all lie on the banks of the city’s rivers near downtown, in a neighbourhood that is perpetually under reconstruction and gentrification.

She notes that the actual site's importance is increasingly marginalized to the exhibits available on the site, which, contained by the limiting boundaries of the park, could actually be placed anywhere in the city with equal effect (Ibid., 39).

This explicit sidelining of the past to a tense, or class conflict-ridden, neighbourhood of the city is of interest because this is also the neighbourhood where much of the city's live roots music activity takes place. The area broadly known as the East Village or Inglewood houses the Ironwood Stage and Grill, where my informants in the country and roots music scene have received a great deal of attention and consistent support. Thus, the "presentation of the *time* of the past as a *place* to be visited...distancing the past from the present" (Ibid., 40, emphasis original) is bound up with a soundtrack drawing on traditions of past music, and satisfies the urban desire felt in Calgary to revisit history as encased in a pleasantly nostalgic package. However, before discussing the implications of this sonic environment, I examine the changes of the East Village, contextualized within a broader theory of gentrification.

Gentrification: The Soundtrack to Transformation

In general, gentrification is viewed as the process by which neglected neighbourhoods are revitalized and marketed to a higher economic class. The end result is unpredictable and complicated by several forces, including the stasis of original populations, tensions between classes, failure to "remake" the neighbourhood in its entirety, and a homogenization or over-commercialization of that which was once viewed as authentic or unique. The term gentrification has been favoured by academics and the popular press, but derided at the institutional level, with governing bodies preferring the positive terms of "revitalization" or "urban renaissance" to obliterate references to class-driven displacement (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008:xix). Hamnett's discussion of recent middle class changes in London takes the following as a working definition of gentrification: "Gentrification is the social and spatial manifestation of the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial urban economy based on financial, business and creative services, with associated changes in the nature and location of work, in occupational class structure, earnings and incomes, life styles and the structure of the housing market" (Hamnett 2003:2402).

These definitions apply directly to the specific case of the East Village in Calgary. While there are other areas of the city at various stages of gentrification, each functioning for a different branch of the middle and upper classes, the concentration of roots music in the East Village leads me to focus primarily

on this area. Calgary's massive growth in the recent past has helped place it within a national and international consciousness, and has amplified the desire for cosmopolitanism and sophistication. But its recent thrust into the global arena could sit uncomfortably with a city that equally prides itself on its marginal status. In Calgary, gentrifiers view themselves as cosmopolitan and global in nature, but still need to fuel a local identity by mapping fantasies of the past and the rural onto specific neighbourhoods like the East Village. Part of this is stimulated by "an all-embracing work culture" (Butler and Robson 2003:1798) that frequently takes one away from home and necessitates an intense experience of nostalgic ideas of home when the opportunity is available.

Drawing on both initiatives of the city of Calgary to revitalize the East Village and David Ley's ideas of artist-driven gentrification, I suggest that Calgary's initiatives have instigated the progression of the neighbourhood to its current state. Ley uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to argue that elite classes follow artist movement into inner-city neighbourhoods. Those with limited economic capital but substantial cultural capital gain dominant class status and stimulate movement from those with substantial economic capital (Ley 2003:2533). A rejection of the commodification "that depreciates the meaning of place" can be "valorised as [an] authentic, symbolically rich [ideology]" (Ibid., 2535), which is only enhanced by the presence of artistic activity. There is no question that the artistic activity found in the East Village has been a major factor in hastening the gentrification of the area. Ley suggests that while artistic activity may not inevitably lead to gentrification, there is often a correlation between the two, especially in light of the "valorisation of cultural competency among segments of the middle class" (Ibid., 2540).

There has been, until recently, little downtown development in Calgary in terms of housing, with the cityscape largely dominated by corporate office towers. Downtown activity outside of office hours is rather absent, as most professionals commute from the outlying suburbs of the city. But the city's expanse has become unmanageable, creating constant gridlock on thoroughfares and driving times upwards of an hour across Calgary. The City of Calgary has recognized this, and in an effort to both curb outward growth and rejuvenate inner city areas, it has attempted to initiate projects in the places that are most in need of overhauling.

The East Village, Calgary's oldest neighbourhood, has become the prioritized target for such work. It is situated slightly east of downtown, immediately south of the Bow River, which runs throughout the city, and north of the Stampede Grounds. It is well known for both its heritage sites, such as the Deane House and Fort Calgary, as well as its reputation for being a refuge for the working poor and homeless (Calgary's main shelters, the Calgary Drop-In

Centre and the Salvation Army, are located here), and as the site of the highest crime rate in the city. In 1994, City Council approved an Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP) that proposed the East Village be developed as a residential area, but changed that proposal to name it a mixed-use neighbourhood in 2001 (City of Calgary 1994). There has been great controversy over the projected development of the area, not only out of concern for the homeless community (half of the neighbourhood's 2,080 residents are homeless [Fekete and McGuinnis 2005]), but over the preservation of specific sites; the inevitable traffic congestion that will occur; the inability to control crime, drug dealing, and prostitution; and the estimated budget for the project, which has ranged from \$1.5 million to \$10 billion in various accounts.

However, the loss of taxpayer money on such matters is of little concern to the generally wealthy and conservative population of Calgary when the subject of the neighbourhood's population is broached. Accounts from potential home-buyers of being approached by "dark figures" emerging from shadows are common in the local press (Thomas 2003), which continues to discourage middle class movement into the area. While there are efforts being made, such as the formation of the Downtown East Central Community Association (DECCA), to create a neighbourhood that caters to a mixed population from different social, economic, or cultural backgrounds, the city has not attempted to follow suit, instead committing to more infrastructure-related expenditures such as \$70 million to improving road conditions, sewers, and sidewalks in the hopes that this will attract private developers. The official plan of the city includes proposals for a central square, a possible downtown campus for the University of Calgary, pedestrian-friendly walkways, numerous entertainment prospects, massive condominium projects and retail ventures (Thomas 2004). There are also numerous environmental concerns, not the least of which is the potential flooding of the Bow River into the area, predicted to happen within the next fifty years (Ibid.). The city ultimately views this project as a necessary progression that will only increase the perception of Calgary as a prosperous, attractive city.

This may not be the case with the local artists involved in the East Village's revitalization. While many of them are attracted to the area for the low property prices and central location, their goal may not necessarily be to perpetuate a middle class invasion. Despite Ley's conviction that artists hold special places in the middle class roster because of their education, awareness of pressing social issues, and avant-garde approach, many artists despise what the possible homogenization of trendy neighbourhoods represents. As such, they tend to be in favour of mixed-population regions that showcase cultural variety and a tolerant mindset. I propose that the soundscape presented by the

Ironwood Stage and Grill and the King Edward Hotel blues bar signifies this way of thinking. The range of artists displayed at these venues contributes to a larger notion of a global sensibility that also retains the nostalgic character of Calgary and the East Village especially, with roots music residing at the forefront of this nostalgia. Moreover, this sensibility is present in visual markers fixed to the venues as well, making the links between place and music particularly evocative in the case of the Ironwood.

The Ironwood Stage and Grill

The Ironwood Stage and Grill opened in April 2003. Aside from a small hiccup in ownership that closed its doors temporarily during the summer of 2004, it has thrived in the East Village. The Ironwood opened with a mandate to showcase local roots and world music, as well as roots artists who are on tour throughout Canada, and features live bands daily.

The Ironwood is located on 9th Avenue Southeast, slightly west of 15th Street, east of the Stampede Park, and just south of the Bow River (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Front of the Ironwood Stage and Grill (Photo by the author. Used with permission)

9th Avenue is the busiest stretch of road in Inglewood, with most businesses located along its length. While there are businesses that indicate gentrification such as cafés, pubs, boutiques, and a plethora of antique stores, there are other unexpected (or leftover) ventures such as the gun shop across the street from the Ironwood. This strip of business activity does not extend much farther east of 15th Street; both this area and that of north of 9th Avenue are occupied by a mixture of dilapidated (or restored) houses and newly constructed condominium complexes. Storefronts are similarly run down; the bright colour and streamlined architecture that is generally characteristic of well-established gentrified neighbourhoods has not yet been realized in Inglewood. However, the area retains a sense of the quaint and the old-fashioned, redolent of original urban neighbourhoods, which could be referred to as charming. The Ironwood's front entrance looks somewhat like a barn in shape, with white siding; windows along the front allow passersby to peer in and view the stage, which faces them.

The inside of the Ironwood is constructed like most other bar venues. A stage at the back of the room faces out onto a small room full of tables and



Figure 2: Steve Coffey and the Lokels on stage at the Ironwood. (Left to Right) Dave Bauer, Lance Loree, Steve Coffey, Russ Baker (Photo by the author. Used with permission)

chairs, with a bar running along one side and a kitchen behind that. The stage is constructed to encourage audience participation – it is nearly at the same level as the wood floor, and a small space is available in front of it to be used as a dance floor. The entire room has a feel of an updated barn (Figure 2).

The pub's website is also constructed to present signifiers of rural life and music, with a tattered-looking sign as the backdrop for all the pages, and sepia-tinted photographs of string bands embellishing several frames. Thus, this visual imagery works to complement the music that emerges from the stage, creating a soundscape of nostalgia and sentiment that reinforces notions of Calgarian identity.

The Ironwood maintains a fairly consistent program of folk, country, and blues artists, and here, folk is loosely defined to include the pop and singer-songwriter tendencies of certain performers. While world music-based acts that might be typically found at the Calgary Folk Festival are occasionally featured, the Ironwood has increased roots programming in recent years. This is partially due to regular features such as "Chicks with Licks," featuring local singer-songwriters Heather Blush and Susan Wheatley; Big Band Brunches and blues jams every weekend; Open Mic Nights hosted by local roots players Tim Leacock and Kit Johnson; and "Fools on Stools" with Tom Phillips and Steve Coffey. Furthermore, in July, the bar concentrates heavily on country acts to coincide with the Stampede, pushing the roots-based programming into higher percentages. While there are still elements of other genres such as klezmer, ska, and funk present in visiting bands, the bar predominantly focuses on folk and country. The Ironwood is a primary destination for Canadian touring acts, functioning as a mid-level alternative venue to places like the Calgary Folk Club. The soundscape that is created from its live acts coincides with the preservation efforts of the Inglewood area in general: homey acoustic folk songs, contemporary roots pop, and traditional country often drift through its open windows and reinforce the ideology behind a continually changing setting of small boutiques, turn-of-the-century buildings, and mixed social groups on the streets.

This is not to say that music somehow transcends the tensions brought about by uncomfortable collisions of middle class encroachment, homeless displacement, and city council initiatives. However, the music that emerges from the Ironwood can somehow speak to, or engage with, many of those who pass by and access the complex mix of aural and visual markers. Whether or not these sounds resonate positively with passersby is not the issue; rather, the sounds of roots and country music engage with the entrenched history of the neighbourhood to construct a sense of Calgary's past and contemporary identities, functioning to draw a middle class population to the neighbour-

hood. This population believes that the identity offered up by the soundtrack from the Ironwood allows them to access an authentic, “old time” Calgarian experience.

The King Eddy Blues Bar

The King Edward Hotel in the East Village (at 4th Street and 9th Avenue Southeast) has become the focus of a variety of groups in the city. Built in 1905, the hotel was initially known as a haven for ranchers and Calgary newcomers; in 1946 its bar began controversially serving free beer to black patrons in an explicit protest against segregated public spaces, and by the 1980s the bar was well established as Calgary’s “Home of the Blues.” In 2001, it was bought by the City of Calgary, but in 2004 was condemned due to structural and mould problems and its doors were closed to the public (LaFortune 2006). This induced an outcry among the city’s inhabitants, particularly those who viewed it as one of the few remaining heritage sites of the city, as well as those who frequented its live shows and afternoon blues jams. In 2008, the owner, the Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), solicited ideas on how to preserve the hotel, which had been listed by the Calgary Heritage Authority as a Category A Potential Heritage Site (Derworiz 2008).

At this point, the Cantos Foundation stepped in. The Cantos Foundation is a long-running institution in Calgary that is partially privately funded and has been responsible for numerous music-related projects and events around the city. Under several different titles, the Cantos Foundation has founded or funded the Esther Honens Piano Competition, the Calgary Organ Festival, and the Cantos Music Collection, which features hundreds of keyboards, pianos, and organs, and provides rehearsal space for local musicians, school programs, and guided tours. Despite its earlier associations with classical music events, its scope is not limited to any particular genre: it sponsors the Calgary Folk Festival every year both financially and by providing instruments for performances; it runs programs on the history of rock music; and it promises to expand its reach into more popular- and roots-based music programs in the near future.³ In May 2008, the city invited bids for the King Eddy’s restoration and the Cantos Foundation won, proposing a national music centre, museum space for its collection, a bar and restaurant featuring local blues acts, a recording studio with vintage equipment used by the Rolling Stones, and office space for musicians in the 80,000 square foot area (Gignac; Cantos Foundation website 2009). The plans for the building were released in October 2008 during a street party that was clearly a meeting place for a confluence of both nostalgia

and progress, with screens available for graffiti artists to make their virtual mark against projected images of past glory days of the (Sylvester 2008).

Plans for the project have intensified in recent months, culminating in the choosing of Allied Works Architecture and local firm BKDI to design and develop the site in the fall of 2009 (Cantos Foundation website 2009). The conditions for the hotel's revamping include maintaining portions of its original structure in line with its status as a heritage site. The projected budget for the project is \$50-55 million, to be raised between government grants, private donation, and fundraising efforts; it is planned to be completed by 2012 and aims to reach up to 120,000 visitors per year (Cantos Music Foundation Request for Expression of Interest 2009).

The King Eddy has thus become a beacon of hope for improving the area's state. Discourse surrounding its restoration and Cantos's role exacerbates the hyper-optimistic nature of gentrification rhetoric that is characteristic of city councils. Music is held at the centre of this hope, both in reflections on the soundscape originally provided by the King Eddy, and in its ability to unite the diverse segments of the East Village's population. The former owner of the bar, Gerry Garvey, described its sound, linking the bar's sonic appeal to physically tangible aspects of its construction: "The [number one] thing about it was the sound. I don't know if it was the wood panelling or the smoke saturated in the walls or what, but if you talked to any musicians, they say the room had a great, gritty sound" (Wardle 2008:24). Here, it is as though the walls themselves embody the music of generations, absorbing and retaining sounds of the past that are resurrected and felt every time audiences and performers enter the room.

But similar discourse is used to describe the happy coexistence of normally socially disparate groups, first within the walls of the King Eddy, and by extension, out on the streets of the East Village: "You'd have Hell's Angels, students, university professors all together, and never any problems. You'd have more fights at Cowboys [a local country bar], where at the Eddy everybody got along. You had Buddy Guy walking outside, playing on the street. It had a *je ne c'ais quoi* [sic] you can't recreate" (Ibid.). The Cantos Foundation and the city have capitalized on these idealized notions of the Eddy's performing and listening population to suggest that the new centre will be the site at which all class tensions inherent in the East Village will be resolved through the common experience and enjoyment of music. "We think this will be a great kick start for the East Village and we're going to do it with the power of music" – quote from Andrew Mosker, executive director of Cantos (Logan 2008). The present audience, made up of middle class music aficionados anxious to see the King Eddy preserved, can attend monthly blues jams, workshops, and spe-

cial roots music concerts offered while the majority of the building undergoes renovation. Yet again, the area's revitalization has been shifted to a new, more promising site since previous projects have failed to change the neighbourhood in any significant way.

Conclusion: Music, Desire, and Imagination

Calgary presents a unique case in the study of gentrification processes in Western Canada. This is due in part to the city's growing affluence and the conflicting desires of the middle and upper classes for the dual experience of a revitalization of the city's rural roots and surroundings in a modern, fast-paced city. Compared to other Western Canadian cities, Calgary's wealth facilitates the fulfillment of rural fantasies in the urban context, preserving and marketing the old and authentically rustic for an audience willing to pay for it. While cities such as Edmonton are also welcoming to musicians, they have recently witnessed a decline in live venues dedicated to roots music. Moreover, the valorization of these cities' western identity and rural roots is manifested in different ways, particularly when it comes to the meanings embodied in the symbol of the cowboy and related events like the Stampede. In cities like Regina or Saskatoon, the pace of urban change moves more slowly than in Calgary; more corporate headquarters and business activity contribute to Calgary's cosmopolitan image. In Eastern Canadian cities such as Toronto, gentrification efforts parallel those of Calgary, although fuelled by different motives such as controlling urban expansion. Roots music in Toronto thrives in some of these locales, but the longevity of the scene pales in comparison with Calgary. Rarely are artists paid in Toronto, as increased competition for gigs reduces what venues are expected to shell out – simply obtaining a gig is paramount to surviving the scene. Yet, artists in Calgary are able to make a living from playing gigs alone without maintaining day jobs, which allows many players to be a part of the scene for years (Hawley 2008; Phillips 2008).

There is no place where the intersections of lived experience, physical landscapes, and expressive culture are not complex, but in Calgary, the role that place occupies in the collective imagination is particularly significant for local artistic expression. Here, I have argued that places in Calgary are constructed by a number of factors: the preservation of heritage sites; the discourse surrounding that preservation; the containment of heritage, the past, and the corresponding artistic and musical endeavours in particular places that often serve as tourist sites; and the nostalgia for a place and time that do not exist in the daily experience of the city's inhabitants. Crossing all of those fac-

tors are the sounds created by the roots musicians of Calgary, seeping through the doors of the Ironwood and the renovated King Eddy.

The Ironwood's and King Eddy's audiences, partially composed of the gentrifying class, consists of those who discover the roots scene of the city and attract a bigger audience by influencing discourse about the venue and scene in corporate environments, local journalism, and social circles. Calgary's East Village occupies a unique position in the gentrification process in that it simultaneously operates as the old (seen in the presence of Fort Calgary and the Deane House), the recent past (as the downtrodden, "unsafe" area of homeless occupancy), and the newly revitalized (seen in the used bookstores, antique shops, and live venues, which, oddly enough, present their own form of the past through the lens of the new and exciting).

Nostalgia is contained within particular spaces in the city that are constructed to present and maintain hegemonic ideas of the city's conception of heritage. Music is inextricably connected to those sites, since the East Village is the main area of the city where roots music is heard and consumed on a daily basis. Thus nostalgia is located, limited, and available for consumption in the East Village, which keeps it separate and unthreatening to the values of cosmopolitanism and newness that the city presents as its public image. My central argument here has been that the contained and controlled manifestation of nostalgia in the gentrified centre of Calgary allows for the city's history to be available for consumption and memory while not infringing upon the daily promotion of sophistication and progress so central to Calgary's contemporary urban identity. Middle class gentrifiers seeking to construct an urban identity that is meaningful imagine a past Calgary while consuming roots music in venues housed in the East Village, thus solidifying beliefs about the city in which they live. 🍀

Notes

1. Landscape is a highly charged term with multiple uses in geographical and anthropological discourse. Here, I am using landscape largely as a term for "a socially constructed (or imagined) landscape." That is, landscape functions throughout this paper as that which is imagined from the physical experience of places. The term "soundscape" functions in the same way and has a similar complex background. Here, I am not using the frequently referenced notion of soundscape attributed to R. Murray Schafer, wherein soundscape accounts for all humanly produced and naturally occurring sounds in the environment. His analytical system for understanding interactions between humans and their sonic environment, while underpinning

most discussions of soundscape, does not apply to such an extent here, as I am not dealing with the entirety of an acoustic ecological system. Instead, I understand soundscape as a socially constructed or imagined understanding of place through aural experiences, most of which are musical in nature. Kay Kaufman Shelemay's discussion of soundscape is particularly useful for this study, and I anchor my use of the term in that definition, which refers specifically to human music making, and how musical activity and performance shape daily experience (Shelemay:2006).

2. This is based on my own observations of people I know and of the visitors to these sites, who exhibit a variety of tourist-associated behaviours.

3. I was employed as a docent for the Foundation in 1999, at which time the collection already featured many electronic keyboards, unique keyboard-based machines, theremins, and hundreds of pianos from around the world, including many that were waiting in storage for restoration. The collection has grown considerably since that time.

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