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Diasporic Ethnopoetics Through “Han-Gook”: An Inquiry into Korean American
Technicians of the Enigmatic

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

David Hur

Committee in charge:

Professor Yunte Huang, co-Chair

Professor Stephanie Batiste, co-Chair

Professor erin Khuê Ninh

Professor Sowon Park

September 2020

The dissertation of David Hur is approved.

erin Khuê Ninh

Sowon Park

Stephanie Batiste, Committee Co-Chair

Yunte Huang, Committee Co-Chair

September 2020

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Technicians of the Enigmatic

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by

David Hur

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This journey has been made possible with support from faculty and staff of both the Comparative Literature program and the Department of Asian American Studies. Special thanks to Catherine Nesci for providing safe passage.

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Thirdly, much has been managed with a little help from the real ones.

I dedicate this to my mother, my father, and my sister, for enduring and undying love of family.

VITA OF DAVID HUR

September 2020

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts in English, Rutgers University, June 2010 (summa cum laude)
Master of Arts in East Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Hawai'i, Manoa, June 2012
Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature, University of California, Santa Barbara, September 2020 (expected)

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2013-2018: Teaching Assistant, Department of Asian American Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

AWARDS

IHC Public Humanities Graduate Teaching Fellow Program, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2018
Graduate Research Mentorship Fellowship, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2017

FIELDS OF STUDY

Asian American Literature and Culture
Modern Korean Literature
Global Poetic Productions

ABSTRACT

Diasporic Ethnopoetics Through “Han-Gook”: An Inquiry into Korean American Technicians of the Enigmatic

by

David Hur

This dissertation proposes an alternative reading and grouping of Korean American cultural production as diasporic ethnopoetics, and focuses on how vernacular works unfold aesthetic space for the mediation of transpacific histories and local memories. This approach does not yield to conventional limits by which Asian American works are contained and constrained as engagements with (im)positions of loss, but rather, draws out the (com)positional wordplay that is often limned by racial melancholia. Each chapter explores the work of a Korean American artist who draws out discursive space by means of modes of production that are available in each social milieu. By reading out diasporic ethnopoetics in the avant-garde cinematic poetry of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, the verbal arts of Denizen Kane (né Dennis Kim), Justin Chon’s filmic text *Gook*, and the popular (sub)cultural stylings of Dumbfoundead (né Jonathan Park), this dissertation inquires into how each of the

four artists negotiate and navigate discursive terrain through re-orienting play with language. The discursive terrain is significantly informed by transpacific histories, and it is by way of diaspora that each artist echolocates a Korean American identification through cultural media. Diaspora thus provides a different way of imagining relations and identifications in the present, as a present absence of relations.

This dissertation also focuses on representation and language with the aim of listening to the sound play in the ethnopoetics. In this way, each chapter proposes a reading that is also a writing attuned to the work of the Korean American technicians and the space of sound that may cohere as Korean American. Put differently, this dissertation proposes a reading of select and disparate Korean American cultural production as diasporic ethnopoetics in order to listen to noises and voices channeled through representation and language. In this impossible challenge to realize the other in relation, the Korean concept of Han is an invaluable analytic for listening through the cuts of racial melancholia where language and representation may fail. Through close-reading and close-listening, this dissertation explores how each artist leads audiences to listen to channels of capacious cultural bricolage that may break with conventional understandings of language and representation. With a noticeable shift in focus from Cha's work in the early 1980s to three Korean American male voices in the post-1992 context of the new millennium, this dissertation aims to listen to different locations in a Korean American constellation of transpacific histories for critical sound play in the colloquial Korean shorthand for the Republic of Korea: "Han-Gook."

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PREFACE:

1. This dissertation is interested in interstitial spaces. On one hand, there is the transpacific, what Yunte Huang implicates as “the deadly space between,” drawing on American novelist Herman Melville’s borrowing from Scottish poet Thomas Campbell to describe “wars of discourses on the destiny of the Pacific” and “the epistemological battle between the documentary and the fictional” (4). On another hand, there is the “deathly embrace.” Shengmei Ma writes, “The paradox of deathly embrace [ethnic identity’s atrophy in its relation to white hegemony] brings out the love-hate relationship between Orientalism and Asian American identity, a stormy marriage with no end in sight” (xxiii). My interest here in drawing out this liberal rhyme is to move into the smoke and mirrors of language-games that produce the “counterpoetics” and “mortal kombat” in the transpacific. In the words of the hermeneut Paul Ricoeur, I am interested in the appropriation and distanciation that is involved in the cultural production of Korean American poetics, the enfolding and unfolding work of re-orienting play.

2. This dissertation is a difficult meditation into an Asian American topic par excellence: the terrain of language. Racialization of Asian Americans is peculiar because it is not only mapped onto the body, but onto the face, and onto the tongue. To borrow from Sylvia Wynter, the sociogenic principle for Asian Americans produces a deracinated and dispossessed subject, gifted language and membership in civil society in turn. Wynter draws the sociogenic principle from “Frantz Fanon’s dually third person and first person exploration of the ‘lived experience of being black’” (2001: 31), the socioculturally produced experience of being. This quasi-metaleptic estrangement is a result of a reification

that splits conscious experience in two, in order to accommodate a narrative imposition by the white subject.

That is, to construct himself in the terms of these predetermined elements, in order to ‘verify’ the ‘truth’ of the others’ glances, the ‘truth’ of their order of consciousness, and to do so in order to confirm both the purely biological identity of being human in its bourgeois conception, as well as its normative definition in ‘white’ terms. (ibid. 42)

In Fanon’s writing, this manifests through language as he is interpellated in French, through the discursive realm woven out of “a thousand details, anecdotes, stories.” In the case of Asian Americans, this discursive realm is forged out of orientalisms and transoceanic histories. My borrowing of Wynter’s sociogenic principle reiterates the “mediation of a socialized *sense of self*” as it culturally determines one’s conscious experience (ibid. 37). Put differently, I am interested in a context for juxtaposition with Fanon’s remark on André Breton’s comments about Aimé Césaire’s handling of the French language, one which concerns the emplacement of diasporic Korean subjects into American cultural understanding.

Diaspora

In the case of a specific Asian American ethnicity, such as Korean Americans, various contexts of migration are conflated and funneled into a representative Korean American identity. Korean immigration to the United States begins in the early twentieth century to the annexed territory of Hawai’i, only decades before the Korean peninsula is annexed by the Empire of Japan. The context of politically motivated immigration starkly changes following the Korean War, which Ji-Yeon Yuh describes as a movement of

“refuge migrants,” those seeking refuge from the consequences of the Korean War. This migration—although spurred by the national struggle embodied in the war and division—leads to community and identity configurations that rely on shared memory and experience rather than nation-state ties. (278)

Yuh's description of a "refuge migration" aim to rearticulate threads of adoption migration, military marriage migration, labor and professional migration in relation to a diaspora rather than a homeland. The diversity of "refuge migration" not only concerns destinations, but rather, considers the variety of movement in the generations since the still-standing declaration of the 1945 armistice. This is not simply a complicated Korean history, but, as Nadia Kim's *Imperial Citizens* draws out, a definitively transpacific entanglement. Koreans are not naïve newcomers to the New World, but already racialized even before emigration [101ff]. Kyeyoung Park also identifies a rhizomatic diaspora in her study of Korean migration to and through Latin America. Proceeding from Asian American literary and cultural studies into transpacific studies, my reading of Korean diaspora is specific and delimited to artists who are 1.5- or second-generation Korean Americans. It is difficult to set any limits to identity, however, in Yoon Sun Lee's formulation, "Asian American literature [i]s the cultural expression of a self-conscious racialized group." Wynter's sociogenic principle helpfully guides exploration of such cultural expression through a relation to American culture and lived experience. The artists selected for my study are notable cultural practitioners of wordplay. Although there is a distinct generational and gendered difference between Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and the other three artists, Korean American men born in the 1970s-1980s, all four artists negotiate the pressures of assimilation into hegemonic culture as well as ethnonationalist affiliation through language. As each chapter leaps from one artist to another, my aim is not to propose a narrative so much as explore the poetics and counterpoetics in the work of each artist.

Throughout this dissertation, I aim to sustain three nodes to triangulate any given moment: diaspora, Han, and ethnopoetics. As Lily Cho writes, diaspora has accumulated scholarly cachet in the past few decades. Cho particularly locates

conditions of diasporic subjectivity within the long histories of Jewish and Armenian diasporic experience [as] emerges from [her] sense that any theorization of contemporary diaspora must acknowledge and engage with the history of the term and the ways in which this history continues to haunt the construction of contemporary diasporic community. (18)

Diaspora is also a keyword, as in the work of Paul Gilroy and Brent Edward Hayes, that indexes a Black diaspora in relation to colonialism and empire. In Asian American studies, diaspora has similarly been invoked to negotiate the difficult dichotomy of the foreign sojourner and the native born, and is available in early Asian American writings such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1946) and Younghill Kang's *East Goes West* (1937), as well as more recent works such as Lisa Ko's *The Leavers* (2017). Stuart Hall's essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" is a popular writing on diaspora, in which he describes new developments in the cinema of Caribbean and Black diaspora that speaks to cultural identities, cuts of identity, and its traces of difference. In a consolidation of same difference, there is a further splintering of differences, which Hall describes by way of Jacques Derrida's *différance*, "set[t]ing the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the *trace* of its other meanings" (229). In this, Hall distinguishes three "presences":

Présence Africaine, "the site of the repressed," *Présence Européenne*, the site of "that which is endlessly speaking – and endlessly speaking us," and *Présence Américaine*, "the space where the creolisations and assimilations and syncretism were negotiated" and "the place of many, continuous displacements" (ibid. 230, 232, 234). It is in the third presence that Hall locates "the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference, what makes Afro-Caribbean people already people of a diaspora," with the nuanced use of diaspora "metaphorically, not literally," hybridity rather than ethnicity" (ibid. 235). Sandra So Hee Chi Kim's use of diaspora resonates with Hall's description. "Diasporic consciousness forms out of the 'foreignness' of the *multiple* worlds that one has inherited, such that the world that the diasporic subject inhabits is perpetually haunted by the absence of another,

distant world” (349). Drawing on Hall’s description of diaspora as a becoming, Kim “emphasizes the *experience* of diaspora [...] [a]nchoring it to a phenomenology of postmemory [to] account more adequately for the realms of heterogeneity, hybridity, discontinuity, and evolution in diasporic experience without denying its ‘reality’” (ibid. 350). Kim’s explication of diaspora draws on the memory work of Paul Ricoeur and Marianne Hirsch. “Diasporic postmemory in particular must actively *conjure up* places, situations, and bodies from which it is not only temporally discontinuous, but also spatially, culturally, and/or linguistically so” (343). Cultural memory therefore mediates narratives of genealogy and historical continuity. As Lily Cho argues, “Diaspora must be understood as a *condition of subjectivity* and not as an object of analysis” (14). Like Hall and Kim, moving beyond the strictures of identity, Cho proposes “an understanding of diaspora as a subjective condition bound by the catastrophic losses inflicted by power and, in the spirit of Butler’s metaleptic reversal, production of power” (18). And this holds a sense of future possibilities, for “one *becomes* diasporic through a complex process of memory and emergence” (ibid. 21). Regarding Asian diasporas in particular, Cho emphasizes the influence of indenture in order to highlight the historical entanglements and “Afro-Asian connections which continue to reverberate across contemporary culture” (ibid. 25). Noting Yuh’s “refuge migration,” there is then a curious narrative line that develops here, one that may become confused with the model minority myth. Much of the following discussion in this dissertation echoes and extends Lisa Lowe’s writings on hybridity and Asian American subjectivation, drawing out a diasporic articulation of Korean American that aims to move beyond the conceptual analytics of race and nation and open into entanglements of ethnicity and political histories. I draw my invocation of diaspora from these channels, as a phenomenon shaped by histories of migration, in part overdetermined by economic and political structures. What is notable

about diaspora is the mark of loss as the organizing difference. In “On Loss: Anticipating the Future of Asian American Studies,” Anthony Shiu explores the im/possibility of diaspora “to address the affirmative uses of ‘loss’ and to question how we can use loss to comprehend literary and social discourses” (19). In the specific context of diasporic Korean counter/poetics, I bring together diaspora with the analytic of Han to similarly consider “how we can use loss” in terms of literary and cultural criticism.

Han

Han is a cultural affect that is commonly approximated by frustration, rage, and sorrow. Like diaspora, Han has accumulated a fair amount of scholarly attention in the past few decades. However, it is a tricky concept to handle, which many more are eager to dismiss. It is perhaps, in some sense, what Sianne Ngai calls an ugly feeling, or in Cathy Park Hong’s words, a minor feeling. Although there are different ways to conceptualize a categorization, there are distinct traditions and contexts for understanding Han. First, there is an ethnonational historical sense of Han that stems from memories of the colonial period and coheres a sense of Koreanness. This Han is colloquial and vernacular. In fact, this cultural idiom is also available to Asian Americans in the contemporary moment as the variation “K-Rage,” which emphasizes a manifestation of an unknown source that is thus attributed to the ethnic variable¹. There is a more complicated version of Han, which may be more “academic.” This tradition is located in a Korean (American) Minjung theology, which finds its beginnings in the Minjung movement in the later twentieth-century during the development of South Korean democracy. The Minjung, which refers to the people’s collective or *demos*, coheres a movement around sensibilities that have been sharpened by

¹ Although this is a recent colloquialism, the “angry Asian” figure is not new. C.f. www.angryasianman.com, theangrytherapist.com.

ideological and material exploitation in the twentieth century. Korean theologian Suh Nam-dong is credited with developing a theology of Han, which he describes as “an underlying feeling of Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness. On the other, it is a feeling with a tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings” (58). As Hellena Moon argues, there is a “motive for associating *han* with wo/men’s issues [that] is also tied to the Korean nationalist discourse” (420). Grace M. Cho explores how this is especially projected onto war brides, or yanggongju (“Western princess”), and her narrative study also “articulate[s] how the Korean diaspora came to be conditioned by transgenerational haunting” (13). Jae Hoon Lee brings Melanie Klein’s psychoanalysis and Carl Jung’s psychological symbolism to his theological study of Han in *The Exploration of the Inner Wounds—Han*. Andrew Sung Park’s meditation on Han opens into conversations on sin, “shift[ing] the discussion from an exclusive focus on the sinner/oppressor to a viewpoint that includes the victims/oppressed as well” (13). Park is not unaware of the difficulties in this, for “a victim of racism can be a sexist. This fact, however, should not diminish the distinction between sin and han, oppressors and oppressed” (ibid. 13). Wonhee Anne Joh’s “postcolonial Christology” extends Lee’s study with Julia Kristeva’s notion of abjection in *Heart of the Cross*, providing readers with language that articulates a feminist Asian American theological perspective on Han.

Lastly, there is a philosophy of Han that pursues a “non-orientable” understanding. Sang Yil Kim proposes a Han philosophy, a Hanism, which aims to draw out an underlying philosophical basis in syncretic Korean culture. Kim’s ambitious movement away from dualism is informed by John B. Cobb’s Process Thought, which draws from British-American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy. Chang-Hee Son distinguishes this Han “of the Korean philosophical, ideological, indigenous thinking” from

the homophonic concept of Minjung theology, describing the latter as a “psychological ‘han’” and rewriting it as Haan, “with an extended ‘a’ sound like ‘aah’ as in breathing a deep sigh of grief” (13). This is a difficult distinction to make, not least because Kim and Cobb are also theologians. For the purposes of this dissertation, Hanism’s relevance, what the differentiation of Han and Haan offers, is a destabilizing philosophy that stabilizes the discussion of the latter “psychological” Han herein. In other words, although I pursue a reading of ethnopoetics that draws on theological discussions of Haan, Hanism provides a sense of non-orientability, a utopic way of thinking, that sharpens the critical point of Haan. Han is the im/possibility toward which Haan nostalgically gestures. As the growing corpus of theological engagements with Haan² illustrates, there are material needs and consequences for decolonization of the mind and spirit. In what follows, I write Haan as Han, in order to maintain the conventional orthography in Korean American theology, and gesture toward the non-orientability or utopic im/possibility of Hanism.

With these colloquial, academic/psychological, and philosophical/ideological/indigenous Hans in mind, I find Sandra So Hee Chi Kim again to be a helpful guide. Kim draws on the second Han, “an essentialist Korean sociocultural concept” that “indexes an affective complex that is so wide-ranging, adaptive, and invested with cultural and nationalistic significance, that defining it precisely has been difficult for scholars” (255). Tracing a genealogy of the concept from the colonial period, Kim identifies how a biologicistic definition of the concept, “as running in the blood of all Koreans,” naturalized colonial suffering via Han’s melancholia, which in turn “also supported a rationalization of Japan’s position of authority” (ibid. 254, 261). Despite the colonial making

² C.f. Kevin P. Considine, *Salvation for the Sinned-Against: Han and Schillebeeckx in Intercultural Dialogue*.

of Han, Kim writes, “*Han* is not just a social construct; it names an embodied experience of shared grief” (ibid. 273). Significantly, Kim makes the move to connect a sense of Han with Asian American writings on racial melancholia, as a “pathway of psychic formation that shows our need to move beyond structuralist accounts of kinship that emphasize the Oedipus complex as the primary psychic structure regulating the emergence of the social” (ibid. 275). Kim closes, “Even though *han*, let alone race itself, are social constructs, *critical han* turns a magnifying glass on to the ways in which race and racial difference continue to saturate our material and psychic lives” (ibid. 275). Recalling Kim’s writing on diaspora as phenomenon and lived experience, critical Han identifies seems to identify a method of triangulation. Negotiating essentialist and anti-essentialist arguments, “*Critical han* is one nexus in which we see how collective grief can play a constitutive role in transnational racial-ethnic subject formations” (ibid. 275). Seo-Young Chu’s notion of postmemory Han cleaves the Kim’s writings on phenomenological diaspora and critical Han, through the metonymic, not metaphoric, figure of a Korean American telepath. A Korean American position, thus understood, is a diasporic conduit for postmemory Han, a possible source of critical Han. Kim and Chu offer significant thoughts by which to theorize and read diasporic Korean American works. Kim’s examples include a suggestive quote from Richard Wright, as well as a collaborative rap song between Korean (American) Tablo and Black American Joey Bada\$\$, that illustrate the possibilities of a non-essentialized, critical Han. Chu’s examples of contemporary diasporic Korean writings demonstrate the conceptual possibilities of a postmemory Han by which one may imagine a critical sense of diaspora. Indeed, critical Han and Korean diaspora may help negotiate the difficulties of Asian American Studies that are highlighted in Anthony Shiu’s essay, the danger of focusing efforts around a general racial analytic of grief. In fact, Lily Cho’s writing on diaspora strengthens the resonance

between diaspora and Han, to translate sorrow as Han when she writes, “[diaspora] is constituted in the spectrality of sorrow and the pleasures of ‘obscure miracles of connection’” (15). In this dissertation, I thus locate what Jennifer Cho calls mel-*han*-cholia as a particular entry point into a discussion of “not so much the validity of one’s grief over another’s, but the state’s institutional apparatuses, which simultaneously produce and manage the grief of inassimilable minority groups” (38).

Ethnopoetics

Developing a focus on Han, this dissertation draws on Shirley Lim’s call for ethnopoetics. In the previous section, what becomes pronounced is the need for new language. Shirley Lim’s case for ethnopoetics argues that Asian American poetry needs to be read with attention to aspects of style, linguistics, and cultural context. Ethnopoetics is more popularly a tradition spearheaded by Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock in the 1960s. Rothenberg’s edited collection *Technicians of the Sacred* brings together “primitive and archaic” poetries from non-European cultures as works of technicians, “specifically in their relation to the ‘sacred’ as something they can create or capture (ix-x). The sacred is drawn from Mircea Eliade’s work in *Shamanism*, which carries the subtitle *Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Ecstasy alludes to dreams and trances through which the shaman “is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world” (27). In his later work *Sacred and Profane*, Eliade describes the sacred as “pre-eminently the *real*, at once power, efficacy, the source of life and fecundity,” which is set in opposition to the profane (28). The sacred and the profane, according to Eliade, are “two modalities of experience,” separated by an abyss (ibid. 14). The sacred is not my focus as much as ethnopoetics, however, it is noteworthy that Eliade devotes a chapter each to the subjects of space and time. What is

perhaps more relevant to the discussion at hand is how “reading projects [modern man] out of his personal duration and incorporates him into other rhythms, makes him live in another ‘history’” (ibid. 205). Lim’s ethnopoetics understands the need for

a specific sensibility trained to understand and appreciate the surface stylistic features of folkloristic and local effects; a linguistic knowledge of the original language of the poet necessary to apprehend the author’s intentions; and an informed socio-cultural approach which counteracts the privileging of the dominant culture. (59)

This hermeneutics of ethnopoetics differs from Rothenberg’s ethnopoetics, in that the latter identifies “primitive” poetries in order to declare they are not so primitive after all, because really “‘primitive’ means complex” (xx). Lim’s ethnopoetics is not only interested in the complexity of ethnic American experience, but in the correction of “the inherent bias of the Anglo-American mainstream [...] to enrich our common literary culture by creating readers capable of appreciating the literary works of other ethnic groups” (51). Put differently, hermeneutics of ethnopoetics encourages a more discerning relation to language so that Asian American experience is neither only a fetishized signifier nor absented from the frame.

As with diaspora and Han, the challenge is to understand ethnopoetics, pace Hall, metaphorically not literally, which is of course the aim of reading poetry. Korean diaspora is to be understood phenomenologically, as a phenomenon produced by different histories of migration, and Han is an affect that offers critical language to open into discussions of grief as well as utopic possibilities. Sandra Kim and Seo-Young Chu both harness Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory to describe the haunting availability of diaspora and Han for those of ethnic Korean descent. It is not only phenomenological, but as Chu gestures in her essay, it is metonymically intergenerational, genetic, biological in a science fiction sense. “[T]he telepathic effect of intersubjective consciousness, the telepathic effect of postmemory han,” extends “a telepathic network of looks wherein recognition spans miles

and generations” (116, 118). There is a resonance here with Eliade’s writings on shamanism and the reading experience, which is not only charged with a primitive or primeval sense of being, but illustrates how contemporary culture is charged with traces of geopolitical and sociocultural histories. In fact, in an issue of a journal titled *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics*, a compilation of transcriptions from a 1975 symposium co-edited by Rothenberg, Sylvia Wynter’s included piece precisely takes up this relation between the sociocultural and the ethnic. In “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” Wynter responds to a point in George Quasha’s contribution, “The Age of the Open Secret,” in which he defines ethnopoetics in terms of “a *relation* between a *We* and an *Other*” (78). The Wynter writes, “The main argument of my talk hinges on the assertion that *Ethnopoetics* can only have validity, if it is explored in a context of *sociopoetics* where the *socio* firmly places the *ethnos* in its concrete historical particularity” (78). Tracing a historical development of the we-other relation, she continues, “If Ethnopoetics is our *self-making*—as Quasha argues—then it is, imperatively, first of all, a negating of the present *dominant self*, structured by the contemporary social forces, *a self*, *a we* that exists only through the negation of an *Other*” (79). In other words, ethnopoetics, less innocently, does not recuperate the complex primitive from the “primitive,” but recuperates the complex self from the its own design of inhuman demise.

Wynter explicates a development of a Western bourgeois subject and implicates the intersecting categories of race and class, reminiscent of Stuart Hall’s statement that “race is the modality in which class is lived” (1978: 94): “*Racism* was the FORM through which, in the context of the world market economy, the class structure as relationship between core and periphery peoples expressed itself” (1976: 84). The significance of culture and the possibilities of ethnopoetics, against “the *heresy of humanism*” are foregrounded with the example of “black popular culture—spirituals, blues, jazz, reggae, Afro-Cuban music—and

its manifold variants [in which] the blacks reinvented themselves as a WE that needed no OTHER to constitute their Being; that laid down the cultural parameters of a concretely universal *ethnos*” (ibid. 85). Lim’s proposal for readings of Asian American poetry as ethnopoetics particularly resonates with Wynter’s closing statements:

The real cultural changes that take place only take place in those areas where, as with the nineteenth century Ghost-Dance and the Peyote cult of the American Indians, elements of the culture formed a matrix, drew in stranger elements and used this new entity as part of their rebellion against this blocking of their existence, of its creative dynamic; created a new cultural form as an accusation against cultural destitution, and as the dynamic of revolt.

[...]

If we approach it from this perspective, we release the potential transformative effect of this conference by approaching the CULTURES OF THE OTHER in order to construct an alternative process of making ourselves human; and to free the Western concept of humanism from its tribal aspect of WE and the OTHER, transforming its abstract universal promise into the concretely human global, the concretely WE. (ibid. 89)

A hermeneutics of ethnopoetics is therefore neither a stray variant of mysticism nor a tourism of orientalisms. It is, as evident when paired with Wynter’s writings, a decidedly instructional reading that moves beyond “erudition [and] interpretation” toward the transformation of the abstract(ed) into the concrete (Lim 59). As the earlier discussion of diaspora and Han suggest, this concerns phenomenon and memory, or more reductively, modes of perception. My study is not only concerned with poetry as a genre of written work, but rather, the diasporic ethnopoetics of Korean American cultural production. The following chapters constitute a montage of ethnopoetics working out of a sociopoetics, the latter which Wynter defines as the ideological meaning of the “overall context of the relation between First/Third World” that is mystified and hidden “in a Western-dominated language” (88-9). The concern therefore lies with language, particularly in attempts “to negate

division” (93n43). As I aim to illustrate, each of the artists seizes upon discoveries in language and draws out a diasporic ethnopoetics.

The first chapter begins with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s singular work of avant-garde poetry, *DICTEE*. In *DICTEE*, Cha illustrates an ethnopoetics that works through and out of a sociopoetics. The previous decade of the 1970s saw the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, the production of Frank Chin’s plays, as well as the publication of the *Aiiieeeee!* anthology of Asian American writings. The 1970s also saw the development of psychoanalytic film theory and semiotics by thinkers writing in French. It was during this period that Cha’s studies and art practice at the University of California, Berkeley and a spring semester at the Centre d’Études Américain du Cinéma in Paris led her to certain tools in her “looking for the roots of the language before it is born on the tip of the tongue” (2009: 2). There is no dearth of scholarship on *DICTEE*, much of which is drawn to the experimental poetics as well as matters of identification in the text. Like Sue J. Kim, I consider the significance of Cha’s edited collection *APPARATUS* for a reading of *DICTEE*, which is to say, I draw on a motif that binds the collection of essays by film theorists and practitioners such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, Roland Barthes, and Maya Deren: the primeval cave. *DICTEE* opens with a scene of cave writing, which, as Michael Stone-Richards explains in his reading of the text, should be considered as a matter of depiction rather than a matter to decipher. Turning attention from interpretation of the image to an interpretation of the facticity of the image unmoors readers from positions of literary mastery and fluent literacy. Here, a rhetorical lens of literary study helps to negotiate the pressures of histories and languages that threaten at every turn to collapse the textual engagement with histories and languages into an essential understanding about the text that inevitably turns to the author. In other words, the challenge is to maintain and sustain the

active process of reading in a productive tension with the apparatus of language, to linger in the space of a sound and catch on a trace of what is invoked through language. For this, I also draw on psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche's notion of the enigmatic signifier to draw out the space of sound, of noise, that is organized as, through, and by language. As Allyson Stack explains, "[a]n enigmatic signifier is something which signals—an address that lacks a signified while still retaining its interpellative function" (66). Although literary studies often assigns the address of a text to the author, addressed to a reader, the enigmatic signifier opens this closed scene to consider how the forms of address, the language, is also transmitted, passing through individuals. Regarding the "interpellative function," the notion of the enigmatic signifier draws out a key meditation in *DICTEE*: language's effect of dis/possession.

Discussions of *DICTEE* also include the topic of shamanism. On one hand, Cha's text invokes the Muses, as well as Sappho, drawing on a Western tradition of channeling poetry and the arts through female bodies that coheres in the figure of the diseuse. On the other hand, Cha also syncretizes a Korean shamanist tale that scholars have identified as the myth of Pari Kongju (Princess Pari), with biblical tales and stories of Catholic saints such as Joan of Arc and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. A reading of *DICTEE* as ethnopoetics therefore seems particularly apt, in the Rothenberg-Eliade tradition of hierophany, as a manifestation of the sacred through poetic expression. However, per Wynter, ethnopoetics demands a reading through sociopoetics for an ethical contextualization of the poetic expression. In terms of Roland Barthes's mythologized grain of the voice, an ethnopoetics without sociopoetics misses the points that constitute the grain, the texture of the sound. The shamanist dimension of an appropriate reading of ethnopoetics is therefore attuned to the sociopoetic dynamics of dis/possession, how language dis/locates an individual on cultural

terrain. In the case of *DICTEE*, what Cha offers readers is a sophisticated world of words, through which readers are led to perform the dis/possession, the dis/location, as they follow the disease in what Stone-Richards identifies as a katabasis, a mythological, mythopoetic descent into an ethnopoetic process of identification. This ethnopoetic process both seduces and resists readerly understanding, by which I identify the apparitional figure of the disease as transpacific ghou. Sounding a figure of haunting as well as the Korean homophonic word for “cave,” the transpacific ghou aims to invoke the shamanist channeling that gives shape to what otherwise remains invisible, the psychic and spiritual dynamics that are negotiated within and by the apparatus of language. My reading aims to perform the dramatization of language in *DICTEE*, not only to describe the transpacific ghou but to echolocate from within the reading process, a dramatization of a response to an enigmatic signifier of language en tout. As available in the section titles, I proceed from the inscription of the epigraph to the eponymous lesson of dictation. From the dictation, I open into the transcription in Cha’s ethnopoetics, to read out the possibility of a reverse-transcription. Reverse-transcription is a borrowing from J.H. Prynne’s meditations on reading poetry, which I articulate with Seo-Young Chu’s “telepathic reverse-text” to read out postmemory Han in the channeling. In this reconstructive process, what becomes available at the limits of language is a diasporic ethnopoetics that articulates across historical and geopolitical breaks and draws on a resonance across divisions.

In the second, third, and fourth chapters, the dissertation shifts from an arguably academic and avant-garde (con)text to vernacular ethnopoetics. Cha’s work guides my readings in the following chapters with continued focus on diaspora, Han, and ethnopoetics. The second chapter explores these three lines in the verbal arts of Denizen Kane (né Dennis Kim). Whereas Cha’s *DICTEE* demonstrates an impossibility of voice through the textual

figuration of a disease who remains to be formed by the reader's eye, Denizen Kane's recorded audio and performances tap directly into the sound of space. As with my reading of *DICTEE*, chapter two begins with the opening of Denizen Kane's oeuvre, a song called "Han." "Han" is the opening track of a collaborative Asian American spoken word album titled *Broken Speak* by I Was Born With Two Tongues, a group that aligned political, social, and artistic interests against Asian racialization. "Han" spotlights Denizen Kane's voice and draws together a hip-hop bricolage of different vernacular styles including Korean storytelling (p'ansori) and spoken word reminiscent of Gil Scott-Heron. In this second chapter, I explore the key of loss in Denizen Kane's oeuvre, in Jennifer Cho's sense of mel-*han*-cholia. Denizen Kane's moniker alludes to a complicated sense of loss, of both cinematic and biblical magnitude. On multiple occasions, Denizen Kane shares a sense of the personal loss of his brother. This intimate loss is entangled in a mel-*han*-cholia that also accommodates what Asian American scholars like David Eng and Shinhee Han call racial melancholia, which is the result of "assimilation into the national fabric" (348). Anne Anlin Cheng also describes this "origin of loss" in terms of a melancholia that persists in Asian American identification, an impossible pursuit after what one has lost despite not knowing what has been lost. As a matter of Asian American subjectivity, the loss is paradoxically what produces a cultural sense of self as an assimilated member of the citizenry. Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics takes on this dilemma, motivated by his own personal loss to move through mel-*han*-cholia. In juxtaposition with the "reverse-transcription" of postmemory Han in *DICTEE*, I read Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics with lenses borrowed from Jae Hoon Lee's and Wonhee Anne Joh's studies of Han and Jeong, as well as relevant works of ethnomusicology and Asian American performance studies. Following a pairing of the first two songs on *Broken Speak*, I trace an affective melody through Denizen Kane's work with

hip-hop trio Typical Cats, to his solo album projects. In effect, I argue that there is a movement from “Han” through an interplay of Jeong, an affect of bonding or invested care, that leads to his stage play *Tree City Legend*, in which Denizen Kane introduces the Korean notion of “Maum,” what Theresa Cha calls “spirit-heart.” In other words, Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics offers a glimpse into a rearticulation of what may be a notion of love.

In the third chapter, I explore the ethnopoetics of director Justin Chon’s 2017 film *Gook*, which leads audiences through a fictional retelling of the first day of the 1992 Los Angeles unrest in the city of Paramount. My approach in this chapter shifts from semiotics and psychoanalysis to narratology and hermeneutics. The 1992 unrest was precipitated by the Los Angeles Police Department’s brutal assault of Rodney King and the 1991 shooting of Latasha Harlins by Soon Ja Du. Video footage of both events circulated on public television, and the court verdict on the former ignited a pressurized social tension fueled by the lack of justice in the court verdict on the latter. Chon’s film aims to dramatize an intimate entanglement between the children of two families, Black and Korean, in the absence of their late parents. Whereas my readings of ethnopoetics in the first two chapters locate loss in Han, the cultural affect is not explicitly available in this chapter. Instead, I locate the ethnopoetics in the film in a language lesson, as it concerns storytelling in a more general sense. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and concepts of narrative, such as emplotment, I focus on how Chon configures the narrative, or organizes time. As Ricoeur says, “We belong to history before telling stories or writing history” (2016: 257). On one hand, there is a significant language lesson that “turns events into historical negotiations” (Shapiro 28). This is, of course, the major aim of Chon’s film, and stories in general. However, the title figure of the “gook” is also an event insofar as it assigns a racialized figure with the holding of a sense of time, of war, of a history of violence. As a slur that

articulates histories of imperial aggression and violence, this racialization performs a complicated function of legitimizing and naturalizing such relations of conquest and domination. To read into the language lesson's rearticulation of relations, I bring together notions of a social grammar and aesthetic sublime through the dimension of racialization. Racial grammar and racial sublime thus prompt considerations of where and how racialized subjects are located and recognized in frames of perception. Borrowing Gerard Genette's concept of focalization, one can see how the visual field in frames of perception are shaped by epistemological mis/understandings. Put differently, racialized subjects are contained by a negative feedback loop of knowledge and humanity, both of which are structures of social reality. The language lesson that I locate aims to break this looping of racializing perception, by drawing on the traces of language in the naming. For example, Korean American scholars and artists have noted how the Korean American community's naming of the 1992 unrest (*sa-i-gu*) is in keeping with a Korean/East Asian tradition of identifying historical events by their date-marks. The significance here is in the resonance between *sa-i-gu* (4-2-9) and *sa-il-gu* (4-1-9), the latter referring to April 19, 1960, the date when people of South Korea's nascent democracy overthrew the authoritarian government of the First Republic. This resonance not only implicates the role of the U.S. government as an authority in both events, but also makes available a juxtaposition of democratic societies that does not limit analysis to either racial dynamics or cold civil war politics. Although neither the language lesson nor the film use the Korean appellation *sa-i-gu*, the language lesson about the title figure nonetheless pulls at a thread on the knot of transpacific geopolitics, which leads one back to the Korean War. Chon's film is not only invested in this ghostly past of military engagements, but also significantly concerned with the social interactions in the narrative. There is a notable presence of absence that marks the loss of the parents for the two

entangled families. Whereas the language lesson aims to disentangle haunting lines of geopolitics that remain unknowable to the characters in the film, the discursive situation aims to build a relationship between members of the two families. As I will explain, audiences are challenged to mourn and feel with the characters through the film. As a retelling of tragedy, *Gook* opens into a significant space of perception in which audiences are led to understand the sophisticated workings of a sociopoetics that in turn challenges audiences to remember and reconsider the subject(s) of *Gook*.

In the fourth and last chapter, I read select works from the oeuvre of Los Angeles rapper Dumbfoundead (né Jonathan Park). In “These Are The Breaks: Hip-Hop and AfroAsian Cultural (Dis)Connections,” Oliver Wang provides a historical outline of Asian American rap. The early 1990s saw the rise of the first wave of “raptivists,” “social activists who turned to hip-hop as a means to reach the public through popular culture,” and “performed mostly at Asian American collegiate and community events” (149, 150). In the middle of the decade, Wang identifies “underground artists,” who “favor more conventional hip-hop narratives,” and “largely avoid the rhetoric of racial pride (let alone exclusivity) in favor of appealing to the idea of ‘skills’ (i.e., talent) as being the marker of authenticity rather than origin” (ibid. 150). And in the later part of the decade, “a flurry of AZN-related songs began to emerge online, using instrumental tracks from popular hip-hop songs but with new lyrics that expressed racial pride and superiority,” but with an “understanding of race [that] is considerably uncritical and problematic” (ibid. 150, 151). Wang’s categories are set in relation to Asian American identity, and one might locate Dumbfoundead in the second grouping, with specific ties to the Los Angeles underground scene at Project Blowed. Located at Leimert Park, a couple miles south of Koreatown, Project Blowed provided a community space for local artists to hone their crafts. Drawing on Dumbfoundead’s weekly

commute to his battle rap training ground, I borrow notions of *détournement*, a diversion or divergence, and *dérive*, a drift, from the psychogeography of the postwar avant-garde group the Situationists International to explore Dumbfoundead's negotiation and navigation through the discursive terrain of culture. In this chapter, I begin with a rap battle between Dumbfoundead and Tantrum, another Asian American battle rapper. The Situationist terms offer helpful language to describe what unfolds in the gathering of the rap battle. Each rapper deflects verbal barbs and also manipulates popular culture and stereotypes in a demonstration of their lyrical prowess. The Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle is significant because the two Asian American artists demonstrate difficulties and possibilities of language in a situation of what is explicitly a language-game.

From the rap battle, I carry the notion of *détournement* forward to a music video, in order to read Dumbfoundead's ethnopoetics through the lens of what Michel Foucault calls a heterotopia. Foucault develops his notion of the heterotopia out of his reading experience with an essay by Jorge Luis Borges, in which the disparate worlds cohere as an *im*/possibility in a particular semiotic space. Bringing together the Situationists and Foucault to read the music video "Murals," I demonstrate how the song "Murals" at once opens into two worlds. There is, on one hand, the fictional narrative within the music video, a conventional narrative of a typical individual's life growing up in Koreatown. This fictional narrative ultimately resolves back into the completion of the actual mural, which charts the development of another narrative. This second narrative includes the making of the music video as well as the mural. Both narratives, as well as the singular mural, produce a complicated repetition that constitutes a selfhood in the form of, per the refrain, a legend. Appropriating the famous phrase from the popular children's tale of Snow White for the refrain, Dumbfoundead's appropriation of authority illustrates how his ethnopoetics

negotiates conventional sociopoetics through a discursive negotiation of images as constituted by stories. I close out this last chapter with a reading of a pair of songs, “24K-Town” and “Are We There Yet,” in order to return to the discursive dimension in terms of language and sound. Returning to the middle of his oeuvre of rap album projects, I invoke Henri Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis and the psychoanalytic concept of *jouissance* to consider how his work negotiates images according to a navigation system that is attuned to a sense of spatial location. In other words, I aim to explore the depth of his ethnopoetics beyond the surface of cultural play, which would otherwise close the conversation on the significance that might be available in his work. On one hand, his relation to the space of Koreatown reveals a certain responsibility that finds position in relation to the symbolic order of popular American culture. In more explicit terms, racialized as an Asian in America, Dumbfoundead moves through spaces with an understanding of his prescribed social location. Attuned to the cultural capital, he is also aware of location in the sense that space is defined by the gathering of individuals. To locate both *jouissance* and social relations in Dumbfoundead’s work therefore identifies a significance in his ethnopoetics that cannot be so easily represented within the symbolic order. Enjoyment and suffering in Koreatown thus offers general audiences a lure by which they may continue to know the other, but which, I argue, rearticulates suffering and pleasure for the possible perception of heterotopias that would in turn unsettle the audience’s position in relation to the ethnic enclave of Koreatown. Put differently, the possibility and desire for a glimpse of utopia may reveal the impossibility of utopia as anything other than heterotopia, challenging audiences to then make sense of responsibilities toward the difficulties of enjoyment and suffering in relation.

In sum, this dissertation is interested with im/possibilities of community, realities of conflict, and counter/poetics of discursive mediation. I tune into what is available in the

work of each artist as ethnopoetics, not to essentialize or pathologize conditions of diaspora, which is to say loss or exile, but to bring out a sense of the weight of histories and the clashes of the past that are to be found in each of their works. My reading of diasporic ethnopoetics is therefore interested in the re-orienting play by which each of the artists articulates a vernacular voicing. Although this dissertation began in part as an inquiry into cultural essence, in the process the inquiry came into its own as a study of the necessary cultures that prove essential for social relations, that is, the play that encourages the work that may remember not to forget.

CHAPTER 1:

詩³: “SHE becomes HER”: A Muse, A Ghoul, & Enigmatic

Signifier

“[...] language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face”

Giorgio Agamben, “Che cos’è un dispositivo?”

“In the mind there is a continual play of obscure images which coming between the eyes and their prey seem pictures on the screen at the movies.”

William Carlos Williams, *Kore in Hell* XVIII

³ The Sino-character, “poetry,” pronounced “*she*” (long e) in Korean, “*sher*” (approximate to “sure”) in Mandarin Chinese.

In Seo-Young Chu's conceptualization of postmemory Han, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* is one of a handful of examples that illustrates how Korean American writers may traverse an impossible transpacific gulf between generational realities through the "shimmering" poetics of postmemory Han that is quasi-biological, a genetic inheritance that one might feel. This dissertation begins with a first chapter on *DICTEE* because something enigmatic indeed seems to shimmer beyond, or perhaps through, language in Cha's text. There may be a glimpse of such shimmering in Korean American scholar Elaine Kim's reading.

Reading in *Dictée* the words of the Korean folk song *Bong Sun Hwa* was profoundly unsettling to me because I had never expected to see lines from that song on a printed page in English. When I learned those lines as a child, they seemed from another world, a place that the English-speakers around me knew not the slightest thing about. It was not just that the words were Korean. It was what the song meant—history, memories, and feelings of people so remote even from me, although in a vastly different way from their remoteness to most other Americans, that they might have been from another planet. And yet my parents, the human beings to whom I was the closest and who shaped my self-hood and gave me my life, defined themselves according to this history, these memories and feelings. (4)

In the next paragraph, Kim offers readers an anecdotal definition of the folk song, which refers to the flowering genus *Impatiens* or "touch-me-not," as transplanted to the state of Maryland in the 1950s. According to her father, the song was suppressed under colonial rule. The folk song is a complicated enigmatic signifier, and "[i]t was not just that the words were Korean." For Kim, the appearance of the song, transcribed into English by an avant-garde Korean American artist, reaches back in time to reveal the disruptive exilic nature of a Korean twentieth century. In Chu's essay, there is what may be a necessarily strategic collapse of "Korean," like a palimpsest, for a Korean American postmemory han. Postmemory Han refers Chu's readers back to the Cold/Civil/Korean War rather than the colonial period. Nonetheless, Chu's descriptive choice of words is so incredibly resonant, because "shimmering" animates Kim's remembering regarding the folk song. In fact, there

is another resonance that alights here from the autobiography of St. Thérèse, who is an important figure in *DICTEE*. It is a moment when Thérèse of Lisieux recounts “a *symbolic* action” from her widowed father in response to her confessed desire to enter the Carmelite order, “not realizing its full meaning.”

Going up to a low wall, he pointed to some *little white flowers*, like lilies in miniature, and plucking one of them, he gave it to me, explaining the care with which God brought it into being and preserved it to that very day. While I listened I believed I was hearing my own story, so great was the resemblance between what Jesus had done for the *little flower* and *little Thérèse*. (108)

Through *Bong Sun Hwa*, Elaine Kim happens to catch on the significance, or enigmatic signifier, of some symbolic sounds in Cha’s ethnopoetics. What becomes clear by way of Kim’s anecdote is how an enigmatic signifier accrues opacity through the discursive realm of culture, “revers[ing] the trajectory of the assimilation paradigm that insists national belonging trumps the melancholy of the past” (J. Cho 57). The cast of postmemory Han suggests discursive slips, which Chu identifies as ungrammatical disruptions, and it is through the swirl of language, sound formation, and shadow play that I consider how Cha’s *DICTEE* can teach us to read postmemory Han in contemporary works of vernacular culture off the page.

Although there is what seems to be a clear disjuncture between Cha’s work and the ethnopoetics of the three men in the chapters that follow, on the torsion point of gender, my reading follows the shimmering in language as it makes available a shamanist context of language play. In the chapters that follow, I turn to children of American multiculturalism, a play on Min Song’s “Children of 1965,” to consider a question of process, an unending writerly reading of s(h)immering postmemory Han that necessarily and strategically transgresses the bounds of language through diasporic ethnopoetics. In my own reading of *DICTEE*, there is a confusingly haunting shimmering, as a second-generation Korean

American born into late eighties American multiculturalism in the mid-Atlantic Tri-State Area. For example, *Bong Sun Hwa* does not recall a song, but calls me to perform an internet search. What I gather returns me to a curious personal relationship to the song, located in memory. We are watching Korean television at home in New Jersey. My father is at work in New York City, and my mother is back home after her own shift at work. Something on the television prompts her to share a brief anecdote with me and my sister, both back from school. When she was young, the girls would wrap their fingertips with Bong Sun Hwa, as a natural nail coloring. She was speaking to us in Korean. Not unlike Kim, this childhood seems to be of another world, another planet, to which our American scenes are articulated and mediated by the Korean language, the radio, the newspaper, the church, the calligraphy. To return to the present moment, Cha's *DICTEE* offers a language lesson through which one might learn what it means to re-call, to understand how language is not so clear when the formation of sounds can shift from a shimmer to a simmer. It is this space of sound (in)to which I now turn.

Epigraph: Hear & the Call

In the epigraph to this chapter, Giorgio Agamben writes on how one is captured by the apparatus of language and emerges as subject. Inquiring into Michel Foucault's "apparatus," Agamben draws out the problem of "the relation between individuals as living beings and the historical element" (6), and following a series of maneuvers into "a theological genealogy of economy" (ibid. 8), he proposes a new context in which to situate Foucault's technical term.

To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses. (ibid. 14)

Agamben's purpose is to recontextualize the "apparatus" thirty years after Foucault's use of the term, to redefine how apparatuses "in the current phase of capitalism [...] no longer act as much through the production of a subject, as through the process of what can be called desubjectification" (ibid. 20). Although Agamben helpfully delineates "apparatus" through his philological inquiry into the "management of men," film theorists had earlier drawn out this process in the 1981 anthology *APPARATUS* edited by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. In the opening essay, Roland Barthes explains this process by way of the "filmic image (sound included)" which he described as a "lure." "The historical subject like the filmgoer I am trying to picture is also glued to the ideological discourse" (3). One might say that subjectivity is a matter that concerns discursive adherence. Barthes goes on to suggest a transcendent break by "taking off," which is to "let [one]self be *twice* fascinated by the image and by its surroundings," to "complicate a 'relationship' with a 'situation.'" The situation here is discursive, and the lure is comprised by "stereotypes with which [the situation] articulates its discourse." *DICTEE* demonstrates how this discursive relationship with the image functions to capture the subject through language (sound included), which is to say, the desire for and disruption to discursive adherence concerns organized forms of noise as translated into a visual order. What I hope to make clear is the opacity of this translating act.

DICTEE reveals an interpretive challenge, to reconsider perception. Sue J. Kim explains how such revelation is made possible in Cha's work as "[t]he text 'slows down' the processes of signification so that, in a sense, the pieces become visible" (161). The challenge lies therein, to see what Agamben calls "the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses" in the workings of the discursive text. Again, the problem is interpretation and perception, desire and disruption. Readers are most explicitly challenged in the visible order

with the unrecognizable sound in the opening epigraph. As Elaine Kim notes, the orthography

marks it as having been done after liberation. The suggestion seems to be that Korean nationalists in Japan carved the words as if the inscription had been made by a forced laborer. Whether or not these speculations are rooted in official Japanese attempts to deny or deflect criticism of colonial atrocities, they in no way reduce the symbolic significance of the inscription, nor do they challenge our readings of it in terms of *Dictée*. (25n9)

The political dimension here in the inscription is a matter of historicizing the conscription of Korean bodies in service to the Japanese empire. The Korean script reads, right to left, “mother/ I miss you/ I am hungry/ I want to go/ [to childhood] home.” Whether one reads left to right or right to left, the phrases do not necessarily read any less easily in either direction. Notably, the nostalgic desires on either side lead readers to the same phrase of hunger set in between, holding primal understanding at a frustrating historical distance. Michael Stone-Richards draws attention to the texture of the epigraph, “the very texture of memory fading to the archaic,” not simply the “decipherment, but rather [...] the function of the image, or, in other words, its depiction” (47). The commentary here is provocative, because if one is to ask about the depiction, it is ostensibly the engraved voice of a Korean adult (male) laborer that is reduced to “the very texture of memory fading to the archaic.” The challenge here is twofold, an interpretive matter of language and history. However, “correct” interpretation does not necessarily lead to a transcendence of a subject of conflict.

In the early collection of critical reflections on *DICTEE*, Shelley Sunn Wong notes, “Curiously, the handful of articles on *Dictée* that have been published to date make no reference whatsoever to the frontispiece, though it contains the only Korean script (Hangul) in the entire work” (107). In the opening essay, Elaine Kim writes, “even a translation [...] would not render it conceptually decipherable in the West, where Koreans and Korean history remain for the most part unknown” (10). What resists conceptual decipherment, as

Stone-Richards remarks, is the depiction, which Cha describes as “unfathomable the words” (32). What cannot be rendered is the historical moment in which “The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue” (ibid. 45). To borrow a phrase from Yunte Huang, “Cha’s penchant for frustrating hermeneutic desires” not only positions the reader within such historical entanglements, *DICTEE* challenges readers to perceive how knots of language also fray beyond what is simply present. As Stone-Richards identifies in the caption of a frame for a series of family portraits, language holds a ghostly inheritance to be spelled out, “what could HAve been kNot one” (Lewallen 110). The hermeneutic dimension implicates readers, which Huang terms Cha’s “reader-as-conspirator thesis.” What is the conspiracy? The subject of deception that is depiction. As Paul Ricoeur writes, one needs to move from reading out “an intention hidden behind the text [to reading into] a world unfolded in front of it” (2016: 53). Reading is, lest we forget, returning sound to images. In fact, this opens into Sue J. Kim’s problematization of the universalized implied reader located by *DICTEE* critics. The idea of a reader already preconceives how one perceives a text, and sound is nowhere to be found. This must be kept in mind as Ricoeur’s hermeneutics implicates the reader in a shift from “the referential moment” and the “sense of the work [that] is its internal organization” to “the mode of being unfolded in front of the text” (ibid.). In *DICTEE*, this unseen space of moving sounds accrues a mystical dimension that may lead readers in a call and response, or more appropriately, to hear a call as listeners in Cha’s textual auditorium.

In a 2008 collection of essays titled *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, scholars propose a method of reading that may “acknowledge both the variety of other reasons and occasions for which they might also want to use English and that we treat those reasons and occasions as critical resources for, rather than impediments to, their

effective use of English” (x). As Kenneth Burke writes, “Whereas poetic language is a kind of symbolic action, for itself and in itself, and whereas scientific action is a preparation for action, rhetorical language is inducement to action (or to attitude, attitude being an incipient act)” (42). In other words, rhetorical language is a call to action, which the contributors of *Representations* take up in exercises of close listening. The editors in turn call for readings of Asian American literary works that are critically sensitive to various uses of English. Min-Zhan Yu and Bruce Horner bring together a collection of essays that are sensitive to “our need to treat the Others of transcultural communication as agents of knowledge making rather than the objects of ‘study’ and domination” (vii). Indeed, Asian American literature has often made such interventions and inquiries into how Asian American subjects are heard. However, *DICTEE* singularly throws the health of one’s “hearing” into question through breaks in and across language(s). Laura Hyun Yi Kang writes, “Central to this project is Cha’s highly skillful unsettling of the reader’s own ethno- and logocentric notions of linguistic proficiency” (83). The rhetorical play in *DICTEE* may in fact unsettle the relations of belonging in Frantz Fanon’s words, “A man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language” (2). *DICTEE*, I argue, draws a parallel between literary works, or orderings of sound-images, with subject formations, as the text calls on the reader to perceive language anew through a defamiliarizing “listening” to how we “hear” language.

As Sue J. Kim writes, *DICTEE* deals with “particular histories and contexts.” The difficulty is in the legibility of these “particular histories and contexts,” which are “coupl[ed] with formal strategies” for articulation. I turn to an inconspicuous moment in *DICTEE*, in order to draw out the stakes of listening to the articulations and open into Cha’s textual auditorium as a space of what Mircea Eliade calls hierophany. In the CLIO

HISTORY section of *DICTEE*, Cha imbricates various historical documents including photographs and letters to reveal what “exist only in the larger perception of History’s recording” (32). The section ends with a photocopy of Cha’s handwritten draft of earlier pages (40-41, 38). Huang draws attention to the “readerly practice *Dictee* has obviously invited,” to “re-witness again and again the scene of execution” on page thirty-nine. There is another curious rhetorical moment that calls on readers to re-witness, through the calling of a name. “She called the name Ahn Joong Kun five times” (28). Ahn Joon Kun is an historical figure who assassinated Japanese Resident-General of Korea and Prime Minister Ito Hirobumi in Harbin, China on October 26, 1909. Franklin Rausch explains how Ahn “challenged the foundations of the Japanese colonial project in Korea,” and yet, “the foundation of An’s thought was regional peace and Pan-Asianism in particular, the belief that the ‘yellow race’ should work together in order to protect itself from the imperialism of the ‘white race.’” In other words, Ahn identified Ito as a threat to regional peace and modern development, however, his assassination paradoxically facilitated Japan’s colonization of Korea, annexing the protectorate, and notably Ahn was executed as a criminal rather than a prisoner of war. “The nation the enemy the name becomes larger than its own identity” (32). Walter Lew opens this call with a meditation over nine pages in his poetic response to *DICTEE, EXCERPTS*, which also includes a portrait of Ahn as well as images of his calligraphy. Ahn was particularly admired for his calligraphy, even by his prison guards, and his works during imprisonment are verifiable by his handprint. “He was 31 when he met at Noryong-k’ari with eleven comrades determined to fight to the death; they each severed one finger and wrote ‘Taehan tongnip’ [Korean independence] in blood on a Korean flag” (Lew 49). Committed to amiable relations in the region as a staunch supporter of Korean independence, his works of calligraphy, gifted to his prison guards, demonstrated his

nuanced position in the complicated situation, marked as the works were by his willing sacrifice for Korean independence. However, as Rausch explicates in his article, Ahn's legacy remains as a site of increasing interpretive struggle. To call "the name Ahn Joong Kun five times" is perhaps a challenge to find out his person in the crowded juncture of (trans)national histories. As Cha writes pages later, "Their countenance evokes not the hallowed beauty, beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dy-ing" (37). On one hand, Ahn's name "becomes larger than [his] own identity," conscripted into battlegrounds of histories. Yet, there is a slide between languages, no matter how speculative, in which, "Ahn Joong Kun," not simply repeated but read out loud five times in succession, in Romanized form here as seen in the text, might cause a tongue to slip and speak out the Korean phrase an-juk-neun, a negation (an-) of the present progressive conjugation for the Korean verb "to die." The challenge then, how does one listen to the undying in the name of Ahn Joong Kun, through an evocation that hears beyond the "dy-ing"? Or, does this question of listening suggest a trace of undying substance in the name of the subject, what Agamben calls a living being?

The question of how *DICTEE* implicates the reader is an inquiring lesson that opens into dimensions of language, a meditation on what Jean Laplanche terms enigmatic signifier. An enigmatic signifier refers to a message, from parent to infant, that is enigmatic, because, on one hand, there is an excess of unconscious meaning from the parent, and on the other, the infant has not fully developed ways of receiving meaning. Allyson Stack describes "[a]n enigmatic signifier [a]s something which signals – an address that lacks a signified while still retaining its interpellative function. In other words, an 'enigmatic signifier' does not signify of, but does signify to" (66). Much of *DICTEE* criticism holds interest in sustaining the Asian American or Korean diasporic notes that echo with the apparition of a disease, to

locate the enigmatic signifier in relation to an identifiable position. However, as Hyo Kim writes, “the question of how the ‘specificity of Cha’s Korean American identity’ operates and becomes legible in ‘outlaw spaces’ that seem to be at odds with the social remains largely unanswered” (128). In other words, how is the enigmatic relation defined and mediated by the text of Cha the poet? Kim’s note on the open-ended, appropriative performance of Korean American identity in “interstitial outlaw spaces” gestures at the subjective cut of identity into an enigmatic relation, revealing a situational chasm of formal proportions that Stone-Richards defines as katabasis, a descent into “the persistent parallelism of materiality and psychic form [that] enables, finally, a strong sense of the term dictée to emerge, namely, as *trans*-scription, the possibly alternative inscription (proto-writing)” (113). A Korean American essence seems beyond the pale of law, insofar as it lies beyond the limits of what is safe and sound. *DICTEE* throws a reading experience into an enigmatic situation, so that readers may experience an “address [...] with no shared interpretative system” (Laplanche 79). The apparition of a diasporic identity seems to manifest in an unlawful space, which is interstitial precisely because it eludes easy ordering or configuration, where a rhetorical address is indeed an enigmatic situation.

Earlier, I described this with a borrowing from Eliade as a space of hierophany, which finds description in Stone-Richards’s reference to *DICTEE* as a “theurgy of sounding,” in which “sound becomes both figure and medium of articulation of this separation [as medium]” (145). To describe *DICTEE*’s textual auditorium as an apparatus of divine/divining sound returns one to the edited collection *APPARATUS*, which features variations of Plato’s allegory of the cave interspersed throughout. Put differently, the Korean diasporic identity in *DICTEE* operates as a ghoul, at once invoking a haunting presence, in the definition of ghoul as phantom, as well as the interstitial space between absence and

presence through a translingual echo, for a sounding of ghoulish in Korean translates back into English as “cave.” The wordplay here is productive precisely because ghoulish explicitly identifies an enigmatic signifier that resonates with a reading experience of *DICTEE*. Cha implicates the reader in a process of subject formation through a rhetorical apparatus of language(s).

The subjectivity of rhetoric, as subjective, “You are using the primary resource of human speech in a thoroughly realistic way [...] A call for help is quite ‘prejudiced’; it is the arrant kind of ‘wishful thinking’; it is not merely descriptive, it is hortatory. It is not just trying to tell how things are, in strictly ‘scenic’ terms; it is trying to move people.” (Burke 41)

If one reads *DICTEE* with an ear for rhetorical language, what is the hortatory motive?

Stone-Richards’s descriptive term katabasis is suggestive, because the cross-cultural mythical intertexts in *DICTEE* invoke mythical figures of liberation from throughout history. Most significantly, I identify *DICTEE* in an ethnopoetic context as a work of decolonization that leads readers through a process, like shamanic initiation, in which one experiences dismemberment and learns to move toward reconstitution from a space of deracinated relation to language.

The shamanic tradition is most available in the Korean variation that scholars locate in *DICTEE*, although mysticism in the text also extends to better known figures from Western religious tradition such as Joan of Arc and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Michael Stephens, one of the earliest scholars to write on *DICTEE*, notably invokes a cultural context of Korean spirits for his reading. His thick description is especially motivated by an autoethnographic inspiration, and though informed and supported by critical knowledge of poetic traditions, it is difficult not to note the elision of how the text mediates his readerly relation to Cha. Peculiarly, for Stephens the text is song, “[i]ts sound is that of a Korean woman speaking in her invented English” (191). Kun Jong Lee identifies Walter Lew as the

first to locate the shamanist myth of Princess Pali in *DICTEE*, and cites relevant scholars on this point in the notes to his essay, of whom Shu-mei Shih provides an incisive reading into the “complex tapestry of multiple self-narration” (157). Wayne Stein singularly offers a structural analysis of “how *Dictee* functions as a *kut*,” or a shamanic exorcism. Throughout these examples, what is clear is that Cha’s ethnopoetics invoke a shaman figure in a struggle of articulation. The story of Princess Pali specifically offers a story of mythical struggle. Michael Stone-Richards provides an articulate description of *DICTEE* in terms of shamanism:

[T]he scene depicted, re-enacted, is an initiation scene as a body is emptied in preparation for the entry of a greater force: this is an out-of-the-body experience, which, in time, may be more specifically culturally located as a *naerim-kut* during which there is an initiation for a Shaman (Mudang) in preparation for the displacement and vacancy of the body preparatory to possession. (96)

Stone-Richards describes the receipt of spirits, a *naerim-kut*, as a key trope in *DICTEE*.

Hwa-Young Chong writes, “The life of Mudang, then, becomes a path of liberation from illness, and at the same time, a channel to lead, heal, and liberate others” (24). Resonating with Eliade’s description of shamanic possession as “a theory of illness,” Chong identifies, in Eliade’s words, shamanic initiation as “two-fold initiation—ecstatic and didactic” (2004: 31, 14). In *DICTEE*, the text manifests a shamanic figure through the rhetorical power in Cha’s ethnopoetics.

Dictation: Hearing, the Caul

The unfolding hermeneutics here implicates the reader in what Ricoeur identifies as “imaginative variation of the ego,” an “unreali[zation of] myself” that sets reader and text in a metaphysical dialectic (2016: 55). In other words, “The metamorphosis of the world in play is also the playful metamorphosis of the ego.” Ricoeur draws out the critical edge of interpretation, “that man can project his emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and

unconstrained communication only on the basis of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage” (ibid. 57). In Cha’s work, “outlaw spaces” hold both the emancipation of the reader from his ego and reinterpretation of Korean diasporic identity, which foregrounds the difficult space of sound in the precarious endeavor of reading. As Derrida writes toward the end of his chapter titled “The Violence of the Letter” in *Of Grammatology*, “To recognize writing in speech, that is to say differance and the absence of speech, is to begin to think the lure” (1976: 139). In the explicit terms of the titular subject, language approximates the reader as a vessel for such cultural hermeneutics. In *DICTEE*, the section marked off for “DISEUSE” at the top of the page unfolds a shape of the speaker, “She mimicks the speaking.” The text sculpts a bust as the language directs a body through imaginative construction. “The entire lower lip would lift upwards then sink back to its original place [...] With a slight tilting of her head backwards, she would gather the strength in her shoulders and remain in this position” (3). As Constance M. Lewallen explains, Cha’s academic and artistic trajectory begins in higher education with an initial “concentrate[ion] on ceramic sculpture” before turning to performance art “accompanied by her live or recorded spoken words” (Cha 2009: 1). Guided by this biographical detail, the disease reads as an autoethnopoiesis rendered through broken speech, leading readers to also experience an initiation into the apparatus of language. “Now the weight begins from the uppermost back of her head, pressing downward. It stretches evenly, the entire skull expanding tightly all sides toward the front of her head. She gasps from its pressure, its contracting motion” (4). In Cha’s hands, language is summoned to reveal that “creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage” is not so simply emancipatory, but indeed disturbing, because it is a matter of subject formation, which is to say, a matter of embodiment.

This chapter begins with Agamben's recontextualization and definitional line of Foucault's apparatus, in order to draw attention to subject formation as a discursive process. Cha's invocation of Ahn Joong Kun offers a glimpse into how one's subjectivity is interpreted through imbrications of histories and contexts, not least of which includes the moment of encounter as represented through the call of the name. In *DICTEE*, this moment of encounter is what frustrates the reader's hermeneutic desire, because the poetic speaker remains unidentifiable, at least on terms many readers may assume, which is to say, the grounds of a cultural or linguistic tradition. In "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," Frantz Fanon offers a description of such a discursive process in his analysis of an "historical-racial schema [...] provided [...] by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" (2008: 91), supplementing an understanding with a discursive tradition. Stone-Richards identifies "not transference, but the encounter (*le rencontre*) [as] the operant category" in this experience (290). He continues,

For as is only too clear to Fanon, the elements of double-consciousness – second-sight, seeing oneself only through *another* consciousness, 'this sense of always looking at one's self [not oneself] through the eyes of another' (*SBF* 102), etc – are structurally the conditions of psychosis. (ibid.)

Stone-Richards invokes W.E.B. DuBois's notion of double-consciousness to illuminate Fanon's analysis of a racialized/colonized experience. The racialized encounter, which splits the receiving subject, acts on somebody, with the motivational force of discursive histories. Rey Chow articulates the significance of language with regard to the "racial epidermal schema" in the introduction to *Not Like A Native Speaker*:

This phenomenon of a *compulsory "self"-recognition* operates at a level that goes considerably beyond the logical questions about subjective consistency and volition because the knowledge and authority it bears comes from another scene, because the injunction of racialization has already been issued long before this particular

encounter, before this particular black person enters the picture in an individuated fashion. (6)

Chow's reference to "another scene" from "long before" resonates with Stone-Richards's invocation of DuBois's "second-sight" in a channel of spiritual content and embodied forms. The disease, Stone-Richards writes, is a fractured and fracturing form, "a figure [...] which embodies the forms of fortune teller (*disease de bonne aventure*), shaman (*Mudang*), and *récitante* (*Sprechstimme*)" (54). In *DICTEE*, in other words, the disease is given to readers as a figure who yields to language and is called upon by readers in engagements with the text. The disease is there for, and because of, the reader's anticipated call.

Cha's critical intervention into this topic of interpellation, on one hand, iterates the supplementary embodiment of imposed identification in a discursive process of subject formation. On the other, the shamanist and mysticist dimensions of *DICTEE* draw out the dynamics of power and desire through particular histories and contexts. As one reads the words on the page, the reader identifies a poetic speaker in the figure of the disease, and begins to form an image of the subject prompted by the foreign image of the epigraph, calls for translation, and broken language. The reader is effectively challenged in terms of poetic sensibility, and a frustrated reader arrives at an implicating litany of identificatory categories that may both affirm one's expectations about the poetic speaker "From A Far," what Derrida might call a "dangerous supplement," which "bypasses the presence of the thing and the duration of being" (1976: 151), and simultaneously refuse an easy naturalization of (un)belonging, "neither one thing nor the other" (Cha 1996: 20). Cha complicates what Bo Wang calls "forced identification" in her rhetorical analysis of Sui Sin Far's literary works. In Wang's rereading, Sui Sin Far, or Edith Eaton, deployed rhetorical strategies of what Kenneth Burke calls consubstantiation to force readers into a shared position through identification.

Her employment of a literary form to identify with her audience so as to challenge the very idea embodied by the form can be viewed as an important way in which a rhetor uses identification to persuade her audience when caught in asymmetrical power relations. (252)

Like the editors of the *Aiiiiiiii!*, Wang duly praises Eaton for humanizing Chinese Americans through anti-racist literary work, and argues that “we must read her work in its own social, historical, and cultural context” (245). Indeed, it is necessary to contextualize, insofar as what becomes available through Wang’s reading is the matter of discursive authority. Cha’s text draws attention to a certain difficulty in rhetorical “forced identification,” as it concerns an embodied space that lies beyond the threshold of discursive legibility.

Wang draws on Kenneth Burke’s *Rhetoric of Motives*, in which he redefines classical rhetoric’s persuasive essence as a function of identification. His “doctrine of consubstantiality” is an explanation of how persuasion works in a discursive situation.

In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another [...] A doctrine of *consubstantiality*, either explicit or implicit, may be necessary to any way of life. For substance, in the old philosophies, was an *act*; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*. (21)

At the root of consubstantiality in identification, there is a matter of joined interests, which Burke then rephrases as joined substance(s). In Wang’s rereading of Sui Sin Far, “the rhetor lead[s] the audience to identify or be ‘consubstantial’ with her [on the basis of possessing] a decent education [or] similar needs for family and children” (252). Burke in fact explains rhetoric with respect to education:

[an] ingredient [...] in all *socialization*, considered as a *moralizing* process. The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification. To act upon himself persuasively, he must variously resort to images and ideas that are formative. Education

(“indoctrination”) exerts such pressure upon him from without; he completes the process from within. (39)

Wang’s analysis of the “forced identification” accurately describes Sui Sin Far’s rhetorical intervention, “how she uses stereotyped images, the very form she intended to break through, to appease reader’s appetite for exotica” (252). However, what becomes clear here through Cha’s work is that Wang’s rhetorical analysis of literary shadow play does not seem to account for the rhetor’s embodied position in this discursive situation, perhaps because it is located beyond the purview of rhetorical authority. “Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within” (Burke 39). Paradoxically, “the language of a voice within” is a narrative voice in fictions of domesticity that determines who can embody effective “voices from without.” What remains unclear in Wang’s “forced identification” is the collapsed space of “stereotyped images” in which a rhetor meets a Fanonian “racial epidermal schema” in discursive battle. *DICTEE* breaks precisely into this discursive space of language and voice, and reveals the metaphysical distance that “domesticity” effaces in identification. In other words, is consubstantiality essentially assimilation?

It is not easy to open into this space of consubstantiality, however, Cha makes this available through the katabasis. Stella Oh deftly explains this problematic consubstantiality in terms of a reappropriation of confession and transubstantiation in the Catholic tradition. In mimicking the act of confession, Cha engages in her own speech act of confessing; that is, she utters her own counter-discourse within and against the traditional ritual of confession [...] Cha takes both the invocation and the confession (originally self-abashing acts) and transforms them into vehicles for the active performance of speech. (10)

The mimicry here is not simply in opposition to religious ritual, for which the disease becomes a heretic as Ahn Joong Kun was so easily condemned as a criminal. Instead, what

becomes apparent is that the communion is a performance of “the Word (of God) made flesh [in Christ]” (ibid. 10). The shared interest in this rhetorical performance is the emergent subject of God as a discursive creation. “*His Image and His Mirror*” (ibid. 17). Oh quotes Anne Cheng’s note from “History In/Against the Fragment,” “DICTEE is not interested in identities, it is profoundly interested in the processes of identification” (141, quoted on ibid. 11). Despite the fact that, as Jennifer Cho writes, “the gift of liberation is also a conscription into a discursive exchange of unequal discursive authority” (51), Cha is not without recourse to play in and through the space of *DICTEE*. D.W. Winnicott draws on Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the Eucharist in *Playing and Reality*. Whether “the wafer of the Blessed Sacrament” is the body or “a substitute, a reminder, and is essentially not, in fact, actually the body itself [...] in both cases it is a symbol” (8). The significance of symbolism is its function in a “journey of progress towards experiencing,” through which one “becom[es] able to accept difference and similarity” through play with transitional objects, “distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception” (ibid. 8). Cha’s ethnopoetics is in this sense a necessary play in *DICTEE*, to distinguish “voices from without” and “a language of a voice within.” An explicit example of such play is available in the recontextualized dictation, in which “open quotation marks” and “close quotation marks” specifically mark out a voice of a different substance not one’s own in a rhetorical space. However, my aim is not to focus on shoring up one tradition or another, but rather to focus on a “*Tertium Quid*,” to test the health of one’s readerly hearing in the waters of the transpacific, into the depths of the aforementioned Korean diasporic ghouls.

My ambition to draw out a Korean diasporic ethnopoetics is interested in locating moments of the shamanism that critics note in descriptions of *DICTEE*. Put differently, my

ambition is to stress the limits of language and intelligibility in order to identify a threshold of “ethno- and logocentric notions of linguistic proficiency” as earlier quoted from Kang. Stella Oh’s essay explicates how the disease emerges as “the tenth muse, the [deci]muse [...] who reutters and rerecords the forgotten history,” representing “the conscious self” (4, 19). Oh continues, “Through the shamanistic power of the disease, Cha creates a site for the constant transaction of writing and writing back” (ibid. 19). Through invocations of the muses, daughters of memory, the disease opens rhetorical space for transversing different histories. Yet writing and speaking, sights and sounds, crowd an understanding of how such an emergence is possible. The critique in *DICTEE* may in fact be a telling rehearsal of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, with regard to the benefits of writing. As Derrida says, through Peggy Kamuf’s translation, “Writing’s case is grave” (1991: 130). Cha’s movement in between languages and histories, of the transpacific ghoul, reveals to what extent one might understand this description. As an updated rehearsal of Plato’s dialogue, *DICTEE* leads readers to a reconsideration of histories of conflict as a dialectic of narratives, a rhetorical melee in which forgotten histories are abjected voices in discursive situations. In this sense, writing is indeed where silence is put to rest, in which a voice is recovered through and out of language(s). The shamanistic power of the disease opens a discursive space in the transpacific ghoul, whence a conscious voice emerges to speak against the grain of historical narrative(s). The rhetorical detail is key in terms of identification and voice(s), and significantly, as a reminder that the reader is the listener.

The most explicit example of this shamanist power occurs on the page before the opening into CLIO HISTORY. The last recto page before the appearance of muses offers a tercet, three lines reading “IN NOMINE/ LE NOM/ NOMINE” (21). The tercet recalls an earlier allusion in *DICTEE* to the Book of Matthew that appears with the mother’s exile in

Manchuria. Here, the opening line, “IN NOMINE” draws on the Trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19, a baptism “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (King James Version). The second line moves from Latin to French, which, for readers familiar with Cha as illustrated in *APPARATUS*, may resonate with semio-psychoanalysis, and the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan as it influences semiotic film theory. Although the source of the language(s) here is indefinite, the uncertain language is precisely beside the point. For readers not versed in Latin or French, and/or the Anglophonic reader, it is the third line that may read most clearly, as “no mine.” In Cha’s work, coincidence and/or typographical mistakes are no less compelling, because it is not only intention at play, but also the rhetorical process of identification. How one chooses, or not, to read is as significant as the words on the page. To read and/or hear “no mine” in the name is to hear the “name” as a dispossession. In fact, the possible possession of language here, in terms of fluency, is coupled with the possible dispossession by language, in terms of identification and relations of belonging, and oriented in a way that to read out the Latin “in the name” effaces the divestment that is more clearly available in the English reading out of “no mine.” The terrifying spiritual dis/possession here accrues power by way of an absent term, represented by language, represented by representation. Not unlike the transubstantiation, the rhetorical identification here of the “name” brings together two worlds through a shared substance, given by one for another’s taking.

In Kim Kyung-nyun’s Korean translation of *DICTEE*, she retains the original language(s) and instead provides a note on the three lines, translated into Korean as “in the name/ the name/ name.” What is lost in her translation is a gain for a reader focused in on “the memory of the silenced Korean American female subject” (Oh 18). Indeed, this leads us to the transpacific ghoulish, because, just as a reader may make substantial sense of

dis/possession in the three lines with recourse to the English language, one may also hear a substantial apparition of Korean language here as well. There is not only dis/possession, but a naming reminiscent of Shakespeare's Caliban that blurs the gift of language with a claim to curse. The etymological base of name in "nom" homophonically corresponds to an informal word in Korean for a (hu)man, which may be rendered as "guy" or play out also as "scoundrel." A dispossessed misreading produces a tercet of three "guys" cloaked in "name." To stretch the ear further, "nom," sounded with a short o, sounds like the Korean word for "stranger," which may connect a definitional line to the colloquial use of "guy." In other words, I appropriate Oh's reading of the disease's emergence for a consideration of a readerly subject who problematically and paradoxically gives voice to the disease "[s]peaking from the interstices of French Catholicism, Japanese colonialism, American imperialism, Korean patriarchy, and classical literary traditions" (ibid. 5-6). I mean to propose that there is a performance of "kut," or exorcism, available here, if one is willing to play with the spiritual dis/possession. A savvy reader realizes how the language(s) fail to account for a "Tertium Quid" in the form of Korean language, which concurrently carries over a resonance of the "name" to be spoken by an unrepresented voice and shocks this reader into an awareness of how dis/possession can be internalized. What is at first an already terrifying play of sound and meaning between English and the Romance languages gains a third dimension that lies beyond the limits of what is visible and reveals an unseen voice in the readerly engagement with text. The figure at the interstices of oppression truly tells us of rhetorical power and its (ab)uses: "He the one who deciphers he the one who invokes in the Name. He the one who becomes He. Man-God" (Cha 1995: 13). Or as Elaine Scarry writes, "That is, to have a body is to be describable, creatable, alterable, and woundable. To have no body, to have only a voice, is to be none of these things: it is to be

the wonderer but not woundable, to be the creator or the one who alters but oneself either creatable or alterable” (206).

This is not a paranoid reading. Or, perhaps it is. My reading here, as a (mis)reading because (mis)hearing, aims to triangulate a position of spiritual dis/possession in a transpacific ghoul. The hermeneutic difficulty lies in how one can draw out the invisible, the projection that casts the disease in the textual frame by way of the reader. The stakes here are indeed clear, because a solid interpretation in name demands a sense of solid reading, which in turn is anchored in the language work of the written word. As scholars note, Korean language is absent in *DICTEE*. How and why would one think to hear Korean absence in the text? Here, I echo a point by Eve Sedgwick in her essay on paranoid reading, in order to manifest the rhetorical strategies in Cha’s ethnopoetics. Commenting on the naturalized, and self-effacing, “hermeneutics of suspicion,” as Ricoeur calls the general hypothesis shared by Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche regarding “both the process of false consciousness and the method of deciphering,” Sedgwick writes, “it seems to me a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds” (126). Sedgwick’s nuanced essay on paranoia aims to relocate paranoia out of descriptions about systems of oppression or reductive psychologization, and instead think about paranoid readings as epistemological practices. In terms of my previous reading, I am neither simply describing language and literacy as an oppressive structure or apparatus, nor reductively suggesting that non-native language users feel a threat to confidence. This does nothing but rehearse the infantilizing power dynamics of racialized discourse as performed by the model minority myth. Instead, I am drawing attention to the

epistemological colonization that unfolds in *DICTEE* through language fluency and literacy, via the disease as site of embodiment.

A dismissive definition of paranoia “seems to grow like a crystal in a hypersaturated solution, blotting out any sense of the possibility of alternate ways of understanding *or* things to understand” (ibid. 131). What is difficult here is how one receives the paranoid reading. On one hand, entertaining paranoid readings may lead to ungrounded conspiracy theories. However, on the other hand, paranoid readings may test the foundations of received ways of knowing. What Cha makes clear is that paranoid reading is concerned with the epistemological *process* of understanding terms of life and death, and it is difficult to say whether it is or is not the death of the author that should concern the reader. Reading is not so simply an unsettling practice⁴. “She hears herself uttering again re-uttering to re-vive” (Cha 1995: 150). The question is whether these rhetorical terms are in fact understood the same, as shared interests of consubstantiality, and if so, how. Cha’s rhetorical inquiry is a complicated performance of what Frantz Fanon calls “the first duty of the colonized people,”

[leading a] counter move which will call everything into question [...] focus[ing] on [a transpacific?] zone of hidden fluctuation where the people can be found, for let there be no mistake, it is here that their souls are crystallized and their perception and respiration transfigured. (2004: 163)

Although there are different embodied histories and contexts between Cha and Fanon, the gist of decolonization motivates a juxtaposition here between what I call a transpacific ghou and Fanon’s “zone of hidden fluctuation,” in pursuit of precarious rhetorical transformation.

⁴ Robert G. Diaz provides a nimble articulation of this difficulty through a reading of a scene from R. Zamora Linmark’s *Rolling the R’s* in an essay titled “Melancholic Maladies: Paranoid Ethics, Reparative Envy, and Asian American Critique.” Through a notable analysis of Linmark’s Steinian line “A Flip is a Flip is a Flip,” Diaz illustrates the significance of hearing nuances of difference in the shuffle.

Either writer is clearly aware of being caught in a colonizing apparatus of representation and language.

Transcription: Here In the Call

To hear dispossession in language disavows passive reading practices. One meets the text in a ghoulish space of communication where language is used. One must ask, in all this, for what use? To refer to Burke, why does one use rhetorical language to move a listener? Persuasion seems simple enough of an answer, but what are the implied positions in an exhortation? To review, *DICTEE*'s opening scenes lead readers through an invocation to Sappho, an identification of muses, an illustrative rendering of dictation and literacy, a manifestation of the disease, and rituals of the Catholic faith. Following Bridget M. Thomas's analysis of prayer as rhetoric in Sappho's "Hymn to Aphrodite," "in order [for Sappho] to define and refine her relationship with the goddess" (3), Cha's opening scenes may be read as rhetorical engagements with various relationships. The shared interest throughout is a matter of language as a relay that motivates belief as it locates an embodied living being in relation to absent presences. For Kenneth Burke, motive is a keyword that describes rhetorical action. In an essay on Burke's "motive," William Benoit aims to redefine understandings of motive, not simply as a move to action that finds discursive expression in rhetoric, but rather, as a reflexive discursive maneuver. "Thus, motives are not cognitive, private, or situational factors that prompt, impel, create, or cause action, but are accounts, linguistic devices that function to explain, justify, interpret or rationalize actions" (70). What is at stake is not an interpretation of what an action means, but an interpretation *saying* what an action *will* mean. Benoit writes, "While it is often said that 'actions speak louder than words,' this reading of Burke's concept of 'motives' argues that 'actions can speak through words'" (ibid. 75). Although Benoit's meditation on Burke's motive defers to

Grammar of Motives, Burke's subsequent text *Rhetoric of Motives* provides a sense of what may be at stake in a rhetorical situation. Writing on Milton's poetry, Burke draws on "Aristotelian entelechy" to describe an important "Grammatical principle,"

the defining of an essence in terms of the *end* (the *perfection* being by the same token *death*, quite as the attaining of a given end marks the death of such efforts as went with the attaining of that end) [...] The depicting of a thing's *end* may be a dramatic way of identifying its *essence*. This Grammatical "Thanatopsis" would be a narrative equivalent of the identification in terms of a thing's "finishedness" we find in the Aristotelian "entelechy." (14, 17, original emphases)

In a discursive text, identification involves a motivational context insofar as it determines a narrative trajectory, and Burke's "Grammatical 'Thanatopsis'" suggests that identification is a definitive vision of life and death with narrative end in mind. In the aforementioned rereading of *Sui Sin Far* by Bo Wang, the "forced identification" strategy called on readers through racial stereotypes to recognize the shared humanity in Chinese American characters, negotiating an essential humanity reframed in familiar domestic scenes. In *DICTEE*, Cha inquires into the apparatus of identification to reveal how "Grammatical 'Thanatopsis'" locates subject positions in domestic(ating) narratives and discursive situations. In other words, although rhetoric may describe a discursive situation as a negotiation through motivated communication, what becomes clear through textual representation is the consequential fact that discursive situations are enmeshed in power relations. The text, like a rhetor, speaks essentially in anticipation of "a thing's end," calling out to for a reader's response. And as Roland Barthes made available in his essay "The Death of the Author," the author is the shaman, through whom language speaks.

Cha's work in *DICTEE* powerfully talks back through the image. It is difficult to render the image in words, as Cha makes clear, because it is a discursive matter. This in part finds description in Edward Said's remarks on Orientalism:

that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.
(3)

What the rhetorical dimension makes clear is how discursive identification can essentially determine how the end justifies the means. Identification, in this sense, is not innocently motivated, but rather, concerns a constitution of knowledge and understanding through a representational capture. Homay King, “As Laplanche repeatedly reminds us, the enigma is ‘a *seduction*’: etymologically a leading astray, similar to what Lacan calls a ‘*lure*’ in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*” (24). In Burke’s reading of Milton, the poet recuperates the biblical figure of Samson in a ritualistic conquest, and the identificatory lines lead readers to a motive of transformation that draws meaning from the death of a character. The ritualistic conquest that Burke describes is in part concerned with Milton’s first marital relationship and the issue of divorce in the context of his religion. In Cha’s *DICTEE*, the poet’s desire for transformation, or transcendence, is complicated in terms of access to discursive authority, such as an “identification of the author with an aggressive, self-destructive hero who was in turn identified with God” (4). The question of whether the poet has access to discursive authority is of course a matter to be determined by the reader. The disease in *DICTEE* demonstrates precisely how discursive authority is imbricated in a self-effacing omniscient and omnipotent position. Burke’s analysis of Milton’s identification with Samson, a biblical figure who locates his strength in God and his vulnerability in the speech of Delilah, draws out the rhetorical dimension of such discursive authority. Readers of *DICTEE* are implicated in this sense through an identification of the disease with the Korean martyr Yu Guan Soon. In other words, the disease performs, for and through the reader’s reading, an interpretive struggle in which the living being becomes an image of

substantial sacrifice. More specifically, patriarchal, orientalist, and nationalist forces collude as conflicts of interpretation and discursive knowing devolve into a semiotic colonization that knows no bounds. By offering the reader Yu Guan Soon, the disease becomes legible, and it is this process of becoming through identification that Cha critically conjures onto the page. This may or may not lead to a struggle between the listening reader, or reading hearer, and the poetic speaker, because it is a matter of how the two parties pursue a play of ethnopoetics through the screen of language. The difficulty lies in figuring out the rules of the game, because, as Cha demonstrates through punctuations in the text, misreadings may lead to misunderstandings. What is at stake in these misunderstandings is indeed the fate of the speaker, if, to borrow Milton from Burke, the poetic speaker is Delilah when the reader needs to hear a line of identification that draws God-given strength through the figure of Samson. This identification is not an idealized matter, but rather, a matter of ideologies framed by historical and cultural conventions, which attest to the power that stories possess.

In this katabasis, readers must wander a transpacific ghoul through the cuts of language(s). In contrast to Wang's "forced identification," identification in the disease's rhetoric confronts readers with a forced poetics on the part of the rhetor. Édouard Glissant calls forced poetics what "exist[s] where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression [...] in an opposition between the content to be expressed and the language suggested or imposed" (120). Although there is an uneven overlap here between Glissant and Cha, or, the Caribbean and Korean context, the fact that the Korean written language depicts orality in writing, as graphic representations of spoken sounds, encourages my reading into *DICTEE*'s performance as a discursive play of forced poetics. Cha's intimacy and familiarity with the Korean language therefore suggests that *DICTEE* plays with forced poetics as a mediation of rhetorical identification. The disease demonstrates how

there is a curious ventriloquism in language through the space of uttering on the verge of speaking language. Again, Stone-Richards explains, through the katabasis, “the persistent parallelism of materiality and psychic form enables, finally, a strong sense of the term *dictée* to emerge, namely, as *trans*-scription, the possibly alternative inscription (proto-writing)” (113). As a scene of dictation yields to a scene of transcription, forced poetics manifests here as dis/possession in language. The invocations of female figures aim to break with semiotic colonization, however, what becomes apparent is that the disease’s identifications persistently lead to sacrificial figures divested of discursive power. On one hand, the struggle in the dis/possession exacerbates the incommensurability of expression that Glissant locates between content and language. Language determines the possibilities of what can find expression. However, what cannot find expression is paradoxically available in a struggle through dis/possession. A struggle to speak, put differently, is also a performance, a sort of show and tell. In *DICTEE*, these cuts in effect produce the shamanist ethnopoetics that channel a transpacific ghoulish for rhetorical movements through and beyond language(s). Disruptions in the reading are not at all what they seem, for they reveal how identification moves through thresholds. Readers of *DICTEE* are challenged to be vigilant about these thresholds, because, as Stone-Richards notes, this is a katabasis.

“She calls the name Jeanne d’Arc three times” (28). This invocation to Joan of Arc follows the invocation to Ahn Joong Kun in the opening of *CLIO HISTORY*. Yu Guan Soon, the earlier noted martyr figure who opens this section in *DICTEE*, is also called Korea’s Joan of Arc. The lines of identification here open a resonance between Cha the poet, the disease, and Yu Guan Soon, as gendered, ethnic, national, and religious identities mark off a ghoulish zone of dis/possession. However, in the translation of Yu Guan Soon as Joan of Arc, and the threefold call in *DICTEE*, a scene begins to unfold in which Cha, the

disease, and Yu Guan Soon converge in the representational figure of Joan of Arc. The “Grammatical ‘Thanatopsis’” here makes explicit the ideological workings that have been at play concerning language, discursive power, and dis/possession. An invocation of Joan of Arc calls to mind a transgressive figure who burns at the stake for heresy. However, this figure refers to the legend in history rather than the living being behind the name.

From an early age her actions are marked exceptional. History records the biography of her short and intensely-lived existence. Actions prescribed separate her path from the others. The identity of such a path is exchangeable with any other heroine in history, their names, dates, actions which require not definition in their devotion to generosity and self-sacrifice. (ibid. 30)

Cha’s description of Yu Guan Soon points to the screens of language and history as they draw transgressive individuals back into the fold, and the rhetorical point in all this is that the legibility of a subject rests on shaky grounds of dis/possession performed. Cha’s articulation across languages and cultural contexts arrives at Joan of Arc as a representative figure, by which I mean that Joan of Arc in *DICTEE* represents a rhetorical position. On one hand, the inverted still from Carl Dreyer’s 1928 film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* identifies a rhetorical position of expressive impossibility. However, Cha’s recontextualization of Joan of Arc as a character played by Renée Falconetti draws attention to the performative possibility in the expressive impossibility. Cha’s lines of identification lead to a martyred saint, through whom Cha locates a powerful identification in the figure of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

The ERATO LOVE section in *DICTEE* ends with the image of Falconetti from Dreyer’s film and begins with an image of St. Thérèse, both performing as Joan of Arc. The inclusion of St. Thérèse in *DICTEE* is remarkable because it is through citations of St. Thérèse that Cha opens into a critical commentary on the emblematic signifier of dis/possession that is love. Ayse Naz Bulamar directly takes up the subject of love in

DICTEE. Bulamar borrows Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" to draw out the politics of emotion in Cha's text. "Overall, love operates in *Dictee* as a contact zone between women across time and space [...] creat[ing] a space where their differences do not prevent them from being in dialogue with one another" (230). Bulamar's reading is powerful, because, like Wong's use of the domestic, love implicates readers in a relation of forced identification that pursues recognition of another, and identifies what begins at the very midpoint of the *DICTEE* exactly halfway through the text. Although Bulamar's essay reorganizes an understanding of *DICTEE* according to three categories of love, national, divine, and maternal, how does Cha's ethno-poetics play out in this reconstructed space? I emphasize the need to consider play in love as a contact zone, because of Cha's focus on the space of sound that Stone-Richards' calls a zone of *trans*-scription, and the complicated play with identification in *ERATO LOVE*. In Bulamar's essay, the section on love for God and husband is collapsed into a divine love for "Man-God." This collapse is indeed what plays out in *ERATO LOVE*. However, Bulamar's reading only notes the slipperiness of "[t]he identity of 'her'" that is shared between the juxtaposed stories that split the text into recto and verso screens in Cha's signature fashion, "narrat[ing] the arranged marriage of an unidentified couple on the left pages, and giv[ing] voice to Thérèse on the right pages" (*ibid.* 226, 225). What is absent in Bulamar's reading is the fact that Thérèse's "wedding invitation" to her marriage with Jesus, her "spiritual espousal," is modeled on her cousin's marriage.

In her autobiography, Thérèse prefaces the wedding invitation with a note on how she "learned from her [cousin Jeanne's] example concerning the delicate attentions a bride can bestow upon her bridegroom" (168). Thérèse "amuse[s]" herself with the composition of her marriage to "a perfect creature, but he was still only a *creature*" (*ibid.*). Although these

points are notably not included in *DICTEE*, I attribute significance to the absence of these words to echo my earlier reading of the tercet that precedes *CLIO HISTORY*. As the transpacific ghoul is critically recontextualized into love as a contact zone, what is most remarkable is how Cha opens the textual space for the disease to perform⁵. In other words, Cha's poetic play makes possible the critical work in *ERATO LOVE*. Without a sense of play, Bulamar's essay on love as a contact zone threatens to disappear into platitudes. Such a reading in turn threatens to render *DICTEE* a text of empty words and lead one away from the rhetorical performance. bell hooks writes, "Using a working definition of love that tells us it is the action we take on behalf of our own or another's spiritual growth provides us with the beginning blueprint for working on the issue of self-love" (54). In this sense, Bulamar is very correct to conclude that love is a contact zone where dialogue through difference is possible, not only in terms of cultural plurality against the dictates of nationality and patriarchy, but in more complicated terms of difference in the name. The fact that Theresa Cha's text arrives at the critical contact zone of love where the reader meets Thérèse realizes the working definition of love proposed by hooks, while also de-idealizing dialogic relations through the distance of differences.

Reverse-Transcription: Healing, the Gall

Despite my reading through *ERATO LOVE*, there is no easy turn that follows in *DICTEE*. The following sections, *ELITERE LYRIC POETRY* and *THALIA COMEDY*, lead readers deeper into the abyss of "*Dead time. Hollow depression interred*" (123). The former section is constituted by subsections that are titled variations of "Aller" and

⁵ Mayumi Takada offers a similar line of thought in a critical exposition of "cinematic love." "But instead of successfully representing the truth of Jesus's Word or the extent of his love and sacrifice, St. Thérèse unwittingly manipulates this sacrificial logic into narrative possibilities of self-empowerment" (34).

“Retour,” to go and return in French. “It took less time for her to realize that there would be no magical shifting” (139). Mayumi Takada notes that “the latter half of the text drops almost all mention of ethnically specific personal, historical, or national narratives altogether and instead engages with overtly filmic language and images that seem to have little to do with *DICTEE*’s autobiographical first half” (24). Indeed, the second half of *DICTEE* threatens to lose the reader. For example, what is the relevance of the seemingly arbitrary letters to a “Mrs. Laura Claxton” in THALIA COMEDY?

[Takada] argue[s] that the omission of the filmic latter half in critical discussions reflects a critical and political need in Asian American studies to valorize and centralize race and ethnicity at the cost of downplaying sections that may not easily correspond to discourses on ethnic identity. (ibid.)

It is difficult to discuss the second half because of this shift, in which the text accrues a cinematic dimension. There is a shift that the perceptive reader is made to *feel*. It begins in ERATO LOVE, with the image of St. Thérèse-as-Joan of Arc (93), and Falconetti-as-Joan of Arc (119), and is explicitly available on the opening image of ELITERE LYRIC POETRY, with the image of people gathered for Korean independence (122). *DICTEE* is not simply shamanistic because Cha draws on a shamanistic aesthetic, the text issues a challenge to the reader, to follow the katabasis, if one dares. Scholarship’s silence on the second half of *DICTEE* may not only reflect a lacunae that holds critical discussions of sections that do not easily correspond to discourses on ethnic identity,” but what reflects may be a pool of silent listening. Put differently, the three images previously noted tap perceptive readers on the shoulder with a chilling reminder of what Lacan saw in Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*.

Hyo Kim writes, “Cha’s text reminds the reader that the rules of syntax and punctuation of a given language do more than order abstract thoughts in a disembodied rationality: they shape the very manner in which the world is framed and experienced”

(132). Kim turns to an early moment in *DICTEE*, where “MAH-UHM” (Cha 1995: 45) offers an example of how “*Dictee* disrupts its structural demands to make way for what resists such reductive description” (H. Kim 132). In a slight departure from Kim’s reading, but no less invested in locating the “specificity of Korean American identity,” I also locate “MAH-UHM” as “instructive to reading the writing in *Dictee*, as it points to alternative ways of imagining the ethico-political relation between individual and collective Others” (ibid. 133). However, my interest pursues this line of inquiry in a different direction, more aligned with Cathy Park Hong’s note in her poetry collection *Translating Mo’um* that “[t]he standard Romanized spelling of *Mo’um* is *Mom*” (74). With deference to Kim’s theorization of the ghostly in-between, Cathy Park Hong tersely identifies the resonance between “MAH-UHM,” which Cha translates as “spirit-heart, and “mom.” This resonance across languages is strengthened in Cha’s rendering, “MAH-UHM,” which also makes available a mirrored resonance in Korean that might seem childish. However, like in the example of Ahn Joong Kun, a repetitive sounding out of “MAH-UHM” produces an articulation that holds an embedded alternation of a “spirit heart” that is cleaved by a hyphen with a homophonic sounding of “mom” in Korean, indicated here by italics: ...MAH-*UHM* MAH-*UHM* MAH-*UHM*... This reading suggests a correction to Hyo Kim’s reading, because what “resists objectification” is not simply the disruption to “Standard English,” but a disruption to standard language (ibid. 132).

My reading of *DICTEE* admittedly veers in the direction of unbridled play with sounds in *DICTEE*, and that is where I locate the “Korean American identity” that disappears in Hyo Kim’s reading as a theoretical “Korean-American author” emerges from his analysis (ibid. 141). This is to suggest that a Korean American identity may exist beyond the page, in poetic space where the “mother tongue” reveals the “mom” in the “spirit-heart.”

Michael Stone-Richards offers a helpful gesture in this vein by bringing the poetry of J.H. Prynne into conversation with Cha, on the “intertwining of the physiological and the psychic” (94). In Prynne’s 1992 lecture *Stars, Tigers, and the Shape of Words*, he performs a productive reading of the poetics of sounds. His lecture is an inquiry into arbitrariness, the “nature of the relation between the sense or meaning of a linguistic utterance (spoken or written) and the forms of its expression or performance” (1). As an example, Prynne reads the popular nursery rhyme “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” with attention to the theme of arbitrariness. Although one might theorize the arbitrariness of a relation between meaning and expression, the signified and the signifier, Prynne suggests reading the rhyme as an intended reader in the nursery.

[T]he small minds of the nursery know nothing directly of this history [of arbitrariness of the sign]: they can apprehend this connection (from “little” to “twinkle”) only at the level of sound-association.

Perhaps, by the same process of auditory noticing, these small minds will observe other potential connections. (9)

This leads Prynne to a particular insight on the act of reading, which I quote at length.

Perhaps in turn this this construction of the argument [the difference in the historical consciousness of a child and of an adult] suggests a pattern of evolutionary development in the growth of what in literary studies we rather easily call a tradition: a traceable history of interpretation. For a language community to develop a literature, the cultural and signifiatory codes of the meaning process have to be extended in certain complex and distinctive ways. In particular, the mapping of sense on to sound and shape which is proposed by the strong version of the arbitrariness hypothesis has to be overwritten and re-mapped by a corpus of optional and variable connections secondarily imposed, so that *literary motivation* is essentially retrospective; precisely, a *reverse transcription*. (ibid. 14)

Prynne’s ideas here of a “literary motivation” that is a “reverse transcription” suggests that one may discover another purpose for language as a reader attuned to the play of sounds.

Prynne’s motivation of “reverse transcription” offers a complement to Burke’s

“Grammatical ‘Thanatopsis’” for an insightful reading of *DICTEE*. On one hand, *DICTEE* is

a rhetorical performance of a violent struggle that knows no bounds, because it is an object bound discursively by history and language. However, poetry toggles open a space of imagination by playing sound against traditions of interpretation.

Why does one read? Or, what does one read for? Students learn to read to learn. What changes if reading is recontextualized as a game, a rhetorical play? Prynne's alternative "literary motivation" is significant, because "reverse transcription" focuses one in on the cultural development of a "language community," not through deconstructive means but through an imagining of alternate construction. Allyson Stack's essay on Laplanche's enigmatic signifier foregrounds such a significant literary motivation. "Like an infant's attempts to respond to and assimilate the messages of an external, alien other, any act of cultural reading – or receiving a textual message – is always a *response*" (67). What *DICTEE* offers readers is a performance that dramatizes this response—a rhetorical challenge to readers to see the latent performance in language as a dramatized dis/possession that calls out for a response. The game begins as soon as *DICTEE* calls out to potential readers⁶.

A book, written by a distant, unknown other, sits on a shelf: its presence invites, solicits, and provokes. An individual may or may not choose to become its reader. But the moment one does, the act of reading is a *response* to that initial address. And because any act of reading must always begin as a *response* to this initial provocation, the primary vector in the event is *centripetal*. A reader allows herself to be drawn into orbit by the gravitational pull of the textual address, an event which "repeats the originary situation of the human being" ([Laplanche's essay "Copernican Revolution"] 1999a: 83). This dynamic extends to all cultural encounters. Watching a film, viewing a painting, listening to music, etc. are all – like reading a book – *responses* to the enigmatic address of an other that is topographically dispersed. (ibid. 67)

⁶ It is not insignificant, therefore, that the cover has changed with newer editions of *DICTEE*. It says something about, as Sue J. Kim writes, "the social and political realities with which we all live" (164), which requires further consideration.

It is here that I locate the im/possibility in Hyo Kim's question about the Korean American identity, upon opening the book and encountering the epigraph. The im/possibility is a certain realization that is available from the position of a Korean American identification, one which eluded me until I realized what it meant to be implicated by Cha's "reader-as-conspirator thesis." In fact, my understanding was paradoxically occluded by my embattled pursuit of diasporic ethnopoetics until I followed the stars, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, as they led to Thérèse's own realization of im/possibility as depicted in her own words. "There were so many things to say that I couldn't say anything at all, my heart was too full" (1996: 66).

The first consonant one learns in Korean sounds curiously like the Sino-Korean word for "memory." To follow Prynne, this literary motivation may lead to a new encounter with language, in which the slippage between the first consonant and "memory" suggests a light-hearted coincidence. One should not wave off this lightness, for there is also the philological gravity in the Sino-Korean translation of "consonant," "child-sound," in correspondence with "vowel," "mother-sound." And, to continue, the latter holds a homophonic resonance with the Korean word for a "gathering" (*mo-um*) which when truncated into a single syllable collapses homophonically into "body" (*mom*, sounded like the meditative *om*) Prynne's "reverse transcription" is significant, not only because it may be the source of Stone-Richards's description of *DICTEE* as an opening into "*trans*-scription," but also because the former notion suggests a significant complement to the "[s]himmering behind the text" that Seo-Young Chu describes as "telepathic reverse-text" (116). Chu's "telepathic reverse-text" is a description of an affectively charged context that produces a "telepathic network of looks wherein recognition spans miles and generations" (118). Borrowing from Marianne Hirsch's work with memory for children of Shoah survivors and a "condition of spatial and

temporal exile” (98), Chu conceptualizes “postmemory han” for Korean Americans as a condition of being “haunted by her parents’ anguish [and] equally haunted by the knowledge that she herself was not directly victimized by the circumstances that led to such pain” (98). Here, one might ask a variation of Stone-Richards’s question, how does the han fall on the Korean *American*? Chu’s emphasis on postmemory draws on the genre of science fiction to illustrate how language holds and negotiates an historical inheritance of han as a lacunae that represents an unrepresentable past. Language dissolves into a void of grief around what cannot be remembered, and Chu identifies Korean American identity, drawing on Werner Sollors, in a “nonconsensual descent relation” (102) to this haunting space in family history. Chu’s articulation of postmemory han, “a ‘gaze’ wherein subject and object lose themselves in each other, a ‘maze’ where the distinction between ‘I’ and ‘you’ disappears” (117), powerfully draws out a reading of telepathic rhetoric. Here, I cautiously echolocate a transpacific ghoulish as a description of postmemory han, embodied in (the space between) language, as an enigmatic signifier. The significance of Korean American literature may then become starkly available, as a cultural space from where one might sight postmemory han.

If one accepts that the fundamental dimension of transference is the relation to the enigma of the other, perhaps the principal site of transference, ‘ordinary’ transference, before, beyond, or after analysis, would be the multiple relation to the cultural, to creation or, more precisely, to the cultural message. (Laplanche 222).

In my reading of *DICTEE*, I extend Chu’s reading to argue that Cha offers a telepathic reverse-text in performance, as a writerly text, available in a Prynnesque reverse-transcription. In this, it is not only a postmemory han, as specific to the Korean diaspora, but a more capacious postmemory han that speaks to other (gendered) figures who suffer what Patricia Williams calls “spirit murder,” “disregard for others whose lives qualitatively

depend on our regard” (73). Cha’s “reader-as-conspirator thesis” is not vague about the meaning of conspirator, only necessarily opaque.

CHAPTER 2:

Han Love : “Living in Sound”

“The only thing I’m afraid of is staying the same/ and I heard that from Denizen Kane”

Blue Scholars, “Hussein” (Cinematropolis)

“keep the small place safe like Jamaica Kincaid”

Denizen Kane, “Lost” (Tree City Legends II)

In Orson Welles's singular cinematic work *Citizen Kane*, the audience is left to wonder at the end about the enigmatic *rosebud*. In this chapter, I explore the ethnopoetics of Denizen Kane (né Dennis Kim), and as I will show, there is a reason for his homage and mimicry of the title character, especially as hybridized with the biblical figure who is hidden in the name. In fact, this is a significant detail insofar as the Asian (American) male has historically been deliberately and definitively excluded from the Family of Man as a houseguest in the United States, which is evinced by the social fact of Chinese bachelor societies. Denizen Kane, like Ichiro in John Okada's *No-No Boy*, is challenged to overcome racial ideologies and recontextualize the notion of brother's keeper in relation to the self. His name, therefore, not only identifies a dislocation in relation to the nation, but critically questions what it means to be lost to the world as a racialized Asian American through the depth of a personal suffering. I draw out this personal line from songs such as "Drown Bless the Dead" ("I had a brother that I lost to the sea"), "Tree City Anthem" ("Now how my baby brother pass before my seed is born/ now what the fuck is that"), and "Another Life" ("it wasn't your fault dawg I hated myself/ you were my kid brother, I was supposed to be strong [...] you were better than me I treated you unfair/ I don't care if everybody here I wish you were here/ life will never be the same without you duke/ I had a son baby boy and he look just like you"). The stakes are clear here. One must struggle to maintain a healthy sense of self in order to maintain the possibility of healthy kinship in Babylon. My reading of Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics traces this difficult struggle, by way of Han and spoken word.

This chapter looks at Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics as aesthetic, sociocultural, and theosophical bricolage. In particular, drawing on the spoken word form, out of a hip-hop culture, and also rooted in a city of poetry, in which spoken word was born out of the white

working class, Denizen Kane makes use of various languages to articulate an identity as a dislocated brother. Again, by brother, I allude to a personal loss that particularly finds form in his later stage-play *Tree City Legend*, as well as a diasporic sense of social location that both identifies a sense of being from elsewhere and a shared sense of kinship (“Peace to civilians, Filipinos, and Sicilians [...] I’ve got my brothers fuck them other motherfuckers,” “Kill Killa,” *Tree City Legends Vol. II*). This diasporic bricolage comes together in his work with *I Was Born With Two Tongues*, as well as *Typical Cats*, and his solo work. The theosophical dimension is glimpsed through the sociocultural aesthetics, in particular, the opening of “Han” and the recursive Rastafarian hits. Diaspora therefore is something more cultural than the sociological definitions that are available in scholarly discussions. “Perhaps it would be more precise to say that to be *diasporic* is a condition of subjectivity, and that *diaspora* as a social phenomenon emerges from such conditions of subjectivity” (S. Kim 2007: 338). However, it is necessary to also write, “Diaspora is real” (350). Although I cut into the phenomenon of Han as an affect that is associated and articulated with the Korean diaspora, especially through a theosophical approach as available particularly in Korean (American) theology, I aim to move closer and remain conscious of what Sandra Kim calls “critical Han,” “a Korean word in which its current usage is a postcolonial translation of a Japanese colonial construct,” which in a critical context “repeatedly emphasize[s] how the term itself is embedded in a specific history that *we should not forget*” (2017: 274). In fact, this complicated contextualization of Han bridges a particular diasporic line, or break, that resonates with the notion of Rastafarian dread, “the means with which to menace” as it produced a life within “an impregnable solidarity, an asceticism born of suffering” (Hebdige 64). On one hand, Rastafarianism, as Hebdige notes, suggests a “revers[al of] the historical sequence of migrations (Africa—Jamaica—Great Britain)” (ibid. 31), invoking a sense of

spiritual colonization that locates a focus on “righteous” resistance against Babylon. And this is particularly maintained through the subversive use of language, turned against the master. On the other, there is an available sense of a complementary history of the Korean people, in terms of a modern history that begins with issues of land reform, the formation of “righteous people’s armies” that return in history in the late twentieth century in the form of the Minjung movement. Language is turned here too, against the powerful, though by drawing on a literary sense of language rather than a biblical sense, for parodic use, as available in the political poetry of Kim Chiha. In both cases, it is music with beginnings in and between agricultural communities that carries this spirit, an ecopoetic “origin,” rearticulated through sound systems that reorient the soul in the body.

In this chapter, what I draw out is how the expression (1) exorcises what represses these histories, which is to say, the ideological impositions of prescribed representation and the deleterious effects, (2) allows one to rearticulate the world according to a different vision, as a revision, and (3) affirms an identity that is produced through a hybrid form of voicing that is learned and shared through expressive language. Denizen Kane’s ethno-poetics are particularly noteworthy because of the geopolitical location of the “Tree City Legends,” the city of Chicago. These days, rap music is not only readily available in popular culture, poetry is also more accessible beyond the academic domain. In fact, hip-hop culture and public poetry particularly cohere in Chicago. The Breakbeat Poets anthologies are evidence of a current cultivation of organic intellectuals. Denizen Kane’s participation in the Chicago scene links him to poet-musician Jamila Woods, as well as cultural provocateur and artist Kanye West (though at various removes). Chicago, in particular, cultivated Slam poetry and contributed to its export to other cities in the U.S. and around the world. Susan Somers-Willett contextualizes Slam as it has been formalized in Poetry Slams, competition

judged by the audience, “invented in the 1980s by a Chicago construction worker named Marc Smith” (149, “The Official National Poetry Slam ‘Emcee Spiel,’” see more rules at 141ff.). Somers-Willett’s study of spoken word draws attention to the performance of identity in Slam, as well as the function of authenticity as a phenomenon that is produced in and through performance. “Slam poetry is defined less by its formal characteristics and more by what it wishes to achieve or effect: a more immediate, personal, and authentic engagement with its audience” (ibid. 19). Writing as a practitioner and scholar, Somers-Willett draws out the lines of tradition, especially with regard to authenticity and identity in performance, from the Beats and the Black Arts Movement, through to the Nuyorican Poets Café and the Chicagoan Slam poets, as Slam becomes popularly available through the documentary film *Slamnation* (1998), drama film *Slam* (1998), and the HBO-televised *Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry Jam* (2002-2007). Somers-Willett’s reading of the cultural politics in slam poetry lead her to explore how authenticity is a metric, in “cultural dynamic[s] between predominantly white, middle-class audiences and marginalized poets,” that may rely on “citations of difference” that “veil the real issue at hand: the dynamics of power between poet and audience in the real world” (ibid. 94). What follows in this chapter explores this citation of difference in the context of a diasporic Korean American male rapper known as Denizen Kane.

Check, “hana, dul”

The litany of Han in “Han” begins with a Korean count-in through Denizen Kane’s strained voice, of “one, two” in Korean, “*hana, dul,*” filtered through a screen of white noise. This repeats over the drum and clashing cymbal of the Korean folk percussion, further imbricated by another vocal layering through a noise filter that improves in audible intelligibility to reveal the phrase “our father in heaven” in Korean, “*haneul’e ge’shin uri*

aboji.” “Han” is the leading track of a spoken word album by Asian American artists I Was Born With Two Tongues, *Broken Speak* (Asian Improv Records, 1999), which precedes Denizen Kane’s work with his rap group Typical Cats and his own solo records in the new millennium.

Chong Chon-Smith introduces Denizen Kane in his book *East Meets Black: Asian and Black Masculinities in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Identifying “race and stereotypes [as] forces of bodily control,” Chon-Smith’s project explores creative engagements with what Kaja Silverman calls the “dominant fiction” of masculinity’s workings:

That is, minority masculinities cannot surpass the universal power center of white national manhood, and black vis-à-vis Asian stereotypes articulated in certain combinations reinforce this architecture codified onto the Asian and black male body. (4)

Chon-Smith writes on a live performance of “Han”:

Kim’s special performance of ‘Han’ reimagines the possibility of a kind of Korean American manhood that gains dignity and voice by talking about the suffering of Korean people within a transpacific diaspora. Specifically, he responds to the impact of U.S. empire, patriarchy, and white supremacy over Korean American identity by weaving a critical tapestry of *han* through Asian-black musical forms. (125)

Following Chon-Smith’s note on how spoken word and hip-hop opens space for performances of Asian American masculinities, I explore Kim’s expressions of self-determination by way of Korean American studies on the relational affects of Han and Jeong. The vocal tapestry in Kim’s oeuvre leads a listening audience through the re-cording of relations as rearticulated by recourse to diaspora and “wails of ancestors.” Opening a vocal clearing through expression of the white noise of Han, Kim’s ethno-poetics disarticulate transpacific sufferings and reassemble a sense of self informed by collective spirits. Denizen Kane’s self-expressive re-cordings find audience in his prophesied “Lost Found Nation,” drawing on an aesthetic bricolage of expressive modes via hip-hop, and

articulating a melody of Jeong that may find resonance through a shared Maum, or spirit-heart.

Sound and Noise

The opening of “Han” moves listeners through a homophonic space that Sang Yil Kim brings together into a Korean philosophy of nonorientability, or Hanism, which John B. Cobb Jr. aligns with process theology. Drawing on a resonance between the concept of creativity in Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy and the Buddhist notion of emptiness, Kim outlines a Korean philosophy of Hanism as a nondualistic worldview that meditates on gestalt. In an essay titled “Theological Interpretation of Hanism,” Kim connects Han as philosophical unity with the theological concept of Han as an “existential anxiety” wrought by a sense of a separate self (104). Kim identifies the former Han as a unity between heaven and man at which the latter Han may arrive: “Han becomes *Han*; resentment becomes love” (ibid. 110). Kim’s theosophical inquiry draws from anthropological lines brought together in the work of Korean poet Kim Chiha as his poetics articulate shamanic and Catholic traditions. The movement toward a nonorientable or nondualistic Hanism is charged by a critical reflection on the

Han emotion [that] arises when orientable mentality or mentality of boundary making emerges, and hierarchical social structures is stereotyped. The orientability creates a hierarchical social structure while the nonorientability creates a free and democratic social structure. (ibid. 109)

Notably, Hanism explicates a theosophy with utopic strivings, and the collected writings in *Hanism as Korean Mind* explore Hanism through theosophical, mathematical, and poetic expression. In other words, the most tangible application of the theosophy is found in an illustration of traditional Korean pants as an artifact of nonorientability in both its construction (inside/outside) and wearability (front/back). Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics

offer a sense of the utopic theosophy of Hanism through his transversal “critical tapestry of *han*,” as vocal crossings that strive toward ideological nonorientability.

Han is a discursive binding agent of the Korean diaspora, available in colloquial and academic conversations. Elaine Kim explains the explosive repercussive potential of Han. “When people die of *han*, it is called dying of *hwabyong*, a disease of frustration and rage following misfortune” (1). Elaine Kim introduces readers to Han in a critical essay concerning the 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the “psychic damage” of “becom[ing] American.” Evoking a Benjaminian catastrophe, Kim writes, “*Han* is a Korean word that means, loosely translated, the sorrow and anger that grow from the accumulated experiences of oppression” (ibid.) A salient site of Han lies in the geopolitical space of the Demilitarized Zone on the Korean peninsula. In an anecdote of her experience at the Demilitarized Zone and subsequent close-reading of the Korean film *Joint Security Area* (dir. Park Chanwook, 2000), Wonhee Anne Joh recounts how the significant zone of a land frozen in time signified “where a sense of ‘my people’[...] the collective experience of *han* and my sense of *han* for Koreans and Korea became most tangible” (30). The affective and psychic dimensions of Han invoke a sense of emotional citizenship, an enfolding into a sense of community. Also siting the DMZ, Suk-young Kim writes,

Geographically signaling a literal transfer of the body from one side to the other, crossing the DMZ is inherently an emotional rearrangement of the crosser’s civic affiliations, not from one place or structure of belonging to another, but rather by *accumulating layers upon layers of the complex sense of belonging* to both sides—which often comes at the price of being labeled a traitor to both sides. (12, emphasis added)

Kim reads a variety of texts to identify “special kinds of citizens who use their physical bodies as mobile frontiers to highlight emotional citizenship that either betrays or confirms the constitutional stipulations of citizenship by the state” (ibid.), “varying degrees of emotional affiliation with the place in which the border crossers find themselves (ibid. 15).

For both Joh and Kim, proximity to the DMZ makes palpable a “complex sense of belonging” in a diasporic relation to a crossing of the historical and personal dimensions. Yet, part of what manifests is “a jaded embodiment of overworked tragedy, or a cliché that fails to strike an emotional chord” (S.Y. Kim 166). The emotional dampening is in part facilitated by the imposition on tourists “to remain silent without sharing their incredibly diverse emotional outlooks on the border” (ibid. 168). Kim’s approach of performative belonging identifies the ironic cooptation of human tragedy by state entities in a geopolitical framing of a ghost-ridden stage devoid of human actors. Joh describes her visit to the Panmunjom Joint Security Area, as a U.S. passport holder, “like a visit to an open grave” where tourists and soldiers participate in performances of “ironic interchange” (29). Significantly, both scholars offer anecdotal experiences in the diasporic frame suggested by Ji-Yeon Yuh, identifying “Korean migration since 1950” with the starting point of the Korean War.

The transgenerational haunting of the Korean War motivates a pursuit of ghosts, which Seo-Young Chu explores as “postmemory Han.” “[S]econd-generation Korean Americans, although raised in the US, cannot help but ‘remember’ what their parents and grandparents experienced” (100). Sandra So Hee Chi Kim engages the entanglement of Han as inheritance: “In fact, han not only refers to a consciousness of ongoing trauma and a lack of resolution, but also the means to its own resolution” (2017: 256). The title of Kim’s essay identifies the paradoxical movement of Han into the aesthetic realm, “the postcolonial afterlives of ‘the beauty of sorrow.’” Han manifests “a complex feedback loop within the social imaginary” (ibid. 255), and “many academics, artists, writers, and critics continue to characterize *han* as characteristic of Koreans and the root of Korean culture” (ibid. 254). Opening the historical frame, Kim’s essay explores the charged symbolic value of Han

through a genealogy that draws on colonial interpellation of Korean ethnics in the early twentieth century.

[Nayoung Aimee] Kwon points to the kind of psychical dynamic that I believe would have primed Koreans' incorporation of han into ethnonational discourse. I would add that colonial modern subjects not only desired to construct symbols of Korean tradition, but to also authenticate their feelings as part and parcel of a racial imaginary that distinguished Koreans from Japanese in an essential, biologicistic way. The idea of han then translated itself into the discourse of ethnonationalism within a pervasively biologicistic understanding of the Korean people as a nation. (ibid. 264)

As a “means to its own resolution,” Han traces enclosing structures of feeling through modern Korean history in the twentieth century, especially through returns to traumatic events in a diasporic history such as the Korean War and Japanese colonization. These events produce deracinated identities that remain tethered to, or through, an im/possibility of a group identity. The cultural identity here is, in Stuart Hall's words, “positioned,” and the movement of Han-Han, in Sang Yil Kim's terms, is through a posit(ion)ed orientability toward an engagement with an underlying utopic creativity. The previous writings on Han draw out a sense of Han that is palpable and performative, constructed and essentialized, and adhered to Korean diaspora as a postcolonial trace. In other words, the *vernacular* concept of Han is a performative idiom that both carries and releases a modern tooling of the Korean spirit, symbolically whet by ideological friction of discursive situations. The cultural productivity of Han discloses an “infinite semiosis of language” (Hall 230).

The white noise of Han is available for interpretation in a video artwork titled “Mouth to Mouth,” in which Theresa Hak Kyung Cha visually communicates units of expression to the viewer. The intervening white noise drowns out the visual soundings, revealing the discursive chasm of and through performance. White noise displaces audible sounds and the critical audience is led to realize how listening depends on visual legibility. “Mouth to Mouth” performs a sense of Han as “existential anxiety,” and Cha's embodied

performance accumulates ways of seeing that a viewer may bring to bear on a reading of her speaking self as text. In a different form, “Audience Distant Relative” manifests the struggle of “sendereceiver,” a possessive struggle of language in a dialogic quest for the legibility of either *sendereceiver* or *sendereceiver*. Although “sendereceiver” flattens a sense of Han into a neat struggle over a shared letter, the struggle to recover encourages an informative textual performance by the reader that may lead one to sound out the increasingly impossible presence of the disappearing “sender.” Han describes a haunting grief that is unrelenting and recursive in its increase of oppressive difference. And yet Han is compelling as “means to its own resolution.” The concept of postmemory Han for Korean American subjects may resonate with what Asian American scholars have conceptualized as racial melancholia. David Eng and Shinhee Han draw out the melancholic identification imposed on Asian American positions in U.S. society. “That is, assimilation into the national fabric demands a psychic splitting on the part of the Asian American subject, who knows and does not know, at once, that she or he is part of the larger group” (Eng and Han, 348). The space of the national fabric, like the borders on either side of the DMZ, suggest exclusive zones of ideological belonging. However, in the space of the U.S. national fabric, the ideological belonging is, in Chon-Smith’s words, “architecture codified onto the racialized body.” This describes the psychic workings of American cultural imaginings of Asians in America, as entities which do not belong yet are included as an example of exceptional national politics. Although this paradoxical embrace of what seems foreign performs a consolidation of national identity for others in the international community on a political stage, this national performance produces a postlapsarian identity for Asian American subjects. “We would like to think about the numerous difficulties of Asian American immigration, assimilation, and racialization processes in terms of ‘Paradise Lost and Regained’” (ibid. 364). In other words,

Asian American subjects seem fated to contend with persistent demands to search for authenticity, a ghostly sense of belonging that may encourage quests for impossible meaning. Anne Anlin Cheng, writes on Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* and literary engagements with "loss of self as legitimacy":

It is the *origin of loss*, which the narrator can never really know and must keep staging, that renders the question of memory and authenticity so profoundly spectral in this text and in the field of ethnic literature at large. (84)

The reiterative staging "enact[s] a quest for cultural origin and authenticity" through the storytelling. However, a performance of expression not only rehearses the cultural script, it opens into a chasm of interpretive impossibilities, and expression may become "means to its own resolution" through a transformation into active meaning-making. In Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics, meaning-making motivates one "to write a bright future world into existence again" ("Lost Found Nation," *Tree City Legends*), out from where "the DMZ becomes the barbed line that traces the military parameters of my c-i-t-i-z-e-n-ship" ("Han").

Feedback Loop, Fracturing

"In weaving Korean American identity through *han*, Kim discovers the processes of memory, language, and lineage caused by the violence of immigration enacted through bodily displacement and disfigurement" (Chon-Smith 125). The opening litany of "Han," "the rising crescendo of words" repeating and reiterating "Han," reveals a discovery of a word that Denizen Kane locates with "the wail of ancestors waiting to be remembered," whose hands are "the same translucent yellow of paper fans, vapor pages of sacred text fluttering earthward, the crumbling book of heaven [that] is [his] Han." Denizen Kane's searching language pulls on a personal thread of a diasporic and postlapsarian text, and as Chon-Smith identifies, Denizen Kane's "critical tapestry" is woven out of a cultural bricolage of musical forms. "Postmodern man is fractured and settle for fractions,/"

paralyzed, can't act, distractions attract/ his attention, dementia dilute his substance,/ man, he got no style, only deconstruction" ("Holding Up the Wall," *Brother Min's Journey to the West*). The style of discovery proves constructive as discovery.

For Deborah Wong, the creative poetics of performance is significant, "performance as constructive rather than reflective of social realities" (4). Wong draws on the healing aspect of performance in "The Asian American Body in Performance" from *Speak It Louder*, in which she offers "explicitly, self-consciously Asian American thoughts—on cultural appropriation and the presence of Asian American performers in two traditions, jazz and hip-hop, that have been racially constructed as African American" (ibid. 161). In resonance with Kim's description of Han as "a complex feedback loop within the social imaginary," "racialization [is] a convenient feedback loop, in which race is the sign that promotes past and continued injury by its very presence" (ibid. 166). Similar to Kwon's writing on the "psychical dynamic" of an "essential, biologicistic" difference, Wong explores how the Asian American body performs "injuries of race," using "performance as a force in social transformation" (173). Denizen Kane's poetics demonstrate such transformative force, with rigorous style:

lose the would and gain the be/ I speak my piece/ for hope to weave a culture from
confusion/ paint my freedom with the bruises on my heart/ I start/ by speaking peace/
to ancestors who've returned to the essence/ to my moms and reconsidering her
lessons/ to my wisdom, I am myself when I am in her presence/ to future seeds for
you I'm hitting conferences having therapeutic sessions/ learning how to spell my
name and multiply my many blessings

"Han" ends with an expression of ambition to "speak to Jah, Allah, christen myself Hanullim,/ and stop walking on the rim of my own violence/ as I enlist the angels on my ones and twos/ diffuse the bomb inside my shoes and chest/ I speak my piece(peace)." The peripatetic groove of hurt here recalls Daniel Kim's identification of "the thing that most defines manhood in our culture" in his reading of an essay by Frank Chin, "promiscuous

violence.” Strikingly, Denizen Kane’s lyrics also invokes Ralph Ellison’s definition of the blues,

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. (62)

Denizen Kane’s lyrical expression aims to break the feedback loops, like Ellison’s blues, through an engagement mediated by ethnopoetics.

The movement through the white noise of Han in Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics finds description in Jae Hoon Lee’s writings on the variations of Han. Informed by Melanie Klein and Carl Jung, Lee approaches Han as an illusive cultural idiom that nonetheless produces a collective unconscious, “a psychological reality, existing in the deeper level of the psyche” (6).

[Klein’s] theory of positions provides a dynamic understanding of the complexities of *han*. The paranoid position and depressive position can be compared to “wonhan” and “jeong-han” respectively. An independent treatment of the schizoid position will add further clarity to the understanding of *han*.

[...]

[Wonhan] carries a phantasy of annihilation of the persecutors as the revenge against them. It calls for violence, which in turn calls for more violence, thus forming a vicious circle of “wonhan.” (ibid. 46, 49)

Lee’s study of Han explains the psychic process that leads one to become consumed by Han, “dying of *hwabyong*.” Yet, as Joh writes, “The most important feature of *jeong-han* is that love and aggression coexist” (22). Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics performs a shamanistic dismemberment of self that moves to “speak [his] piece” to “speak [his] peace.” Denizen Kane’s style is wrought by voice, and like the blues, the significance is to be found out in the grain of the voice.

Unfolding Resonance

In an explication of the “creative and political processes and energies in perpetual motion in their endeavor,” Chon-Smith writes,

[Han] incorporates Korean *pansori* and *punk-ak* folk music, jazz bass lines, and hip-hop rhyme schemes. Routing his Korean American masculinity through the Korean term *han*, Kim’s invocation of a word that connotes deep lasting trauma in the Korean language reworks traditional ways in which Korean men are expected to express their wounds, pains, and fears. (125)

Chon-Smith hears both *p’ansori*, a storytelling through song, and *p’ung-ak*, a musical ensemble of folk instruments, in Denizen Kane’s “Han.” Both expressive forms refer to the vernacular. Heather Willoughby offers ethnographic studies into *p’ansori*, describing “a vocal genre performed by solo singer and accompanied by a percussionist on a barrel-shaped drum called a *puk*. The singer recounts a long dramatic narrative through song, speech, and gestures” (20). Willoughby’s dissertation focuses on “the sound of Han,” the curious “rough timbres” that define the *p’ansori* sound, citing *p’ansori* performer and Ewha University professor Ch’e Su-chong, who identifies the aesthetic of such rough timbres as expressive of experiences of Han. This timbre is doubly fortified by the *pansori* singer’s devoted exhaustion of voice in pursuit of her craft. Willoughby writes on the acquisition of such timbre, or *tūk’ūm* (득음, 得音), by drawing from her professional training, the experiences of other singer-teachers, and the filmic text *Sŏp’yŏnje* (dir. Im Kwon-taek, 1993). In the film, the teacher figure

“Yu-bong instructs Song-hwa on proper vocalization methods: “Crying doesn’t improve your voice. By losing and recovering the voice, you gain the voice for *p’ansori*”

[...]

This process of singing until one’s vocal chords literally bleed, and eventually become calloused, is the same process of ‘losing and recovering one’s voice’ spoken of by Yu-bong in the movie *Sŏp’yŏnje*. Although the thought of callouses on one’s vocal chords makes a Western singer cringe, it is this very process that enables the *kwangdae* to produce the harsh and raspy tones peculiar to the genre of *p’ansori*. (ibid. 126, 129)

“Harsh and raspy tones” aptly describes the husky voice of Denizen Kane, who “lose[s] the would and gain[s] the be/ [to] speak [his] piece/ for hope to weave a culture from confusion/ paint his freedom with the bruises on [his] heart.” As “Han” moves from Korean folk music to “jazz bass lines and hip-hop rhyme schemes,” Denizen Kane’s voice sustains the aesthetic bricolage through a lyrical struggle, to emerge “from the heart of *han* and *jeong* [...] expressing the semiotic depths of both *han* and *jeong* [...] by pulling *jeong* through the depths of *han*” (Joh 126).

Whereas Jae Hoon Lee explores Han and Jeong through an approach from psychology, Wonhee Anne Joh “focus[es] on the juxtaposition of the Korean concepts *han* and *jeong* in relation to Kristeva’s notions of abjection and love as a way toward articulating a Korean American feminist theology of *jeong*” (xxii). Joh’s description of p’ansori offers a mode of expression for Anne Cheng’s description of racial melancholia as an “interaction between *melancholy* in the vernacular sense of affect, as ‘sadness’ or the ‘blues,’ and *melancholia* as the structural, identificatory formation” (ibid. 20).

Pansori is a traditional Korean way of singing that embodies both *han* and *jeong* [that] is similar to the African American blues. In Korea, the voice of *Pansori* is recognized as the most profound and effective way by which *han* is articulated [...] incarnat[ing] the complex intertwining of *han* and *jeong* through [the singer’s] voice. (ibid. 126)

Joh also reads *Sŏp’yŏnje*, focusing on a scene in which the pansori singer is advised to empty herself of either Won-Han or Jeong-Han, to achieve a state of transcendence. Joh reads this necessity of evacuating the self of Han as “the only way of unraveling *han*,” however, she identifies the need for Jeong to shift from a personal transcendence to the “interstitial space” Jeong cleaves in a relational in-between. “In the phase of *jeong-han*, melancholy is replaced with sympathy for others” (ibid. 26). “[A]rguing here for a politicized appropriation of *jeong* as a possible alternative for the unraveling of the causes of

han” (ibid. 127). Joh identifies Jeong’s powerful blurring of boundaries between oppressor and oppressed as the productive space where it is through “transgression of the erected boundary between the oppressed and the oppressor that transformation of *han* might well take place.” (ibid.). Joh shifts from Han to Jeong “to renegotiate and open up the gap, the interstitial space, from which radical subversive resistance can emerge creatively and where one might embody what I have termed the ‘hermeneutics of complexity’” (ibid.). It is such an interstitial space, in sound, where Denizen Kane embodies a “hermeneutics of complexity,” to speak his piece/peace.

In Chon-Smith’s words, Denizen Kane “reimagines the possibility of a kind of Korean American manhood that gains dignity and voice by talking about the suffering of Korean people in within a transpacific diaspora.” The reimagining is audible in “Han” as an address to “AZN, Korean,” “long[ing] to call brother and sister and.” The task becomes difficult as each remains separately alienated in struggles of perception (“manhood [that] must be defended,” “cloudy *noon* [“eye”] can’t be transcended”). Chon-Smith’s reading of Denizen Kane’s “hermeneutics of complexity” attends to being in relation to others through an affective web of identifications. In “Han,” the diasporic kinship of others is fettered by an overlaid postcolonial sense of Othering, which Christine Kim describes by way of Han as “confusing and complicated affect[ive] signs of a self-Orientalizing that still equates difference with the Other and Asia” (107). In a chapter titled “Diasporic Fragility and Brokenness: Korean War Legacies and Structures of Feeling,” Kim writes,

How to articulate—in both the senses of speaking and connecting—insights about the speaking and feeling practices of imperial diasporas is a trying task, especially since such a project involves unearthing what has been, or is still trying to be, forgotten. (ibid. 123)

What is forgotten is a ghostly struggle with what Chu conceptualizes as postmemory Han.

I think, though, that postmemory *han* illustrates the ways in which diasporic Koreans *have* had their bodies cut in half as they are trapped in a situation of knowing emotions they cannot feel, being haunted by histories they cannot access, and embodying both new and older forms of racialization. (106)

In the fracturing feedback loop of Han and racialization, Kim suggests, “Perhaps, then, what is necessary in order to realize the intimacies between postcolonial subjects is for a structure of remembering to shape global economies of caring” (C. Kim 108). This explicates Chon-Smith’s gesture toward diaspora, as Denizen Kane deals with Han by calling on a postmemory Han, whether the latter is definitively shaped and available. What is significant, particularly for the listener, is that there is an aesthetic form from which he draws. As the example of p’ansori illustrates, the rough timbres of a reclaimed power of voice draws Jeong out of “the depths of Han.” P’ansori, which, etymologically, unfolds a “site of sound,” suggests the significance of an aesthetic dimension for the interplay of Han and Jeong in a re-membering that plumbs depths of care.

The location of social relations is paramount in discussions of Han, Jeong, and cultural forms of expression. Christine Kim’s invocation of postmemory Han “brings together Korean diaspora with [Brent Edward] Hayes’s concept of ‘diasporic décalage,’ “a changing core of difference; it is the work of differences within unity, an unidentifiable point that is incessantly touched and fingered and pressed” (91). Resonant with Ellison’s blues, “an unidentifiable point” locates diaspora, and diasporic identities, in Stuart Hall’s terms, *through* differences. For Kim, the unidentifiable point is a puncturing sense of suffering that cleaves generations. Yet, the aesthetic space of sound manifests an interplay, “living in sound” (“Lastchild Speaks,” *TCL II*). In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali explores the subversive potential of sound. Attali’s theorization is grounded by his reading of Dutch painter Brueghel’s *Carnival’s Quarrel with Lent*. Mining an “archaeology of resonances but also of marginalities” in the image, Attali specifically

identifies the round dance “as the culmination, not the inauguration, of a struggle” (148). A struggle of what? Although impossible to reduce and rehearse Attali’s response, the struggle is, in part, as always, a matter of power and violence. Attali’s reading of the space of dance in the painting identifies the “culmination” of a struggle insofar as the dancing figures hear a different music otherwise than the struggle that Attali locates in the painting’s separation of various noises of living. Beyond the ordering logic of “pagan Carnival” by “capitalist Lent,” Attali imagines a “postpenitence, postsilence, at the back exit of the church” in the painting. In other words, the round dance punctuates the orientation of the painting’s viewer, in this case Attali, as a movement that not only marks the organization of noise by music, but the imperative to order sound. In “Han,” Denizen Kane invokes a Korean folk song associated with a round dance (“*gang gang sul-lae*”) before the audio signals cut in and out, and an improvisational bass line leads Denizen Kane to call out “Stop! Drop!” Like the round dance in Attali’s reading of Brueghel’s painting, Denizen Kane’s invocation of the Korean round dance culminates a difficult “call to respond to the call and response of old spirits who make ciphers in circles singing” a postmemory Han. The aesthetic break here performs a break with the doubling carry-over of Han by a second generation, as Denizen Kane breaks out an “express[ion of his] *bap* to the *bi-bim* boy.” In a terse line, Denizen Kane unpacks a Korean dish of *bibimbap* (mixed up rice), with a foundation of white rice topped by various colorful ingredients, as he longs to spit out his notes in the meld, “if you don’t step off my mic with that assimilate and distort.” Notably, the “*bap*” here also sounds, not simply the notion of “old-school” hip-hop sonic aesthetics in terms of a boom-bap (with a long a), but an earlier innovative genre, be-bop. This is significant because be-bop breaks musical expectations, as available in the stylings of saxophonist Charlie Parker. Beyond Attali and

resonant with Hall, Denizen Kane breaks into differences to find a position within a composition drawn from diasporic décalage.

Twist of Melody

The preceding reading into “Han,” by way of Han, proposes a space of listening in sound where one may engage the resonance, or as Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Listening*, binding sonance as it opens the echo chamber of subjectivity. For Nancy, “the subject of the listening or the subject who is listening” finds himself as subject in “the place of resonance,” one who first knows “himself being—his being or his subjectivity—the sudden expansion of an echo chamber” (17). To know oneself calls for a listening subject to hear oneself sound. In “A Theory of Resonance,” Waichee Dimock sets out to explore “the semantic fabric of the text” as it undergoes a passage of time. “As time alters the fabric of human association, it also alters the fabric of linguistic usage, the imputable or deployable nuances of words that make possible that association” (1060). Exploring the shifting receptions of a text, Dimock theorizes a centrifugal pollination of a text into “new composite networks of association,” each with a new emotive value (ibid. 1066). Resonance, per Nancy and Dimock, identifies a sonic dimension of being, in intertextual relations. For Dimock, the text thus suggests infinite possible “new composite networks of association.” For Nancy, subjectivity strives to become a “resonant subject” in sonic play (21). For either critical theorist, it is clear there is always already an echo. Denizen Kane’s “hermeneutics of complexity” in “Han” performs a diasporic association through his “critical weaving of han” from the echo chamber of his body as instrument. What may challenge the negative feedback loop in a melancholic postmemory Han is a manifestation of melody. In *Listening*, Nancy engages Husserl’s thoughts on melody, “Melody [as] the matrix of a thought of unity *of and in* diversity [...] as much as of a diversity or divergence *of and in* unity” (ibid. 18). Melody draws together

“resonance of the instances” through listening, for the “subject of listening [who] is always still yet to come” (ibid. 19, 21). The trace of melody leads Denizen Kane to find out voice in “Han,” a critical lesson gifted “by [his] sister Anida.”

Melody of Jeong

Melody is a keyword that traces the shift into the second track of *Broken Speak*.

Chon-Smith narrates Denizen Kane’s attendance at a significant spoken word event where he witnessed the

Seattle spoken word group Isangmahal perform, their name being a Tagalog word referencing Bob Marley’s third world anthem “One Love.” Describing his moment of inner transformation, Kim recalls the night he saw Isangmahal: “I saw some of them perform and they were just fucking sick. My friend and I, we were writing too. We were part of the hip-hop generation, and we were writing our little raps, thinking we were fresh. But I went to check these guys and they were fucking sick... There was self-love there.” (122)

There is a resonance of love, or Jeong, here, as well as an echo of Rastafari semantics in the reggae-tinged elements of Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics. In a reading of the Jamaican poet Dennis Scott’s title poem “Dread Talk,” Velma Pollard notes how “the interlocuter uses the Rasta term for peace and goodwill – love – to dissipate his new friend’s anger” (75). In “Para Sa Isangmahal,” the second track of *Broken Speak*, Anida Yoeu Ali speaks a sense of collective self, “I-we,” that fills a sense of life as survival with “a collective spirit/ forged together by a turbulent force we called a monsoon.” Survival produces a collective form that is in itself a source of productive power, “isangmahal.” “Isangmahal” is to be shared, “to pass it around, ikalat muna.” In Joh’s analysis of Jeong in *Joint Security Area*, “Jeong is what allows them to see one another’s vulnerability” (35). To draw on Joh’s statement that “jeong embodies the invisible traces of compassion in relationships” (ibid. xxi), melody evokes an aural sense of Jeong’s relational possibilities in Jeong-Han. Denizen Kane and Emily Chang vocalize the latter phrases into melodies that background Anida’s spoken word

performance, and the power of the Tagalog phrases also manifests onto the pages of the liner notes for *Broken Speak*. The melody in “Para Sa Isangmahal,” in Nancy’s words as “matrix,” offers a double resonance. On one hand, the resonance of “isangmahal” as a collective self disrupts racial melancholia’s imposed “loss of self as legitimacy” (Cheng 20), as Ali urges the listener on “to remember, to never forget,/ to believe, to believe,/ to love, to love,/ isang mahal, survival/ ikalata muna.” On the other hand, the resonance of the musical melody draws Jeong through Denizen Kane’s different projects, as a source of collective spirit. Sharing a melody of love draws on Jeong as an adhesive element of caring.

“Para Sa Isangmahal” begins with a guitar riff over which Denizen Kane speak-sings the title phrase. Anida Yoeu Ali begins her piece, and the song opens dynamically to also accommodate the vocalizing of Emily Chang. Denizen Kane and Emily Chang bring the song to an end, singing “Ikala Munat, pass it around,” until Chang’s voice alone carries the melody. About a year following the release of *Broken Speak*, Denizen Kane, Qwazaar, and Qwel release their first album as a rap trio, the self-titled *Typical Cats*. The opening track “Intro” samples the “Para Sa Isangmahal” guitar riff with vocalizations by Emily Chang, and introduces a sample of the inimitable percussion recording for “When the Levee Breaks” by Led Zeppelin. The three rappers announce themselves through lyrical manifestations. The resonant melody reappears toward the end of the track-listing, in “What You Thought Hops.” The penultimate track on *Typical Cats* showcases Denizen Kane in an extended solo rap that begins with acapella spoken word and finds rhythm with the downbeat note of the guitar riff that begins the musical groove. The musical melody finds a doubling resonance of collective spirit as Denizen Kane carries a sense of Ali’s “I-We” from 2Tongues’s *Broken Speak* to an articulation of self with *Typical Cats* in “What You Thought Hops”:

I can speak about myself and rhyme in couplets if I want to/ I am I is I be I do I self I
delf I solo I dolo is is is is I I I/ Am my mother's talk stories from beginning to end/
Listen to this poem with your hips [music begins]
Yes it's Denizen an exhalation of breath/And these Typicaaal Cats will make the
session start fresh,/ Yes it's I grip tight the lemon scented mic device/ These
Typicaaal Cats will make the session start right/ See I was born with two tongues but
no green card/ My skin marked by the immigration narratives of my people drifting
a-part/ Of the two worlds I reside in the high yellow phantasm, of an undiscovered
future/ I am to breach the chasm between my mother's memory and my hazy prison I
so knew

Denizen Kane loses himself in the melodic matrix, performing what Athena Athanasiou identifies as “a turbulent performative occasion, one that both constrains and enables action *qua embodied situatedness and extension*” (178), breaking up a feedback loop of the past tense (“lose the would”) with instantiations of presence (“gain the be”) that cascade each into next by weaving back through the self-referential “I.” In Joh’s words, “The ‘backbone’ of jeong is relationality of the self with the other” (18). In conversation with Judith Butler in *Dispossessions*, Athanasiou explores how “corporal vulnerability and revolt become each other’s indeterminate condition of possibility,” prompted by thoughts on “square gatherings of protest that seek to open “space to breathe.”” In the space of sound, Denizen Kane articulates a multidimensional self as a resonant subject of collective spirits, drawing out semantic extensions of self with each breath. As Roland Barthes writes, “a whole carnal stereophany: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language” (66-7).

What develops here, which I aim to illustrate, is what Carolyn Abbate calls, borrowing from Georges Favre’s analysis of “Paul Dukas’s symphonic scherzo *L’apprenti sorcier* (*The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*, 1893)⁷, an “incantation motif,” “a kind of annunciation that is energetically rhythmicized, supported by chromatic harmony” (quoted on 35). Abbate describes this as follows: “The musical element is the signifier for a dramatic idea or object

[...] thus the musical signifier is both quasi-iconic (musical sound as the sound of a speaking voice) and arbitrary (a theme for a word” (ibid. 36). Not long after, Abbate denounces Favre’s idea, with regard to the representation of the incantation motif, and instead suggests “rescu[ing] Favre’s sign by arguing that the musical gesture has, in the midst of the piece, been liberated from the object in the phenomenal world (the human voice chanting a spell), and now floats without the anchor of a fixed referential meaning” (ibid. 37). Despite the difficult distance between Abbate’s discussion of a late-nineteenth century orchestral composition and my discussion of Emily Chang’s vocalized melody, the emphasis in this juxtaposition lies in the immanent meaning of the musical phenomenon. “Music is changed, moreover, in a way that does not seem developmental: the themes are not transformed as if belonging to a progressive continuity, but are so greatly reformed that they can be nothing but a new end in themselves” (ibid. 60).

The resonant melody of Isangmahal carries into Denizen Kane’s first solo album, *Tree City Legends*, released a year after *Typical Cats*. “Micah 6:8” is the third to last track, and thematically develops a variation on the bible verse to which the title refers, paraphrased between the opening rap verse and the closing dialogue that carries on a Christological meditation⁸. “Listen brothers he has shown me/ What’s required of thee only/ To love mercy and do justly/ With Selassie to walk humbly.” Denizen Kane draws from a book of

⁷ Disney fans may note that this is fantastically rendered in *Fantasia* (1940).

⁸ In my listening, this conversation does not seem inflected with Dread Talk. However, as Velma Pollard writes, it may be “a warning that something [wa]s changing. What is added to the discourse and what gets lost is unpredictable. It could be that as the research moves further and further away from Jamaica, the locale of the beginnings of the movements and the home of some of the oldest interviewees, emphasizes change. What is clear is that interest in the culture and so in the language of a movement that speaks to oppressed black people, and eventually to the oppressed of all races, is not waning. (107)

prophetic sayings, which reiterates a covenant⁹ between the old testament God and Jacob, grandson of Abraham. The soteriological refrain is also a critical variation that introduces listeners to the figure of Haile Selassie I, who long reigned over Ethiopia in the twentieth century. The Rastafari movement locates Ethiopia as utopic heaven on earth, articulating an Afrocentric new order of pan-African diaspora against historical narratives of European colonialism and global capitalism¹⁰. “Through a rereading of the Bible, and the identification of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Rastafari therefore sets up a religious construction of the origin, accompanied by a transmission of the past of slavery” (Daynes 125). Despite possible objections to Denizen Kane’s ostensible appropriation of Rastafari hermeneutics¹¹, Joh’s reflections on “the overlapping of *han* from community to community” of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots lends appropriate description. Writing on the Korean American women in the documentary film *Sa-I-Gu*, Joh identifies “remnants of jeong” in the available Korean American Christian context, “they recognize that all are God’s children,” “because they understand the collective pain and anger of *Sa-I-Gu*/4-39: all

⁹ In Micah Chapter 5, “remnant of Jacob” is reiterated, invoking the covenant between the old testament God and Jacob, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. Upon waking from a dream in which God speaks to him, Jacob anoints the place where he laid his head to rest. “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth” (Genesis 28:20-22). Denizen Kane interestingly translates a calculus of progeny into a geometry of diaspora.

¹⁰ See Pollard 21-22 for a brief background. Sylvia Wynter also writes, in a book review, “The Rastafarian movement began somewhere in the early thirties, sparked off by Garveyism and by the world-wide shock which black men all over the world experienced with the invasion of Ethiopia; and the dispossession of Haile Selassie. (1972: 89)

¹¹ As Wynter notes, there is a tradition of appropriation regarding Rastafarian rhetoric, including the 1972 elections, (90), which Dick Hebdige, with Stuart Hall, notes as homing Rastafarianism as the beginning of a cultural revolution, which also “coincides exactly with the revolution of the Jamaican popular music industry” (35). For Stuart Hall, this culture and music offers “figures or signifiers of a new construction of ‘Jamaican-ness’” (1990: 231).

have been victimized” (47-8). Following “Han,” Denizen Kane’s aesthetic bricolage not only articulates folk modes of vernacular expression to break with postmemory Han, he draws together modes of diasporic remembering for a collective spirit, gathering “Lost Found Nation” as melody of Jeong.

Echoing Half the World in Resonance

Denizen Kane’s embodiment of interstitial spaces, as an echo chamber, leads Chon-Smith to explain how an audience receives the performative embodiment. “The audience sees, hears, and touches (through sonic vibrations) the rising crescendo of words,” and the haptic dimension here, identified in terms of “sonic vibrations,” highlights how the racialized body “becomes the corporeal instrument to mediate sound, word, and diasporic fusions” (125). Deborah Wong witnesses an Asian American male rapper in another situation, and similarly notes “his rapping body is rhythmicized” (186). Reclaiming body and voice, Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics aim for a new account of a resonant subject,

math of the after/ pray for revelation/ resuscitation, resuscitation, resuscitation,
resuscitation,/ resuscitation, resuscitation, resuscitation, resuscitation,/ resuscitation,
resuscitation, resuscitation, resuscitation,/ resuscitation, resuscitation, resuscitation,
resuscitation,/ breathe (“Two Trains,” *Tree City Legends*)

The “rhythmicized body” as “corporeal instrument” reappropriates, as Chon-Smith notes, “the power of agency in remaking the Korean American body contests the coercive forces that shape Korean American bodies in the first place.” Although the redemptive remaking is located here in performance, Denizen Kane’s oeuvre also includes poems on the page that illustrate the struggle to express as a matter of finding one’s breath.

The anthology *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images* includes a poem by Denizen Kane titled “Satta Massagana.”¹² The poem closes with praise for a

¹² As in the title of the 1976 album by The Abyssinians.

heavenly figure in Amharic, Arabic, and Korean phrasings, as the return to English punctuates “how to break free/ how to break free/ how to break free is to kill the enemy sleeping in the inner me” (316). The poem begins with an eschatological intonation (“*babylon’s burning, babylon’s burning,/ babylon’s burning there’s no water/ fire fire, fire fire,/ fire fire, there’s no water*”). Following Jamaican reggae artist Max Romeo’s opening lines of “Babylon Burning,” the poem’s speaker wakes from “beneath a cold sheet of sweat” and struggles with an apparition of “charlie chan” for numerous stanzas. Interpellated by “the residue of murderous years in the hundreds,” the speaker fights fears to move toward self-expression (“I didn’t choose this life/ but I admit I’m scared to fight”). Against discursive traps of a self-replicating image, the speaker articulates cultural idioms that overwhelm the emptying function of Charlie Chan. “i. see. God./ EYE SEE GOD!” (ibid. 315). This couplet makes explicit what is available throughout Denizen Kane’s poetics, which Pollard explains¹³ with a quote from the Rastafari Movement Association, “But eyes have they and see not, only Fari could see,” “[u]nderstand ‘far (seeing) eye’ – pun on ‘fari’ (28). Gathering “*Katipunan Kalayaan Ja-Yu and Krylon*,” Denizen Kane’s poem enunciates a late-19th century anticolonial organization in the Philippines, drawing “freedom” through Tagalog and Korean, to a brand of spray paint that signifies the graffiti writing element of hip-hop culture. The speaker dances lyrically through a cut-and-mix matrix of hip-hop culture, “swept up in the rhythm of a heavenly dub,” and following a centrifugal blast of identifications (“I AM Christafari Connector of Dots/ I AM Adonai Elohim and Source of All Thought/ I AM Yin and Yang which are Isis and Osiris/ I AM John Africa¹⁴...”), locates

¹³ Pollard also offers a collection of quoted thoughts on 106-107.

¹⁴ Founder of black liberation group MOVE in Philadelphia, PA, who was killed along with five adult members and five children in a bombing by the Philadelphia Police Department. See *The Bombing of Osage Avenue* (1986) by Toni Cade Bambara and Louis Massiah (<https://www.pbs.org/video/whyy-specials-bombing-osage-avenue-1986/>)

a significant space as encouraged by “the b-girl in the windmill/ [who] is the dervish in the second appearance” (ibid.). “Dancing in the deep of the media blackout,” the speaker articulates a litany of identifications to pronounce “my *without is Within, within my without/ Within I Without I is ()*.” (ibid.). In the pressurized emptiness that may feedback a loop of charlie chan’s imago, the speaker locates a parenthetical space that follows the sliding between a sense of self and a sense of sight, which readers perform by what follows the stanzaic break on the page, “only breath—.” (ibid.).

The theosophical wordplay that precedes the parenthetical space transforms a sense of emptiness into a containment of space. Playing with an orientation of “-in” and “-out,” the speaker performs a resonant subject as a relational embodiment for a listening subject, through a repetition of “With[] I.” (ibid.).

To be listening is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other. Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion. (Nancy 14)

Moreover, the location of breathing space in the parenthetical emptiness performs Stuart Hall’s theory of identity “as constituted, not outside but within representation” (236). Hall’s definition of diasporic identity is one of flux, “constantly producing and reproducing themselves as new, through transformation and difference” (ibid. 235). “Satta Massagana” suggests the paradoxical “changing core of difference” around which a diasporic decalage forms as breath. In terms that may seem provocatively reductive, postmemory Han and melodies of Jeong find expression through the diasporic body through “only breath.” However, Denizen Kane’s ethnopoetics rehearse the difficulty of self-expression, as a challenge of breaking with repetition of feedback loops. The difficulty of paradox becomes productive in the space of hip-hop culture.

Breaking with, Enjambment

In Stuart Hall's theorization of cultural identity, it is the American "New World," that offers "ground, place, territory [as] the juncture-point where the many cultural tributaries meet" (234).

It is because this New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement, that it gives rise so profoundly to a certain imaginary plenitude, recreating the endless desire to return to "lost origins," to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning. (ibid. 236)

Attali identifies the danger of recreation as reproduction in critical Marxist language, as "reproduced, normalized, *repetition*" (20), but also gestures "beyond repetition, [wherein] lies freedom," at "the arrival of new social relations," "Music is becoming *composition*" (ibid.). Quoting Mark Anthony Neal's "post-soul aesthetic," Imani Perry describes rap music in terms of performative freedom. "It also makes for a kind of mimicry of the montage of memory: here, phrases and riffs exist inside the artists to be expressed in unique forms emerging within the fragmentary mosaic of memory" (ibid. 34). Beyond feedback loops of racialization on repeat, hip-hop practitioners of the spoken word may break out a breath of freedom from within the repetition of a dangerous logic.

"Concerto in C for Two Shades of Yellow" features the two male members of 2Tongues, Denizen Kane and Marion Esguerra. The track begins with Esguerra, "We are half the world," and the duo share verses that create a resonance for the refrain "We are half the world," including the reiteration "I am not a slave." Affirmative identifications and resistant disidentifications fill out the shape of their lyrical acrobatics through musical engagements with historical narratives and representation. They perform as corporeal instruments, "I am a horn squeezed between the lips of dizzy prophecy." And the song builds to a repetition of "We are half the world." What follows is Denizen Kane's ending extended verse that returns an image in pursuit of what lies beyond repetition, "creeping

midnight roundabouts with windmills and flex styles/ freestyles and jumps over turnstiles/ I pay no fare/ we all ride for/ freedom.” As finds performance in “What You Thought Hops,” Denizen Kane breaks repetition through the moves between “I am I/ B I swear I am I be I be,” and opens space for “that butter colored brother on the northbound eyes blinking lips moving but producing no sound.” Denizen Kane represents a self who is undisturbed by and disturbs no other as he lives in his sound. To borrow from Alexander Weheliye, Denizen Kane here “fuses *I am* and *I be* in ways that do not inflict violence upon their fragile, yet potent singularities as modes of becoming-in-the-world” (67-8). Anticipating a call for his name (“and my name is/ No name is/ Every name I name and don’t name is), he redirects this demand for an identity toward a redefinition of an identity as identification, “Every word rendered sensible by context in the moment/ Is neither idea nor concept but impossible/ possible movement/ Is the wordless word/ The inexplicable perfect sound of free/Dom.”

The freedom resonates in its space between the body and language. The breath both expresses and breaks down “freedom” with an enjambment that separates the adjective “free” from a nominal domain. This is of course the linguistic ability of spoken word artists, who “tap with two tongues against the inside of my mouth” (“What You Thought Hops,” *Typical Cats*), whose “skills are the mad texts of kali sticks (“Concerto,” *Broken Speak*). One might transcribe the enjambed “free/Dom” further as “free/d/om,” to signify the discursive disarticulation that is reminiscent of Saul Williams’s expression of the sacred sound “om” in his performative ethnopoetics. As Saul Williams beat-boxes his Om, and as Amiri Barak listens to and for the “Black ommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm,” Denizen Kane evokes free/d(/)om in *Broken Speak* through the space of vocal articulation in breath, suspending self as a resonant subject in poetic interplay with Marion Esguerra. The

enjambment cuts into impossibilities, to reveal “the inexplicable perfect sound” of wordplay. Wonhee Joh introduces a concept of Dan into her discussion of Han and Jeong that may explain “the impossible/ possible movement” in “Concerto.” Writing on Korean poet Kim Chiha’s practice of Dan, “the practice of severing/cutting off forms of oppression” (23), Joh argues, “even though sometimes it is a necessary part[, i]t is not enough because it does not seriously take into account relationships of systems of oppression to complex human experiences of *jeong*” (26). Reading Kim Chiha’s narrative poem “Chang Il-dam,” Kevin Considine interprets the “limited, agonizing violence and cutting of *dan*, for Kim, [a]s necessary in order for these new, reconciled persons to arise” (67). The repeated cuttings of Dan may separate individuals from “the cycle of *han*, and by their very embodied existence transform its negative energy into positive energy that can foster healing, liberation, forgiveness, and reconciliation.” Although Considine leaves unsaid the significant consideration of structures of feeling underscored by Joh, Dan helpfully describe the enjambment performed in “Concerto,” as it draws out a space for resonance, in the “impossible/ possible movement,” for the close listener to move into “the inexplicable perfect sound of free/Dom.”

In the discursive space of sound, the dialogic interplay between Denizen Kane and Marlon Esguerra performs the difficulties of giving expression to oppressive structures of feeling. Repetition may lead to normalization, and efforts to pull Jeong from the depths of Han involve a complicated expression of culture through white noise, “not the token spirit broken.” Through practices of Dan as enjambment, both men perform ethnopoetic breakdowns that reorient the world in terms of performer and audience. What especially facilitates the reorientation, or disorientating performance, is the “phase of *jeong-han*,” through which “empathy is generated through one’s recognition of *han* in other people” (Joh

26). In the space of resonance, a cup half-empty is re-cognized as half-full, and the artists seek to expunge “spirits forced down the throats” (“Concerto”), “drink lunacy from the same cup, we all infected” (“Two Trains,” *TCL*). To return to Elaine Kim’s explanation of Han’s deleterious effects on the larger Korean American community, “to ‘become American’ without dying of *han*,” Denizen Kane’s ethno-poetics offer a transformative cut in the form of rhymes and spoken word. “And I don’t wait for this pot to boil/ I am word and I am fuel and the tongue of living flame” (“Concerto”). Denizen Kane’s promethean meaning-making challenges listeners to reappropriate accumulations of oppression as fodder for self-expression to share in community.

Fire Burning in the Chest

The expressive action of “pulling *jeong* from the depths of *han*” appropriately foregrounds the performative aspect in Joh’s description of p’ansori. P’ansori and rap find juxtaposition as forms of vocal articulation that aim to disorient sedimentations of sonic space through a recuperation of the performer’s body as a resonant echo chamber. Imani Perry closes her study of the “Politics and Poetics in Hip-hop” with a statement on the “compositional framework” of hip-hop: “its very roots lie in the use of commodity to dislocate commodity” (203). Writing on the unavoidable cooptation of aesthetic form, Perry emphasizes the necessary grounding in the local “space from which hip-hop production organically emerged—poor urban black and Latino communities” (*ibid.*). It is no easy matter to locate Denizen Kane’s grounding in Perry’s emphasis of the local, however, by way of diaspora, an audience is led to witness the expressions of utopic strivings as performed by a deracinated corporeal instrument. “I be that MC embattled and weary who battle until I am empty, the memory of Lost and Found Tribes who fumble and fight, amidst the family until the fire learns to burn right” (“Lost Found Nation”). As available in the

Rastafari/Dread Talk leanings in Denizen Kane's ethnopoetics, wordplay significantly disorients the sedimentations of language that manifest accumulations of Han, here represented in the sustained reference to the book of Micah and Jacob's progeny and a biblical narrative of kin and exile. To speak otherwise, Denizen Kane finds location in the liminal space of what Joh identified as the productive interstitial space of transformation.

Denizen Kane's oeuvre develops with a dramatization of the Tree City Legends that cohere his solo work. In his review of "the closing performance of the premiere of Dennis Kim's *Tree City Legends* in San Francisco," Fisher opens with a note on the "more than 45 minutes" delay that deferred the play's opening. Nobody was to be turned away, and the room was thus made to accommodate the growing audience. It is this transformation of the space on which Fisher shifts readers to the terrain of the play,

Without realizing it, they had all unconsciously occupied a similar kind of space Kim describes in the opening stage directions, a part of an apart from the world of the play:

"Denizen [as Min] is standing in the in-between—in between the church house and memory, the present and a booth like a coffin. He is in the story (he is telling it). He is outside of it (pointing to it). He does this—he speaks and signifies—at the same time." (11)

This position of nonorientability is described by a location of a Korean word, which brings together "mind and heart—*maum*." In Cha's *Dictée*, "MAH-UHM" introduces a "spirit [that] has not left," which "burns. Fire alight enflame" (45). Through the dwelling of *Maum*, Cha transverses history and time to reunite with her mother. In *Tree City Legends*, the character of Min is located as threshold within threshold, breaking the fourth wall to draw the audience, "*us, and no one in particular*," through the "single word for mind and heart—*maum*."

The character Min explains *maum* to describe a narrative position by which to narrate being "born into tumult."

In Korean, the subject and the object tends to unite and assimilate with each other, while in the Western languages the two are clearly distinguished.’ In Western life, this is often considered illogical, a precarious basis upon which to build a functioning psychology. I was born into tumult. I am a second-generation immigrant, first-generation American, a legal citizen, an “other” by culture, language, and phenotype. I am either a non-entity or a denizen of an emergent reality. (D. Kim 13)

The significance of *maum*’s “inextricably intertwined” nature and a living defined by “tumult” suggests a critical understanding of the splitting sense of unity in which difference is defined as a category of other in a narrative of assimilation. This critical understanding offers a Korean sense of assimilation that suggests a gathering together. Fisher brings together this sense of composite relationality with a description of his experience in the audience in his review of the play. Outlining the play’s engagement with three Kane brothers (Denizen, Min, Sum) in mourning of the second oldest brother Junie, Fisher gives a shape of the play’s engagements with a cycle of violence that demands assimilation as inassimilable objects. Fisher closes his review,

We too experience *Tree City Legends* with our *maum* – appreciating the play’s intelligence, humor, and clarity of its spiritual and political insight while it burns viscerally in our hearts. Kim’s play is an elegant reminder that intellect and emotion are not opposed. It captures how we remember the dead and how their memory lives on with us in the full spectrum, of clashing emotions—grief, anger, confusion, nostalgia, resentment, and joy—and beautifully demonstrates that these varied, contradictory things all stem from the same source. (12)

Reappropriating the paradoxical orientation of Korean American experience, Denizen Kane works out wordplay in the performative space of sound, guiding listeners from Han as anxiety to a holistic nonorientable Han. The meaning-making is not simply redemptive, but rather, accrues healing power through the transformational invocation of Jeong sourced from Maum. “Know my loving is the journey and my body is the bus/ Heart’s the engine heaving with the souls of the lost” (Lost Found Nation”).

CHAPTER 3:

“Ain’t Nobody Watching Over Us, It’s Just Us” : Mo(u)rning in Mi-Gook

“you are the audience
you are my distant audience
i address you
as i would a distant relative
as if a distant relative
seen only heard only through someone else’s description.

neither you nor i
are visible to each other
i can only assume that you can hear me
i can only hope that you hear me”

Theresa Cha, “Audience Distant Relative”

“We’ll bury your dead tomorrow. I think you’re right to want to do it. And I think we should bury our dead as well. Most of us have had to walk away—or run—away from our unburned, unburied dead. Tomorrow, we should remember them all, and lay them to rest if we can.”

Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

The 1992 Los Angeles Riots mark the historical moment that Koreans in America became Korean Americans through trial by fire. One may recall the conflagration as race riots ignited by a court acquittal of the four police officers charged with excessive force in the arrest of Rodney King. However, as Patrick Joyce quotes from Raphael Sonenshein, “Perhaps the most accurate assessment would be that it was several different, overlapping riots” (148). Although a simple interpretation is impossible, there have been many works of cultural representation that have engaged the historical event, such as the novel forms of Ryan Gattis’s *All Involved* (2015) and Steph Cha’s *Your House Will Pay* (2019). Film representations are especially notable because of the confusing influence of news media. In 1993, Dai Sil Kim-Gibson and Christine Choy co-directed a documentary film *Sa-I-Gu*, which gives voice to different perspectives of Korean women who witnessed the loss of their American Dream. In 2012, David Kim’s *Clash of Colors* sets different perspectives in conversation to understand what happened, and it becomes clear that the media representation did not help. For example, the edited news clip of the assault on Rodney King excited viewer interest and rage, but a different showing of the video footage in the courtroom environment led to an acquittal that would shock viewers into action because of the clear injustice. In the previous year, video footage of Latasha Harlins’s murder by Soon Ja Du was also edited down and looped in the news cycle. Here, too, the court verdict for Du was inconceivably at odds with the images that looped in the news. The unedited video footage does not undo the violence in either case, however, the edited clips made for public consumption revealed how media can be manipulated to elicit responses on different registers. Justin Chon’s film *Gook* (2017) is particularly interesting in this context, because it is a cinematic representation about the Riots that employs a manipulation of visual information in order to gather an interpretive community around a production of edited

footage. *Gook* unfolds a narrative that focuses on two families in the city of Paramount, California on April 29, 1992. Two Korean American brothers, Eli (Justin Chon) and Daniel (David So), run their late father's shoe store. Three African American siblings, Kamilla (Simone Baker), Regina (Omone Okojie), and Keith (Curtiss Cook Jr.), are intimately connected to Eli and Daniel. The supporting cast of characters includes the significant figure of Mr. Kim (Sang Chon), who owns a convenience store across from the shoe store, and Jesus (Ben Munoz), who is an older helping hand to the two brothers. Chon's film challenges the audience to interpret the Riots through a fictional representation, and the intervention may gather a possible reconstitution of community through storytelling.

The Objective, Toward Transfiguration

The notion of objectivity is precarious. An objective position claims violence in support of an interpretation, particularly when an historical event is set in the frame. Writing on the ideological production of cultural forms, Fredric Jameson tersely summates how history as a ground terrorizes interpretation through an inconspicuous territorialization of being, time, and space: "History is what hurts" (88). In an analysis of *La Haine* (dir. Matthieu Kassovitz, 1995), Sanjay Sharma and Ashwani Sharma explain how the film reproduces "the dominant media's disembodied look – an impossible neutral objectivity," in an effort to hyperextend a view into how "the aesthetics and simulacra of urban existence are reincorporated and reworked by youth" who live in France's *banlieues* (110). However, "The hyper-realism of *La Haine* effaces the necessity to situate the racialized crisis of the banlieue as a product of decolonization in France and contemporary postcolonial social conditions." In other words, a reappropriation of objectivity's power does not obstruct the process of mediation, because the historical working of the relational structure remains "an absent cause" (Jameson 21). Although an objective mediation of the audience's entry into

the racialized space struggles to keep the mediatization in the frame, film audiences are nonetheless called upon to draw out meaning through subjective interpretation. One asks questions about the symbolic work, which Paul Ricoeur describes as “cultural contingency.” “[M]y field of investigation is oriented, and because it is oriented it is limited” (1969: 19-20). Justin Chon’s film negotiates limits of knowing through cultural contingencies. The auteur’s tropes of language and kinship guide audiences to ask about what the Riots could mean from a Korean American perspective. “Anyone who wished to escape this contingency of historical encounters and stand apart from the game in the name of a non-situated ‘objectivity’ would at the most know everything, but would understand nothing” (ibid. 24). *Gook* tells a story about one long day in the spring of 1992, and leads the audience to discover lessons that may draw on the fires for critical illumination.

Although objectivity is precarious, embodying a subjective position proves to be impossibly difficult. Simply put, one becomes a subject in relation. The subject of social grammar grounds a tradition of philosophical inquiries into being and consciousness that extends from Descartes’s pronouncement of cognitive existence per Divine order to Judith Butler’s work with performative subjectivity in a social structure. Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* makes a critical intervention into such conversations on the production of subjectivity with attention to “the tragic continuities in antebellum and postbellum constructions of blackness” (7). Hartman “approach[es] issues of subjectivity and agency by examining the possibilities and constraints of various practices from performance to the rhetorical strategies of law” (ibid. 12). Across the variations of the frame, the subject is a matter of narration. Hortense Spillers particularly takes up the problem of naming the subject in terms of how naming constitutes symbolic order and assigns one a location in a common narrative. Connecting this line from Olaudah Equiano’s 1789 autobiography to

Daniel Moynihan's 1965 prescriptive report "The Negro Family," Spillers articulates the resonance of "narrative energies [borrowed] from the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep in the collective past, that come to surround and signify the captive person" (69). Black subjectivity identifies a position in a symbolic order that Spillers describes as "an 'American grammar' [...] which [begins] really [as] a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation" (ibid. 68). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva echoes the imposition of narrative limits on a subject's self-representation. In "The Invisible Weight of Whiteness," Bonilla-Silva borrows from Caroline Knowles's description of "the social practices to which race/ethnicity give rise," to identify "racial grammar," that which "influences vision, emotion, and our sense of aesthetics in addition to the way we talk about and frame racial matters" (188). Racial grammar, like American grammar, identifies a loop of discursive practices, in which perception is informed by a symbolic system of visible difference as embodied in a shared tradition.

Set in relation to history, the subject is an aesthetic matter as it concerns one's location in narrative. Ricoeur writes, "We belong to history before telling stories or writing history" (2016: 257). The fact of conscription is not irrelevant to understandings of the Korean American position in the Riots. David Palumbo-Liu reads a photograph from an issue of *Newsweek* and explains how the frame of racial optics threaten to ventriloquize the Korean American subject. The figure in the photograph "emblemizes the *function* of Asian-Americans, both in the specific public discourses surrounding the Los Angeles rebellion and within the late twentieth-century American political economy," as "a powerful signifier" that draws from European orientalist mythologies" and "vindicate[s] American ideology" (366, 375). In Robert Lee's description, historical representations of the Asian figure "portray the Oriental as an alien body and a threat to the American national family"

(8). The apparatus of racial grammar here extends a transnational reach that draws power from the entangled histories of colonization and migration that it in turn effaces in the construction of a domestic frame. In an essay titled “The International Within the National,” Lisa Lowe outlines how the Asian (American) subject is also an epistemological object and paradoxically embodies limits of knowing one’s subject position as determined by racial grammar. In other words, on the *carte blanche* of nationhood, racial grammar constitutes a narrative play at the expense of the racialized subject that functions through what Michael Shapiro calls the racial sublime: “a vast, difficult-to-comprehend system of oppression,” which “persists as a system of racial discrimination and officially sanctioned forms of brutality whose vastness pierces the veil of ignorance only episodically” (44). Racial grammar renders subjects visible according to the hidden gaze of an aesthetic tradition. Shapiro quotes Hermann Wittenberg, “The sublime, already in the classical foundations laid by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, is founded on problematic assumptions of racial difference [...] defin[ing] sublimity by using images of racial others as deficit models” (ibid. 43). Meg Armstrong articulates more precisely,

“The sublime is not simply a moment of terror and privation on the way to a recovery of a self-possession and mastery (or recognition of oneself within a transcendent symbolic order); rather, the sublime exceeds this drama of identification and marks the sheer ecstasy of the image of foreign bodies” (214).

Justin Chon’s engagement with the Riots, as a void that confounds interpretation, offers an aesthetic education through the racial sublime. On one hand, there is a moment in the film that breaks down the racial grammar that is apparent in the title. On the other, the film engages the racial sublime and offers an intervention into how audiences remember the Riots, which implicates a shared notion of national community.

Chon’s intervention into representations of the Riots motivates audiences with a narrative “politics of transfiguration.” In the analysis of *La Haine*, Sharma and Sharma

describe how the film articulates “the possibility of imagining a utopia” through the soundtrack, borrowing “politics of transfiguration” from Paul Gilroy who in turn borrows from Seyla Benhabib. “As Gilroy goes on to say, this politics of transfiguration “pursues the sublime and struggles to present the unrepresentable and its hermeneutic focuses on the dramatic and performative” (111-2). In *Gook*, “politics of transfiguration” describes the film’s discursive openings for critical hermeneutics into cultural representations of the Riots as an incomprehensible void in history. Through an hermeneutics of transfiguration, Chon’s film critically engages the original mediatization of the news coverage and implicates the audience as a constitutive part of history as a whole. Terry Eagleton explains,

The hermeneutical method seeks to fit each element of a text into a complete whole, in a process commonly known as the “hermeneutical circle”: individual features are intelligible in terms of the entire context, and the entire context becomes intelligible through the individual features. (74)

Chon’s film offers a hermeneutical intervention into interpretations of an event, which reveals how historical intelligibility is mediated by racial grammar and the racial sublime. Ricoeur’s definition of hermeneutics makes this clear. “An interpretation is not authentic unless it culminates in some form of appropriation (*Aneignun*), if by that term we understand the process by which one makes one’s own (*eigen*) what was initially other or alien (*fremd*)” (2016: 140). History prevails as the authentic interpretation. The hermeneutics of transfiguration in *Gook* therefore displaces an ostensible objectivity with subjective storytelling from a Korean American perspective, in terms of what Albert Baracco calls “re-perception.” “Following Sobchack’s argumentation, one can observe that in the re-perception of film perception, the filmgoer’s intentionality can also be directed to the intentionality of the film rather than to the intentional objects of film perception” (47). In other words, Chon’s narrative redirects audiences to the mediatized event and its framing for

an experience of authentic interpretation rather than simply suturing the audience to the object in the frame as a passive spectator.

Cultural Contingencies

There are critical discursive openings for moments of re-perception within the film, in which two significant moments cut the film into thirds and guide audiences on the theme of kinship through conversations of loss, of language and history. The first is shared between Kamilla and Eli, and the second brings together a collection of scenes between Daniel and Mr. Kim, Keith and Kamilla, and Mr. Kim and Eli. The relation between storytelling, loss, and history is significant because, as Ricoeur writes, “time become human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative” (2009: 3). My reading of *Gook* as a Korean American cinematic text follows Yoon Sun Lee’s proposal for a narrative studies approach to Asian American literature. For Lee, the lens of narrative theory offers “something of a test” to the question of whether “Asian American literature aim[s] to represent Asian American lives, experiences, or identities.” Justin Chon has spoken on his responsibility as an auteur to draw on “a certain perspective and a certain life experience that shades [his] storytelling.” Lee suggests an appropriation of “Gerard Genette’s analytical terminology, and particularly his explication of time, voice, and point of view (or what he calls *focalization*) [because these aspects] can help describe recurrent features and important variations in Asian American literature.” Lee particularly notes the significance of focalization, which, although “[o]ften assimilated to the concept of ‘point of view, refers to a more complex relation between the narrator of a story and the actual point of view that she or he adopts in telling it.” Focalization is a confounding matter in narrative theory, because the “complex relation” seems to vacillate the narrator between subjective and objective positions. However, in the case of the cinematic text, the narration’s translation into images

may illuminate the shades of knowing in the “complex relation.” As Albert Baracco writes, “The world of film can only be understood by the filmgoer as *being-in-the-film-world*” (123). The filmgoer is led through a visual projection of the narrative, and focalization may describe the limits of the frame in terms of what the audience perceives and what lies beyond perception. For example, *Gook* intersperses different cultural artifacts throughout the film, such as the beeper. The anachronistic technology may call for responses that reveal generational differences in audiences. Moreover, a close look at the number clusters on the screen may reveal culturo-linguistic lines for interpretation, such as the urgency of Eli’s message to Daniel reflected in “8282” (in Korean, “hurry, hurry”). Focalization therefore describes the limits of possible knowing, and the Korean American perspective finds significance here as Korean American auteur Justin Chon assumes a directorial position in relation to the narrative. As Sharma and Sharma noted with *La Haine*, the significant challenge of an authentic representation calls for a politics of transfiguration and cultural contingency. My reading of Chon’s film locates a politics of transfiguration in relation to racial grammar, in terms of a language lesson, and also in relation to a racial sublime, in terms of kinship.

As Hortense Spillers writes, “Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which in turn, situates those persons it ‘covers’ in a particular place” (72). Names may shield or bury a location in relation to a cultural tradition. However, Spillers goes on to explain how racial grammar may dispossess one of a name and a relation to cultural tradition through historical rupture. In a written response to the Riots, Elaine Kim explains that the naming of the Riots is a difficult matter from “an interstitial position in the

American discourse of race.” The uncertainty here concerns the Korean American position in relation to the national narrative.

So some of us have taken to calling it *sa-i-ku*, April 29, after the manner of naming of other events in Korean history—3.1 (*sam-il*) for March 1, 1919, when massive protests against Japanese colonial rule began in Korea; 6.25 (*yook-i-o*), or June 25, 1950, when the Korean War began; and 4.19 (*sa-il-ku*), or April 19, 1960, when the first student movement in the world to overthrow a government began in South Korea. The ironic similarity between 4.19 and 4.29 does not escape most Korean Americans. (E. Kim 2)

Describing the significance of the student and youth-led overthrow of the authoritarian regime, Namhee Lee writes, “4.19 became both a historical marker and a historical burden” (26). Circumventing the “interstitial position in the American discourse of race,” Korean Americans chose to articulate the Riots in the cultural tradition of democratic ambitions and failures in the Republic of Korea. The “ironic similarity” comes into sharper focus when considering other names for the Riots, such as “rebellion, insurrection, or civil uprising” (Abelmann and Lie, xiii). Abelmann and Lie write, “In keeping with their allusions to the Korean past, many Korean Americans placed the L.A. riots, at least in part, in the *annals* of Korean history” (ibid. 18, emphasis added). This historical continuity critically cuts into the rhetoric of the American Dream to reveal the racial sublime that is covered by promises of an inclusive land of equal opportunity.

The instructive poetics of cleaving are also illustrated in Cha’s edited collection *Apparatus* and the critical primer *Writing Self, Writing Nation*. As Shelley Sunn Wong writes, Cha’s poetics of cleaving “resift[] and reaccentuate[e] that which addresses/is addressed to her.” In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s explication of assemblages in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they note

“two kinds of form, forms of expression and forms of content” as separately independent but mutually dynamic elements that speak “on the same level”—in short, the functional independence of the two forms is only the form of their reciprocal presupposition, and of the continuing passage from one to the other—we

constantly pass from order-words to the 'silent order' of things, as Foucault puts it, and vice versa. (87)

In this description of the saying and the said, the authors note “the significance of dates[...] what incorporeal transformation is expressed by these dates, incorporeal yet attributed to bodies, inserted into them?” The significance of this intercalation is the not unlike the inverse blurring of individual cuts on a film reel into a smooth narrative movement. Intercalation thus “resifts and reaccentuates that which addresses/is addressed,” through interspersions of significant historical moments. Yong Soon Min’s photo essay in *Writing Self, Writing Nation* exemplifies this intercalation as a variation of Cha’s poetics of cleaving. Significantly, Yong Soon Min’s list of the “Defining Moments” articulates national tragedies (“End of the Korean War,” “witnessed this popular uprising which toppled the Syngman Rhee government,” “the Kwaju [sic] uprising and massacre,” “Watched LA burn”) with the artist’s personal biographical chronology (“year of my birth,” “and emigrated later that year to the U.S.,” “indelibly politicized me,” “on my birth-day”)—cleaving a subjectivization that anticipates an underscored blank where “we stand together on Mt. Paektu overlooking our Lake of Heaven.”

This transpacific articulation offers a different ordering of time, or emplotment. William Dowling explains Ricoeur’s concept of emplotment, “an intuitive grasping together (*prendre ensemble*) of otherwise heterogeneous elements” that strives for “a harmonious relation among heterogeneous elements” (5-6). In Ricoeur’s words, emplotment “opens the kingdom of the *as if*,” “[it] is the operation that draws a [seemingly arbitrary] configuration out of a simple succession” of events (2009: 65, 66). The recourse to Korean language in naming the Riots engages a cultural contingency that holds racial grammar accountable for its corruption of democratic promises and also opens into an entanglement of transpacific

histories. In *Gook*, Daniel becomes entangled in the outbreak of violence. Robbed on his way to a home recording studio, he is forced to accompany the recording engineer to scenes of looting in order to pay for his recording session. Daniel is pulled from the car in stopped traffic, and falls prey to the anger in the streets. The audience next sees Daniel walking on a desolate street, when a van squeals to a stop beside him. He screams out in exasperation, “Are you fucking kidding me?! You want to kill me bitch?! Motherfucker let’s go, I’m ready to die tonight!!” The driver is Mr. Kim, owner of Van Convenience. The conversation on their drive is accompanied by sounds of a Korean radio station, and Mr. Kim explains the Los Angeles Police Department’s withdrawal from the area and the impromptu Korean American organization of defense forces to protect their livelihoods. Daniel responds, “You talk like you’re in the fucking military and shit.” Mr. Kim explains that he and the two brothers’ father were in fact both members of the South Korean Marine Corps. Mr. Kim touches on the military legacy that conscripts all Korean men into mandatory service, which draws out a long shadow of the transpacific cultural contingency that traces back through the Korean War to Japanese colonial rule. Ricoeur’s interrogative cultural contingency finds a particular resonance with the “historical contingency” that Michael Shapiro notes in Friedrich Schiller’s writing on the arts and the sublime experience. Shapiro explains, historical contingency “both undermines the Kantian pursuit of subjective harmony and anticipates the analyses of contemporary post-Kantians who emphasize the contingencies of relation between subjects and communities of sense” (25). Historical contingency identifies the critical differences around which subjects gather into “communities of sense.” Mr. Kim’s story calls on the audience to make sense of a transpacific history that conscripts individuals into nationhood through a state-building project. In other words, this cultural/historical contingency gestures toward an intimate Korean American entanglement

of military forces and modern history between the two nation-states. Mr. Kim's military training jolts the scene into a mission of personnel recovery, in which Daniel becomes an unwilling combatant despite an earlier objection, "Listen, that's not me man, I don't do that kind of shit dude." There is a transpacific prehistory here that draws complicated lines through the twentieth century on the Korean peninsula. A "'prehistory' of the story is what binds it to a larger whole and gives it a 'background'" (Ricoeur 2009: 75). The background in the prehistory reveals a matter of transpacific entanglements that are disclosed through Mr. Kim's story, an intergenerational knot of conscription into ideological violence and the racial sublime.

Chon's film takes up this prehistory of transpacific entanglements most explicitly through its title, a transpacific excess that lumps the Korean War (1950-1953) into an abject space in national memory as a "forgotten war." The opening title scene offers an initial definition of the title subject as an object of perception: "Gook: a derogatory term for East and Southeast Asians. It was originally predominantly used by the US military during wartime, especially during the Korean and Vietnam Wars." Following the Korean War and *sa-il-gu* (April 19, 1960), the Republic of Korea responded to a U.S. request for military forces in Vietnam, in exchange for compensation with which the Republic would finance its fast-paced development of industry and modernization. The carryover between the two wars is not simply the spectral Cold War, but "the foreigner racialization of the poor, third world, Communist 'gook'" (Kim, *Imperial Citizens* 8). The slur blurred the dividing line between Cold War ideologies and a racial sublime, as "the most common racial epithet used by Americans to describe Vietnamese, enemy *and ally alike*" (Lee 190, emphases added). The two wars would find their way into the national imaginary through popular culture, however, the "mere gook rule" also returned to the U.S. into the domestic racial sublime. The racial

grammar had cast off another layer and revealed itself to explicitly as an imperial American grammar.

One of the most revealing of the countless such references to gooks came in a 1969 report by war correspondent Robert Kaiser entitled “The GI’s and the Gooks.” Kaiser wrote, in a sentence suggestive of how anti-Vietnamese racism drew on formulations as old as the Indian Wars, “The only good gook, it is said again and again on US bases throughout Vietnam, is a dead gook.” (Roediger 119)

In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Grace Cho writes,

The perception of ‘the gook,’ constructed by both military rhetoric and 1950s American popular culture, was that of a racially and morally inferior class of beings who needed to be saved in the south and extinguished in the north, yet because of the constant movement of refugees across boundaries of conflict, north and south became virtually indistinguishable. (72-3)

Robert Lee explains how hate crimes against Asian Americans dramatically increased in the following decades. “In several of these cases and in many others, it did not matter that the victim was Chinese, or Korean, or Vietnamese; the mere gook rule overrode ethnicity” (217). In the 2000 presidential campaigns, Senator John McCain invoked an apparition of this unspoken rule to refer to his North Vietnamese captors. “While he later apologized, Senator McCain continued to justify this use by appealing to his *prisoner of war memory* as the *objective basis for his representation of the past*” (Mao and Young 12-13, emphases added). Although the public apology aimed to amend the border between past and present, thereby buttressing the safe confines of the national community in the present moment of his political address, the war veteran presidential candidate’s “representation of the past” illustrated the impossibility of an objective basis. Through a word, the racial sublime pierced the ahistorical veil and revealed the traumatic “prisoner of war memory” that haunts the present. Put differently, the slur functions to keep a traumatic past in the space of memory separate from an objective position of narration that is one’s embodied presence in the present. One needs not necessarily apologize for speaking of one’s ghosts, although it is a

significantly necessary civil gesture, but rather, acknowledge and inquire into how the return of the repressed here reveals the racial sublime in the political unconscious.

Language Lesson

Chon's film takes up the slur for a politics of transfiguration, and remarkably breaks down a representational figure of unintelligibility through a language lesson. Immediately preceding Daniel's trip to the recording studio and the breakout of the Riots, Eli abusively berates Daniel in a long scene that hits a nerve on the financial reality of their daily living. Daniel is left mute to swipe away silent tears, as Eli steps out to his car. Eli lights a cigarette and pulls out a binder from the glove compartment which holds photos of their father. Kamilla soon joins him outside, and lets him know that Daniel has left and she has locked up the store. The two are about to leave, but the car doesn't start. Eli goes out to check the engine compartment, propping the hood. Kamilla then contorts herself to read the defacement that had earlier been painted on the car.

Kamilla: "Yo what does that even mean?"

Eli: "What? Oh, gook? I don't know, it just means, in Korean it just means country."

Kamilla: "Really."

Eli: "Yea, yea, so like, Han-Gook is Korea, Young-Gook is England."

Kamilla: "What about America?"

Eli: "That's, uh, that's my favorite one. Me-Gook."

The language lesson here is an ironic lesson of American grammar punctuated by Eli's self-incriminating gestures. In an interview with director Ava Duvernay at the Sundance Film Festival, Chon spoke about this moment. "Eli has a choice, he can choose to perpetuate the cycle of hate and teach her the racial slur, or he can make a conscious decision to protect her and teach her the literal definition, and he chooses to do the latter." Chon offers an interpretative context for the former, explaining how American soldiers in the Korean War

deformed the Korean word for the United States into a slur by cutting out the Sino-Korean character for “beautiful” and instrumentalizing the character for “country.” Emphasizing the deformation and dispossession, Chon outlines a racializing misrecognition that implicates American military support on the Korean peninsula: “to take that word away from us, and we were calling your country beautiful, and now it’s a racial slur that carries over into the Vietnam War.” Robert Lee explains in a similar vein,

The term “gook” has a long history in the American vocabulary of race and in the American imperial career in Asia and the Pacific. A bastardization of the Korean *hankuk* (Korean), or *mikuk* (American), it was used by Americans in the Korean War to refer to North and South Koreans and Chinese alike. (190)

It seems that Chon’s “literal definition” is a transliteration of the Sino-Korean characters, which leaves off further explanation in order to retain a sense of irony and debar “perpetuat[ing] the cycle of hate.” Although it may seem reductive, Eli offers Kamilla a language lesson on the sublime subject of “-gook” that most simply aims to recuperate the “beautiful character.” Chon’s explanation, however contrived, does not diminish the significance of the moment of encounter in which the repetition of “country” led soldiers to calling Koreans “-gooks” as shorthand, effectively rewriting Korean persons through the racial sublime.

If this line of inquiry into language seems to lack a scientific basis, it is notable that the slur is at a basic level a sound-image. As Robert Lee writes, “The term also has links to ‘goo-goo,’ used by American soldiers used to describe Filipino insurgents at the turn of the century.” In fact, David Roediger offers “a short history of an Americanism” on this word, which further complicates the ethnonational specificity of the term. David Roediger mines archives of military conflict to identify the slur as a “pan-racist” signifier that “provides almost a short history of modern US imperial aggression and particularly of the connections between racial oppression and war,” “connecting contempt for natives with contempt for

‘promiscuous’ women and poor people generally” (117). Roediger’s writing extends Lee’s definitional line,

that gook developed from goo-goo, which, as Stuart Flexner suggests, may have been a mocking imitation of Filipino speech. If so, the origins would square with the roughly contemporaneous ‘spik’, the derivation of which, H. L. Mencken held, came from Spanish-speakers’ alleged attempts to say that they did not ‘spik’ [speak] English. One account from the 1930s specifically identifies gooks on language grounds as Spanish-speakers. (ibid. 118)

Turning back to the early twentieth century, “Marines made the Haitians into gooks [...] by the 1920s, gooks were French- and creole-speaking Black Haitians and Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans” (ibid.). Roediger’s genealogy traces a haunting figure in the minds of American empire as an onomatopoeic appellation, one which imposes a sign that renders an other unintelligible. Curiously, “Gook” is the second track on rapper Denzel Curry’s 2016 album *Imperial*, which he explains is Miami slang for an “odd” or “weird” individual. Without a clear genealogy, the slur is nonetheless significant for what it reveals about the aural basis of racialization. As Rebecca Kukla writes, “A slur is a *doing*” (8). An other person is reduced to a sound-image, which “slurs” a subject into a sign of an other being and infantilizes an individual through a developmental devolution. Thus, this is a significant moment in the film in the intervention into and reconfiguration of a crude understanding that refuses to face humanity of the other. Eli’s language lesson attempts to give Kamilla a sense of the beautiful returned out of a racial sublime, which is interestingly a translingual homonym for “beauty” in a Sino-Korean character that sounds the self as an object pronoun in English. A chapter from Helen Zia’s *Asian American Dreams*, “Gangsters, Gooks, Geishas, and Geeks,” which takes up casting controversy for a run of *Miss Saigon* in the early 1990s, foregrounds this aesthetic trace of cultural (mis)representation as it suggests that an animation of Oriental characters is only intelligible when performed in yellowface, as if to provide an ontological possibility to what would otherwise remain lost to

comprehension. The qualified performance of language not only draws on a context of imperial aggression and military conflicts, it doubles back to the insidious legacy of representational defacement that draws on a history of blackface and a troubling desire for racialized bodies.

Whereas Chon aims to frame the language lesson between Kamilla and Eli as education about “the literal meaning,” the imperial genealogy above, from Chon’s interview, as well as Lee and Roediger, draws out a “non-literal meaning” or “metaphorical use” that Ricoeur calls “‘the metaphorical twist’ (to speak like Monroe Beardsley) [a]s something which happens to the word. The change of meaning, which requires the full contribution of the context, affects the word” (2016: 128). What Ricoeur suggests by this metaphorical twist is an understanding of “[a]ll discourse [a]s realised (sic) as event but understood as meaning” (ibid. 130). Or, “the ‘metaphorical twist’ is both an event and a meaning, a meaningful event and an emergent meaning in language” (ibid. 136). By locating the metaphorical twist available in the language lesson, Eli offers a moment of transfiguration within the configuration of the cinematic text as an example of what is available for the film’s audience. The ironic self-reflexive language lesson may then be understood as an attempt to break from what Chon calls a “perpetual cycle of hate.” Kamilla bears witness and Eli’s discourse attempts to guide Kamilla to the character of “beauty” in the Sino-Korean naming of America that is effaced by an imposition of unintelligibility onto such a speaking position. In other words, the language lesson punctures the impossibly objective with the impossibly subjective. The metaphorical twist here locates what Ricoeur calls a “double intentionality” of symbols, an “analogical bond between the literal meaning and the symbolic meaning” (1969: 15). Eli ironically locates this metaphorical twist in a self-reflexive gesture that performs the opacity of symbolic signs, as “the first, literal, obvious

meaning itself points analogically to a second meaning which is not given otherwise than in it.” In a deconstructing performance, Eli returns the context of “forgotten wars” to the first order of the literal, making available a cultural history or “prehistory” of unintelligibility as grounds for narrative. In other words, Chon’s film engages “gook” as a trace of empire in a struggle to rearticulate the “literal” meaning of “country” with the lost character of “beautiful” in the impossible return to a prelapsarian Sinosphere.

This lesson leads the audience through the world of the film toward a new position of understanding in relation to the slur. Justin Chon’s imperative to remember the history behind the slur renders explicit a divestment of language for the subject’s conscription into a racial grammar. Here, the film offers an important lesson into the function of racialization in social conflict, through a recuperation of presence out of a representation of absent intelligibility, as an example of “Schiller’s account of ‘aesthetic education’ to allow for ‘mastery over the deeply indifferent energy of the historical process’” (Shapiro 25). However, there is also a significance regarding the storytelling as a language lesson, in the move to reconstitute an absence that paradoxically cannot find representation except as a presence made intelligible in terms of a kill count. Shapiro quotes Longinus on sublime expressions as “leav[ing] deep [in one’s mind] more to theorize than what was actually said” (ibid. 19). *Gook* rehearses a sublime expression through its cinematic storytelling that intervenes into understandings of the slur and challenges the audience’s imagination, “turn[ing] events into historical negotiations” (ibid. 28). Shapiro offers this transfiguration of historical events into discursive matters of negotiation by way of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s “reinflection of Kant” (ibid.). Whereas Lyotard substitutes the “‘matter’ of art for Kant’s transcendental structures of mentality,” Shapiro’s “extend[s] that substitution into a way of conceiving a politics of the sublime event by focusing on the way various artistic texts turn

events into historical negotiations” (ibid.). In this sense, Justin Chon’s cinematic narrative articulates moments of storytelling, doubling the act of emplotment within the configuration, illustrating a “politics of transfiguration” that navigates representational impossibilities of an objective realism by recourse to the subjective act of representation proper.

Desublimation of the Defamiliarized

The language lesson presents a transfiguration for a subject out of a cursed position in racial grammar, however, the film is not solely concerned with the Korean/Asian American subject. Bonilla-Silva states, “Racial grammar must be challenged because, like air pollution, it is hard to see clearly yet it is out there poisoning us all” (188). In *Political Sublime*, Michael Shapiro describes how literary works can facilitate “the (de)sublimation of the racial sublime by calling attention to what has been repressed in order to venture a politically inflected reading of America’s racial order” (60). Borrowing from the field of chemistry, Shapiro’s (de)sublimation describes a process of “change from a solid to a dissipating gas. Accordingly, (de)sublimation, as [he is] using the concept, is a change from what is dissipated (and thus rendered invisible) to something solid and thus apprehensible” (ibid. 59). Shapiro focuses here on Spike Lee’s cinematic engagement with Hurricane Katrina, *When the Levees Broke*, which brings together elements that “do the interpretive work” and (de)sublimate images of death. Noting death and “a history of racism and government neglect” as the two stars of the film, Shapiro writes, “The other stars are those who have suffered, not only those who mourn the dead but also those separated from family members” (ibid. 62). How does *Gook* (de)sublimate the racial grammar that Bonilla-Silva describes most explicitly as a “distillate of racial ideology and, hence, of white supremacy”? It is helpful to turn to Lisa Lowe’s thematic study of “Asian American cultural productions as countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture,” because such “aesthetic

characterizes works that are the sites for the emergence of a new subject” (4, 33). These “site[s] of ‘remembering’” also crucially make possible a recognition of Asian immigrant histories in relation to other racial histories, “the *agency* of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans” in aesthetic works of relation (ibid. 21, 9). The cultural contingencies here direct us to a crucial question of who is remembered and a recognition of entangled histories in the racial sublime.

The language lesson illustrates how the racial sublime cuts into the tongue in order to assimilate an unintelligible “nation” through racial grammar. Storytelling desublimates the military legacies and the “perpetual cycle of hate” that extend to and through Eli. However, the pan-racist signifier alone is unable to approach a utopic sense of a relative loss in relation. After the language lesson and the outbreak of civil unrest, Kamilla returns home to find her brother Keith in the living room. The audience is first introduced to Keith on the front steps outside their home, and he seems beset with heavy thoughts. In this scene, Keith is sitting in front of the television as Kamilla attempts to engage her brother in conversation about the media coverage. Eventually, Kamilla asks Keith, “Can you tell me something good about mom?” Seemingly caught off guard, Keith responds, “Yea, I guess you have no idea huh?” In a later scene, Mr. Kim shares a story with Eli and reveals that his father and Kamilla’s mother were both fatally shot while working at the shoe store. The two families are entangled by the loss of parents. Earlier in the film, Eli and Daniel tell customers that Kamilla’s “adopted,” claiming that she is “half-black half-Korean.” Although it’s difficult to read these comments as “true” statements in the light-hearted scene, one cannot deny the relations of care between the three. However, this is a point of resentment with Keith that comes to the surface in his conversation with Kamilla. Keith describes for Kamilla their mother’s unfathomable generosity for others, as well as her strict discipline at home. The

conversation opens an intimate moment of affection between the siblings until Keith's attention turns to Kamilla's backpack. He mistakes Eli's gift to Kamilla for looted sneakers, which he realizes when he discovers a photograph of their parents in the shoebox, "Where'd you get that? You been down there with them gooks huh?!" Keith shifts suddenly into a different mood, and attempts to address the situation: "Yo, they don't like you, they don't love you, nothing—they're not your friends, they're using you—they used mom—that's actually how mom died." Kamilla responds, "They're not using me, they treat me like family!" The conversation escalates dramatically as Kamilla lets slip, "They're better family than you guys! They're much better than you!" This corners Keith and he pulls himself out of the vulnerable exchange, "They better than me? Them niggas that killed my mom? They ain't never come here, they ain't never say fucking sorry or nothing?! They over here prospering? They over here prospering... I bet you they got fucking more of them shoes huh? What the fuck am I crying for?!" In the later conversation between Mr. Kim and Eli, Mr. Kim can only wonder aloud whether things might have been different if he had been there at the time. Mr. Kim reveals that he and Eli's father had in fact established the shoe store together. In closing, he puts an arm around Eli and tells him that they had moved to America to give the children a better life. There is no clear sense of an explanation or resolution about the fatal shooting, and this lack of clarity foregrounds the loss of the parents that seems to haunt the children of either family. As Keith responds to Kamilla's question about whether their mother is looking down, "Ain't nobody watching over us, it's just us." Kamilla's cry of family provides the missing spark for remembering, but the desublimation of lost relations reveals deep wounds that have not yet healed.

Remembering is not easy, because forgetting is difficult. Remembering presents a challenge in perception. On one hand, remembering, like the entanglement of the two

families, is tied to violence and loss. However, on the other hand, there is the sense of re-membering that was available in the language lesson. In the context of this film, re-membering concerns a re-perception through *Gook*, a desublimation of the racial sublime through language that reveals the hidden etymology of a word. An enemy, in terms of language, is inherited from the Latin *inimicus*, which one may re-member as a negation (*in-*) of friendly relation (*amicus*). This aspect of re-membering is a learning, which is a theme numerous characters emphasize by calling on Kamilla to go to school. This second re-membering shares significant implications with the film's audience, the classroom experience as an aesthetic education. Most importantly, an hermeneutics of transfiguration underscores the existential urgency to re-member through the momentary breaks of storytelling, because racial grammar aims to totalize. Abelmann and Lie write, "The poet June Jordan saw in 'fire everywhere' a simmering sentiment for social justice and a hope for a political movement against racism and oppression" (3). *Gook* grasps together the day's events through a significant motif that features Kamilla dancing in front of a fire. The narrative begins and ends with this aesthetic motif. The close of the film follows Eli back to the shoe store where Daniel is waiting, and he returns Daniel's inquisitive gaze with a shake of his head. Daniel silently embraces his brother. Previously, Kamilla attempted to intervene as Keith and his friends prepared petrol bombs to burn down the store with Eli and Daniel on the roof. Kamilla, unbeknownst to Keith, had taken off to the shoe store with his gun. She runs out the front door, and the audience does not see but hears the ringing of a gunshot, which breaks the escalating tension between the two groups. Kamilla had tripped over the doorsill, and despite Keith and Eli's attempts to rush her to the hospital, the audience understands that Kamilla has not survived the fatal wound. In the final montage, Eli breaks from Daniel and tells him to "go get the molotovs." Eli lights the cloth and throws the bottle

of gasoline through an opening in the smashed front window. The two brothers stand and watch the store burn from a distance, as the film flashes back to an earlier scene in which Eli, Daniel, and Kamilla danced a dream-like sequence, and the aesthetic motif of Kamilla dancing in front of a fire ends the film. These three scenes, an arson, a flashback dance sequence, and the aesthetic motif of Kamilla's dance, draw out three dimensions in the narrative: reality, memory, and dream. The aesthetic motif opens a resonance with the title of Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the relation between being, care, and time comes together in a meditation on loss and mourning. Ricoeur develops "an ontological hermeneutics addressed to the historical condition considered an unsurpassable mode of being" (343). The context here is guided by Heidegger's *da-sein*, "there-being." As William Dowling explains, "For Ricoeur, Heidegger's most important philosophical contribution was his demonstration of the rootedness of temporality in *Sorge*, or care, which in *Being and Time* is said to derive from the sense of finitude or limitation that gives meaning to even the most ordinary human activities" (27). To be in a caring relation with another triangulates one in that moment as a historical being. However, the racial sublime identifies how a system of relations assigns locations of intelligible being through a racial grammar. The moments of storytelling in *Gook* are significant demonstrations of care precisely because they give voice to otherwise unintelligible characters as they share stories, especially in the conversations about the parents. Ricoeur's meditation on mourning aims to reveal the "fundamental relation of history to violence" (2004: 79). The difficulty lies in the historical negotiations around traumatic events of loss. Ricoeur explains how losing a loved one produces "a rupture in communication [which] constitutes a genuine amputation of oneself to the extent that the relation with the one who has disappeared forms an integral part of

one's self-identity" (ibid. 359). What follows is an anticipation that finds shape in "the reconciliation with this loss," "on the horizon of this mourning of the other, the mourning that would crown the anticipated loss of our own life" (ibid.). What does this mean for the characters in *Gook*? In separate scenes with their siblings, Eli and Keith violently express the pain that besets them. In the absence of parents, the older brothers inherit a responsibility to financially maintain their households. The sudden loss of their parents shifted them into precarious roles, and the brothers have not been able to afford to mourn. The circumstances create conditions that are not conducive to successful mourning, not least because to anticipate the loss of one's own life threatens the survival of the family that is the foremost priority in one's mind. Most significantly, the parents have been lost to indiscriminate gun violence. The everyday struggle of economic survival demands coming to terms with the impossibility of life. Eli fights to keep the business alive, which means his daily return to the site of the father's murder. Keith provides for his sisters, however, Kamilla's routine visits to the shoe store recall their mother's commute and murder. The brothers must impossibly hold it all together and they remain unable to let go of loss. Either man suffers alone, unable to recognize the shared pain, and the deferred reconciliation only exacerbates their entrenchment as historical beings in the racial sublime.

The death of Kamilla is a terrifying apogee in the narrative. Kamilla effectively influences the focalization in *Gook*, as the audience followed her through private and public spaces in the neighborhood, without whom the audience may lose their way. The character of Kamilla also echoes an historical event that challenges the audience's frame of understanding about the Riots. In the interview with Justin Chon, Ava Duvernay remarks on an early scene, in which Kamilla stops at Mr. Kim's convenience store before arriving at the shoe store, as a clear recall of the fatal shooting of Latasha Harlins for "anyone [in the

audience] that knows that history of the city.” Steph Cha’s *Your House Will Pay* explicitly engages the murder of Latasha Harlins, and an author’s note opens toward the back of her novel with a brief outline.

On March 16, 1991, fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins walked into Empire Liquor Market and Deli to buy a bottle of orange juice. When she went to pay for the juice, the store owner, a woman named Soon Ja Du, accused her of stealing and reaching across the counter to grab the girl and her backpack. Latasha fought back, hitting Du four times before turning around to leave. Du retrieved a gun and shot Latasha in the back of the head. The girl died with two dollars in her left hand. The whole thing was caught on video, and Du was convicted of voluntary manslaughter. She received no jail time.

This video footage entered into a televisual interplay with the footage of police officers beating Rodney King. News media edited down the original footage into an intensified clip of the fatal shooting. Chon’s representation of Kamilla’s death complicates the reference above. The choice to separate Kamilla’s death with an accidental gunshot may either suggest a critical gesture at Du’s verdict as an erasure of accountability, or invite criticism for appropriating the memory of Latasha Harlins. Moreover, how does one interpret the visual absence of the fatal gunshot in the film? What is at stake is undoubtedly how we remember. Michael Shapiro’s engages Longinus on sublime expressions with respect to “complications of representation”:

[Longinus] anticipates contemporary reflections on sublime experience that identify not “an object *beyond* reason and expression, but rather ‘that within representation which nonetheless *exceeds* the possibility of representation.’” Whether resident in Longinus’s observations or in contemporary post-Kantian ones, what is shared by sublime experiences and disruptions to representation is a provocation to think critically about subjectivity. (21)

The difficulty of Kamilla’s death in *Gook* may be a “provocation to think critically about subjectivity,” in terms of being in relation, remembering as an act of relation, when the shared experience is a sublime experience of that loss that is not immediately available, but specific, mediat(iz)ed, and fragmented.

The cinematic narrative charges the narrative fiction with a sense of historical reality, “permitting us to become aware of the actualities of history through a protective but transparent barrier” (Hinnant 135). To draw from Charles Hinnant’s explication of Friedrich Schiller’s engagements with the sublime, viewers “remain outside the representation, even as we identify with the surrogate figures for the purposes of gaining an aesthetic education.” Hinnant locates a twofold appeal of Schiller’s education, intellectual and emotional functions. On one hand, representations of sublime subjects encourage recognition of misfortune or great suffering as “a form of retrospective prophecy” (ibid. 133). A tragedy that befell another in some distant past may visit one in the future. On the other hand, the “struggling figures could inspire in us [...] the sublime courage associated with the nobility and endurance of those who remain steadfast in defeat” (ibid.). The question then is a matter of audience identification. In *Gook*, the surrogate figures with whom we identify suggests a communal identification of a collective “us.” After all, it is through a subjective position as part of the film’s audience that one experiences the aesthetic education. To experience an aesthetic education suggests an hermeneutic experience of transfiguration, implicating how we re-member beyond the moment.

Re-membering as Utopia in Mourning

Justin Chon’s film is an intervention that aims to address the title slur, as well as the looped violence of the racial sublime. In the latter, the fatal shooting that leads to the death of Kamilla is absent from the frame, which invokes the memory of Latasha Harlins and circumvents mediatization. The film’s intervention into the looped violence instead motivates a rehearsal of collective re-membering in the space of aesthetic education, a

collective movement into a space of mourning¹⁵. Kamilla's death tragically approximates her mother's murder. Ultimately, the unfulfilled mourning for the parents catches Kamilla as she trips over the threshold of the front entrance in her distressed attempt to mediate the situation with firepower. Christine Battersby writes, "In both alchemy and architecture the Latin word *sublimis* is in play, in particular 'sub' denoting 'under' or 'up to' and *limin* meaning threshold" (5). The loss of Kamilla is a significant breaking point. After Keith and Eli rush Kamilla into the hospital, the two men are left facing one another. The disaster rends Keith, who begins to hammer Eli with punches before he falls back and turns the verbal castigation onto himself as he throws his fists back across his own jaw. Eli draws toward Keith to intercede, crying "no, stop, please stop." As Eli returns to the store and sets fire to the haunting site of loss, the arson liberates the symbolic store of suffering in a performance of significant mourning that transitions into the final montage. Ricoeur writes, "The work mourning is the cost of the work of remembering, but the work of remembering is the benefit of the work of mourning" (2004: 72). A sense of closure comes at the cost of an opening into memory, and the film closes as an enclosure that conscripts the audience into its hermeneutics of transfiguration.

To read in this [structural] way means [...] to transfer oneself into the "place" where the text stands, within the "enclosure" of this worldless place. According to this choice, the text no longer has an outside, it has only an inside [...] the projection of a world that is more than a situation. (2007: 162, 166)

Re-remembering loss through mourning returns lived experience to an historical absence. *Gook*'s intervention into the looping of a death presents the audience with a break from the historical narrative through a cut in a succession of scenes, and "the 'enclosure' of this worldless place" as an absence in the scene accumulates meaning as "the material place thus becomes the enduring mark of mourning, the memory-aid of the act of sepulcher" (2004:

¹⁵ Many thanks to Magda Garcia for help with this significant articulation.

366). Ricoeur here writes on the ritual of entombment with relation to the act of writing. “It is this act of sepulcher that historiography transforms into writing.” The symbolic fire of the Riots is appropriated into symbolic work of mourning through a cinematic re-membering.

An interpretation of the aesthetic motif as a “transfiguration of death in history into sepulcher” complicates the Korean American subject in *Gook*. The language lesson that transfigures cultural inscrutability into ontological intelligibility is curiously located within the cinematic sepulcher. The aesthetic motif may be a key to an hermeneutic experience that aims to identify a Korean American subject in the frame. The film holds a re-membering of Kamilla that is prefigured with a flash of her name across the scene of her first appearance, which brings together a narrative that grasps together significant characters from her life. The camera work encourages the audience to identify with Kamilla through an inverted vertical orientation to follow Kamilla’s contortion to read the graffiti on the car right side up, and the blurring focus that suggests Kamilla’s loss of consciousness following the gunshot. To recall the notions of being and care, Eli is perhaps recognized as a Korean American subject not in an essentialist sense, but rather, in the caring relation that opens a channel for Eli to express a Korean American subject in the language lesson. In this sense, an hermeneutics of transfiguration opens a space in which loss is embodied by each relation of care as a shared mourning. In an essay titled “Racial Melancholia,” David Eng and Shinhee Han quote from José Muñoz:

Communal mourning, by its very nature, is an immensely complicated text to read, for we do not mourn just one lost object or other, but we also mourn as a ‘whole’—or, put another way, as a contingent and temporary collection of fragments that is experiencing a loss of its parts.” A series of unresolved fragments, we come together as a contingent whole. We gain social recognition as a racial collective in the face of this communal loss. (64)

The notion of communal mourning aligns with an image of the hermeneutic circle, and in turn, opens an hermeneutics that draws out meaning through a configuration of caring relations around absence and loss.

As part of the aesthetic motif that begins and closes the cinematic narrative, the sepulcher reconstitutes the events of the Riots into historical negotiations. “The historicity of those negotiations becomes evident if one heeds Deleuzian temporality. Deleuze like Kant privileges the instant; however, that privileging is not in the service of moral closure; it is rather in the service of an imagination of a different future” (Shapiro 28). Shapiro continues,

Thus rather than moral closure, Deleuze theorizes an ethics of the event. In focusing on ethics rather than morality (where the morality involves rules for making judgments while ethics involves embracing uncertainty in order to exit from what is habitually recognized within one’s milieu), Deleuze’s aim is to liberate thinking, thus enabling an imagination of a different world. (ibid.)

The ethics of the instant locates utopia in the mourning, through the dancing in front of the fires. There is a scene in which Eli sends Kamilla to Mr. Kim to break a fifty-dollar bill for change. Mr. Kim refuses, “I’m not bank.” The situation escalates, and as Kamilla exclaims, “Mr. Kim pulled a gun on me!” Eli closes shop and confronts Mr. Kim. Unlike an earlier confrontation, Eli engages Mr. Kim with curses in the Korean language. Mr. Kim responds by invoking the memory of Eli’s father, which explodes the situation. Eli, incensed, taunts Mr. Kim’s vulnerability behind the bullet-proof partition, and lifts two bottles of malt liquor and a box of twinkies with menacing defiance. The next scene cuts to Kamilla dancing in the shoe store parking lot as Eli drifts his Toyota Trueno in a circle around her. Watching on from across street, Mr. Kim yells out, “What are you doing?! you’re ruining your tires!!” before he retires back into his store in exasperation. Kamilla here occupies a similar position as when she dances in front of the fires. In fact, the position of the camera in the arson scene locates the audience in this similar position, relative to the store. In other words, Kamilla’s

dancing locates the grounds for historical negotiation, as her presence as well as absence opens and threads the narrative through re-membering. Following Shapiro, the aesthetically motivated narrative does not propose an idealized community, but rather, gathers an audience around and by the aesthetic motif as a fractured community, or a community of different fragments of time gathered by the loss of another. “A series of unresolved fragments, we come together as a contingent whole.” Through Kamilla’s dancing, the montage illustrates an intentional combustion of history as a storehouse of haunted beings, a re-membering of shared times, and a mourning of lost being. The narrative does not fulfill “the culmination of the implicit logic of the present,” but moves through an hermeneutic of transfiguration, which “emphasizes the emergence of qualitatively new needs, social relations, and modes of association, which burst open the utopian potential within the old” (Benhabib 13). This is not what must inevitably be, but what may otherwise possibly be anticipated.

In *Gook*, loss is not simply bound to history as an absence that registers as hurt, it is revealed as an entanglement, in Ricoeur’s words, of narratively structured human times. In this sense, topic being is being nowhere. *Gook* offers a text for a hermeneutic reading that draws on the dissertation’s interest in diasporic constellations, as mediations of relations through aesthetic space. Engaging David Kazanjian and Marc Nichanian’s dialogue about Armenian diaspora, Lily Cho writes,

Loss is both in the past and in the potentiality of the future. This understanding of loss takes diaspora out of a relation to land and territory into one which is bound to the problem of history and memory.

[...]

Diasporas emerge through losses which have already happened but which also define the future. These losses come both before and after the emergence of diasporic subjectivity. In thinking about diaspora and loss, there might be a temptation to understand the substance of diasporic loss as that of the loss of the homeland. However, as Nichanian reveals, diasporic loss signals a relationship to history, not land or territory. (16-17)

The aesthetic education in *Gook* is a complicated lesson into what Eng and Han call racial melancholy. In the final chapter of *The Melancholy of Race*, Anne Cheng reads Anne Devere Smith's *Twilight*, and explores the politics of grief. Inquiring into the keyword "identification," Cheng borrows from Elin Diamond to explain how the "peculiar form of recognition [...] borne out of a drama of otherness" is fractured through with "historical contradictions," which is provoked rather than disguised "within a social status quo implied by a homogenous notion of the audience-as-one" (181). Cheng locates a politics of grief in the ethical identification that follows what she calls "immersion": "the passage between self and the other" as "the disorienting immersion that is the condition for any act of identification [for which] the 'no place' [...] is nonetheless an imperative" (ibid. 195). The cinematic narrative of *Gook* opens up a space of immersion for its audience in which one is challenged to lose oneself in the loss of another.

Although there are dangers of spiraling into the abyss of loss, one may find healing through re-membering, to desubliminate conventional familiarities into familial subjects through storytelling. Finally, although the sepulcher discloses and aesthetic enclosure for re-membering, the audience is also given a gift in the form of song. As the film closes with Kamilla again in front of the fires, the voice of Korean American singer-songwriter David Choi sings back the song Kamilla sings in our first introduction to her character.

I hear the voices all around
Echoing the fears within my thoughts
If I'm dreaming
No
I could see the light on the other side
Everything's going to be alright
Oh I could see the light on the other side
Everything's going to be alright
Just a little more time

The Asian/Korean American configuration draws an aesthetic community around an aesthetic motif that function *as if* a votive for a new collective mourning, and each member of the audience may leave the scene illuminated with music to share. Justin Chon's film thus presents a rearticulation that implicates audiences in the unending Promethean politics of transfiguration. However, this is a movement to *find* healing, which is to remind one that the film is not only a challenge to retell the events of the Los Angeles unrest in 1992, as some true version of events in fictional form, but rather, to take notice of the impossibility of speaking about the film without invoking the slur. In other words, one must face the inevitable question, who is the gook in *Gook*?

CHAPTER 4:

“BORN CTZN”

In the previous chapters, I explored Korean American ethnopoetics with a focus on how aesthetic mediation holds a necessary expression. This chapter moves toward a sense of enjoyment, in terms of the psychoanalytic analytic *jouissance*. In *Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature*, Juliana Chang notably reads a selection of Asian American texts through the psychoanalytic frame. As available in the subtitle of her work, Chang glosses *jouissance* as “traumatic enjoyment,” “a violent yet blissful shattering of the self” (1). I extend Chang’s scholarship to Dumbfoundead’s raps to read the ethnopoetics across his growing oeuvre. Like the mid-century European avant-garde collective, the Situationists International, Dumbfoundead plays with spectacles. In this chapter, I set out to explore what H. Samy Alim, Jooyoung Lee, and Lauren Mason Carris call “nested performances” in Dumbfoundead’s ethnopoetics. “By using the term *nested performances*, [the authors] are calling attention to the utility of investigating linguistic performances at different scales and over time” (119). From the shared interest in language, my focus on ethnopoetics leads me to consider how Dumbfoundead engages in what James Clifford calls an “ethnographic self-fashioning.” I approach “nested performances” from two different angles, Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, and the narratological concept of metalepsis. By way of these conceptual tools, I will illustrate how Dumbfoundead plays in a movement through popular/culture¹⁶.

Drift of Divergence/Diversion

Dumbfoundead’s story begins in the Los Angeles underground battle rap scene. Like Denizen Kane’s experience upon seeing spoken word group Isangmahal, Dumbfoundead’s

¹⁶ The solidus here designates (sub)culture in specific relation to the popular, which I intend to read as popular
culture to be sustained throughout this chapter.

exposure to Project Blowed was an aesthetic revelation, “Seeing these guys using their mind and turning freestyles into an instrument” (“LA’s Hidden Gem”). Dumbfoundead made the weekly excursions from Koreatown to “Leimart Park Village [...] in the Crenshaw district of Los Angeles” (30), site of the underground hip-hop mecca Project Blowed. “I walked about like forty blocks, through bright reds and dark blues/ Leimert Park, my rap school, they rap fast and pack tools/ you rap whack, they come back, you will get your ass boo’ed” (“Huell Howser,” *DFD*). Marcyliena Morgan introduces readers to Project Blowed in *The Real Hip-hop*: “LA’s most influential hip-hop freestyle competition,” an underground or counterpublic site with a “philosophy and organizational structure [that] became a model and progressive response to the alienation experienced by the young people in the community [...] in the form of a counterdiscourse, a powerful alternative medium to represent their truth” (30). This space offered a profound sense of “optimism [...] during what may be one of the bleakest periods in the history of LA’s youth” (32). Morgan’s ethnography “provide[s] the way into the underground as a physical, imagined, symbolic, and powerful space” (*ibid.* 14), where “youth form new social meanings of race and ethnicity within the local settings of these competitive verbal duels” (Alim et al. 118). Alim, Lee, and Carris analyze the “sociolinguistic stylizations” in the “nested performances,” as distinct from Alasdair Pennycook’s study of rap in Japan and a “heterogeny position” of “world Englishes” (516). The three co-authors are interested in two connected levels of identity and language construction: “the larger level of genre [that] locates the freestyle rap battle as performance within the range of performances in the speech community,” and “the stylistic performances of the racial and ethnic Other within those rap battles (including the production of Asianness, blackness, and *Latinidad*)” (Alim et. al. 120). My contribution to

these discussions about Project Blowed is focused on the ethnopoetics, for which I begin with Situationist techniques of *dérive* and *détournement*.

In the Situationist document *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord describes mid-twentieth century circumstances through the trope of the spectacle. “The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving” (§2). This describes a reification of lived experiences, “presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*” (ibid. §1), which produces a technologically mediated virtual (mis)perception. Debord’s Marxist critique specifically identifies a shift in social relations, which are cleaved by intervening images that set lived experiences at a distance. The forces of industry and production have not only affected social relations. The spectacle, or alternatively, the commodity as fetish, transforms space and time into a seamless terrain of an “unreal unity [that] masks the class division underlying the real unity of the capitalist mode of production” (ibid. §72). A critique of this illusive and seamless unity calls for a consideration of “the spectacle of Western racial oppression” and its transnational variations (Robinson 308). Here I detour the spectacle through Cedric Robinson’s lessons into the Black Radical Tradition, specifically his remarks regarding the late-19th century context of the American Civil War. “The class struggle had been distorted and a proletarian revolutionary consciousness among nineteenth-century American workers had been effectively interdicted by the ideological power of racism and the seductiveness of the bourgeois myth of upward mobility” (ibid. 314). In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman provides a tremendous outline of “the diffusion of terror and violence” produced through this crossing of race and spectacle: “the spectacular nature of black suffering, and, conversely, the dissimulation of suffering through spectacle” (4, 22). In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman’s defamiliarization of racialized violence made familiar casts Debord’s critique back into the archives for a

reconsideration of the phrase “society of the spectacle.” I draw out these lines not simply to locate my intervention, but in order to note the stakes that are involved in discussions of race, economy, and social relations.

In Jooyoung Lee’s book-length ethnographic study on Project Blowed, he describes how the young participants are “interested in ‘blowin’ up,’ or becoming successful recording artists” (x). Lee follows Morgan’s study of the early period of Project Blowed with a thematic focus on violence and “existential urgency.” For these young men, Project Blowed offers “a competitive training ground” for their craft in “places where constraints imposed by gangs and police interventions restricted their mobility” (ibid. 12). Dumbfoundead speaks on his introduction to Project Blowed as an extension of his interest in freestyling and battle rapping. As the son of busy working immigrant parents, Dumbfoundead’s keen interest in the craft led him to the open mic spot during weeknights in high school (Kelley). Notably, this choice, encouraged by cultural proclivities for comedy and Hip-hop, moves away from the model minority myth, which promotes an image of upward mobility through adherence to socially acceptable terms of the “Protestant ethic.” In Situationist terms, Dumbfoundead drifts, practicing *dérive*, in which one “drop[s] their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (“Theory of the *Dérive*”). *Dérive* is a contradictory practice of abandonment to “the dominations of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities.” This aims to reengage the world from which one is separated in a “society of the spectacle,” to realize the “real world [that] is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it” (“Society” §36). In fact, Dumbfoundead’s drift toward Project Blowed reorients the sense of vocation, or calling, in Max Weber’s Protestant work ethic. As Rey Chow explains, “the

psychological mechanism of ‘calling’ (sense of vocation)—what Max Weber calls a ‘work ethic’ [...] is, arguably, already a dynamic built into the rationalist process of commodification itself” (33). Abandoning himself to *dérive*, letting himself drift through the streets of Los Angeles, Dumbfoundead’s ethno-poetics begin to take shape already in his pursuit of the craft, transgressing the ethnic and racial boundaries of Los Angeles neighborhoods in the process.

Unlike Morgan and Lee, my relation to Project Blowed is mediated by the cultural traces of the workshop in the form of CDs. I first encountered Dumbfoundead through his rap battles on YouTube, and continued to explore his music in the form of downloadable albums projects. Following his training at Project Blowed, Dumbfoundead gained visibility through YouTube as a participant in the *Grind Time* battle rap league. His 2008 battle with Tantrum¹⁷ is particularly noteworthy, because it highlights a war of words between two Asian American battle rappers who represent Southern and Northern California. Significantly, Dumbfoundead represents Koreatown, Los Angeles and a collective called Swim Team forged out of Project Blowed. As Morgan explains,

To represent in hip-hop is not simply to identify with a city, neighborhood, school, and so on. It is also a *discursive turn*—it is the symbols, memory, participants, and objects and details that together produce art of the space and time. Representing rebuilds and reinvigorates the space by making it hip-hop. (72, emphasis added)

To draw back on Alim, Lee, and Carris, the nested performances in this battle are particularly focused in on “productions of Asianness.” This leads us from the Situationist technique of *dérive* to *détournement*. In a chapter titled “Negation and Consumption Within Culture,” Debord turns to a critical discussion of sociology and structuralism, in which he calls for a critical use, or practice, of critical theory. “A critical theory of the spectacle

¹⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to the audio text that is included on Dumbfoundead’s first album project *Fun With Dumb*.

cannot be true unless it unites with the practical current of negation in society” (“Society” §203). “It is not a negation of style, but a style of negation” (ibid. §204). Drawing on Hegel, Debord explains the technique of *détournement*, an act of detour or diversion.

“Détournement reradicalizes previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths and thus transformed into lies” (ibid. §206). Turning to Kierkegaard, he continues, “this use of *détournement* requires maintaining one’s *distance* from whatever has been turned into an official truth.” My argument here is that battle rap specifically utilizes this technique as it concerns identity.

Détournement is the opposite of quotation, of appealing to a theoretical authority that is inevitably tainted by the very fact that it has become a quotation – a fragment torn from its own context and development, and ultimately from the general framework of its period and from the particular option (appropriate or erroneous) that it represented within that framework. *Détournement* is the flexible language of anti-ideology. (ibid. §208)

The question then, what is the ideology that is thus refused, or diverted? How does battle rap tear a fragment of discourse, discursive identity, from a logic of ideological re/production?

It is said that the rules in battle rap are that there are no rules. There is only form (specifically defined in battle rap leagues in terms of timed rounds), and style. Of course, there are unspoken and unwritten rules, because it is a language-game. It is important to note that Project Blowed did in fact maintain a list of rules to uphold a community of mutual respect, which appears in facsimile form in Morgan’s study (91). With regard to the form, most importantly, there was a rule that spoke to the critical dimension of the space.

When an artist was not performing at the highest level of lyrical skill, the audience, comprised mainly of MCs, would chant “Please pass the mic.” This chant meant that the audience no longer respected the person on the mic because that MC had not respected the audience by coming prepared. (ibid. 38)

In *Grind Time* videos, and those from other battle rap leagues, the crowd is not only constituted by other MCs, but includes a seemingly heterogenous local social network as

well as an online audience. It is difficult to say how this shifts the qualitative measure of lyrical skill, however, what is clear is that the spectacle becomes more pronounced with the less clearly defined crowd response, as the power of judgment also shifts from the crowd to a team of MC-judges. To recall Debord's definition of the spectacle, it is a virtual mis/perception, not "a mere visual deception produced by mass-media technologies [but] a worldview that has actually been materialized" ("Society" §5). In the battle rap context, rappers engage in an agonistic discursive space where the struggle is not physical, but metaphysical, poetic. Battle rappers evade and inflict discursive hits to capture the opponent in a spectacle. As an explicit example, battle rappers employ and exploit stereotypes that are available in the battle situation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines stereotype as "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception." This is the stereotype as a figuration. However, there is also a less common usage derived from the French noun *stéréotype*, "The method or process of printing in which a solid plate of type-metal, cast from a papier-maché or plaster mould taken from the surface of a forme of type is used for printing instead of the form itself." The colloquial use of "stereotype" borrows this sense of duplicated impressions in terms of perception. Bringing together Debord's Marxist dimension with the performative line in battle rap, *détournement* therefore diverts or detours the objectifying or reifying process, which is, in this case, discursive.

The Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle is significant because both rappers draw on Asian stereotypes, which not only demonstrates how Asian American battle rappers elude the capture of spectacle, but also how they play with the threatening materialization. Tantrum opens the battle with an appropriation of the "forever foreigner" position in a claim to a parallel universe and violent origin beyond the simulation. "Yo, see I ain't from here, in

my world we don't fight for peace and love/ so I'm on a mission to prove your life is freakin' done/ I traveled space and time to meet with Dumb/ here I am so I can kill the whack version of me so I can be 'the one.'" Tantrum pulls Dumbfoundead into his world through a sense of shared ethnicity ("now your career's dead, you should be making a eulogy/ your music's only respected in our native community") and undermines Dumbfoundead's MC credibility, as both unmanly and an imitation of another rapper persona in the battle rap community ("so how the fuck are you going to take on a true MC/ when you look like the Asian Illusion-Z who failed at puberty"). Tantrum continues this last mode of attack by painting Dumbfoundead as a "nerdy" "video game freak," drawing on references to StarCraft, a late 1990s strategy video game of inter-species war. In response to Tantrum's opening attempts to lock Dumbfoundead into an image of an Asian rapper who paradoxically cannot be a real MC because he is Asian, Dumbfoundead flips Tantrum's style with his opening line and similarly makes a reference to another battle rapper: "Yo, battling another Asian guy sure is simple/ it just sounds like someone took The Saurus into Oriental." He goes on, "We're both Asian, but we were both raised differently," recapitulating Tantrum's references of Asian culture as points that might detract from a real MC persona. "While I was attending funerals and smoking chron'/ you was playing Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokemon/ I was taking hip-hop beyond the limits/ you was racing Integras and Honda Civics." The battle continues in this manner, between Tantrum's persona as an "angry Asian man" against Dumbfoundead's "cool and calm" posturing. Dumbfoundead riffs on this point, "yo why you so stiff looking like an Asian mannequin."

Both rappers negotiate stereotypical images. However, there is a difference in their approaches. Tantrum's freestyle bars are not unlike his line about "only buil[ding] the Great Wall to keep faggots like you out." His defensive location ironically locks him into an

identity position of hypermasculinity at the core of his performance: “basically I’m just a better Asian/ see I spit sicker and I rhyme fresher/ I can kick quicker by a high measure/ and just to throw it in, my dick’s bigger and I drive better.” Tantrum’s aggressive bars illustrate how his rapping performance is an affirmative performance of an embodiment of Asian male identity (“see for me rhyme scheming tactics is as easy as tai chi and backflips,” “yo you better leave and hop the border/ or we’ll see if this Thirsty Fish can quench his thirst during Chinese water torture”). In contrast, Dumbfoundead’s bars open up the discursive space, making for moments that disassemble Tantrum’s hard stance from myriad angles of culture (“Yo, this guy ain’t just an Uncle Tom, he’s an Uncle Wong/ I’m a slap you with my drunken palm til you cry a Smashing Pumpkins song”) and diffuse the violent edge in Tantrum’s bars (“You’re the type of kid to go to the shooting range to soothe your pain/ remember Virginia Tech? You put your school to shame”). In other words, Dumbfoundead goes, as he prophesied earlier in the battle, “beyond the limits” of stereotypes, exploding the images by the fact of his performance and articulation of the stereotypes with his own punch lines. Dumbfoundead’s performance proves him to be a more mobile rapper who is agile with stereotypes and does not only set his sights on racial identity as punchline. “In conclusion, Tantrum’s a hater/ didn’t anybody tell you those pants are for ravers?/ How ironic you just got served in Oakland by a Los Angeles raider.” Both Tantrum and Dumbfoundead incite crowd response in the form of laughter to varying success. However, Tantrum’s performance plays into a figure of the angry Asian man, whereas Dumbfoundead’s hyperbolic references to a contemporary Asian American subculture (“dropping ecstasy without pants, doing some weird-ass house dance wearin’ Mickey Mouse hands”) as well as to the nearby Bay Area hip-hop scene (“When the Bay was bringing up the hyphy movement/ he was doing his own thing, the Tai Chi movement/ While everybody

was going “dumb dumb,” he was going “om om”) lead the audience in rhymed circles around Tantrum. After all, Dumbfoundead’s flow, or lyrical articulation, learns from “[t]he Project Blowed freestyle of rapid-fire, extemporaneous, articulate delivery [that] is known throughout LA’s underground” (Morgan 96).

In this example text, both Asian American rappers avail to prove their skills, through engagements with stereotypical images and “productions of Asianness.” As noted earlier, what is significant in this battle is the fact that both rappers are expected to do battle with Asian stereotypes. It is in this scenario that *détournement* is an important analytic. Tantrum’s use of Asian stereotypes is limited in effectiveness because the “previous critical conclusions” attributed to Asian Americans continues to “petrif[y] into respectable truths.” His interventions redirect this process of petrification, the effective function of stereotypes, toward his opponent to claim victory in the battle. However, as Alim, Lee, and Carris write, “while youth may be creating alternative local hierarchies of race and ethnicity, they are also reifying other hierarchies of gender and sexuality” (129). Despite attempts to exploit an orientalist image of martial arts, this proves ineffective against another Asian American rapper who draws from a fresher repertoire of cultural references. Bracketing the matter of who won the battle, what *détournement* foregrounds through battle rap is how images, through verbal bricolage, can be diverted, which cuts into the “autonomous movement of the nonliving” to reveal the spectacle as an occlusion of a false relation through its displacement. In terms of verbal arts, *détournement* displaces literal language as a false cultural medium through a playful and aware engagement with the language-game. More simply, language is fun in a certain way, in terms of divergent meanings. In an article titled “Psychogeography, *Détournement*, Cyberspace,” Amy Elias draws out the role of play in the work of the Situationists. “[T]he situation constructed by *dérive* and *détournement* resituated

participants in a renewed, libidinal *space*” (825). “While *dérive* described a phenomenology, *détournement* described a hermeneutics and a praxis” (ibid. 824). Setting “authentic fun” in opposition to “alienation and *boredom*,” Elias’s reading offers a method to apply the Situationist terms to my reading of the Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle. Through the co-produced *détournement* and with his appeal to more diverse stereotypes, Dumbfoundead leads the participants in the battle situation, including the internet viewer, through the stereotypes-as-spectacles, on a discursive *dérive*. Like Elias’s study of virtual spaces, Dumbfoundead leads viewer/listeners out of a “society of the spectacle” by blowing up the spectacle from the inside, as might be perceived by someone on the “outside.” It is helpful here to recall the term “nested performances” as earlier noted. The spectacle, of course, is what falsely occupies the space in between social relations, and the nested performances direct participants through cultural worlds in a journey through the verbal performances. This is what becomes clear in the Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle, particularly in the video form on YouTube. The two Asian American rappers trade bar(b)s, as if they are pulling from an invisible box of props, and the attentive viewer/listener understands that props are precisely stereotypically connotative objects. Necessarily, it takes both Asian American rappers to produce a space in which there is a possible *détournement*, divergence/diversion from the stereotype, through which the crowd sets out on a *dérive*, un beholden to ideological preconceptions.

“Murals”: “Mural, mural...”

Although my reading of the Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle may be a bit convoluted, the aim is to understand how the poetics of the *détournement* might give rise to, or differently, withhold, *dérive*, reconstituting an experience of time as fun rather than boredom and alienation, which necessitates a reimagined experience of space. Admittedly, this

description falls far short of what is available in viewing of a documentary-style video, which in turn does not do justice to physical presence in such a space. However, in the tradition of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, one can imagine what it means for a world to unfold in front of a text [cite]. As a reader follows the words in a written text, a world unfolds. As we saw with the ethnopoetics of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Justin Chon, the cinematic work provides us with a sense of the virtuality that is necessary for an imagining of such phenomenological hermeneutics. It is in this sense that Dumbfoundead's ethnopoetics are significant, not simply as textual space, but *especially* as his engagement with identity and language highlights the projective possibilities of textual space through cultural media such as the rap form and the music video. In what follows, I draw out the hermeneutic poetics in *détournement*, as a divergence/diversion of that which is expected or anticipated. In this section, I consider the music video for the song "Murals," because, in addition to the lyrical content, the visual component reveals a derivative composition. By derivative, I mean that the dramatized composition within the space of the music video derives from a panoply of lived experiences, which include various events and individuals brought together around the unfolding narrative of a Korean American persona. Although the music video does not offer a pure *dérive*, in the sense of what Debord advocates as an abandonment of false relations for a rediscovery of true relations, I argue that the space of the music video reveals a heterotopia wherein one can follow a drift away from the illusion of a model minority myth and social prescriptions into a revelatory simulation of "true" relations.

In an essay on specific cultural representations of Koreatown, Stephen Cho Suh explains an appropriation of the space by "second-generation Korean Americans to stake claims to space that they regard as both representative and affirmative of their own marginalized identities [...] as primary patrons and storytellers" (407). As available in the

previous chapter, in contrast to “past portrayals of Koreatown [...] by the predominantly white mainstream news media [the] projects created by second-generation Korean Americans stand as organic movements to contest the continued racialization of Korean/Asian Americans as ‘forever foreigners’” (ibid. 415). Suh locates significance in the embodied agency behind the creative work as developments in Korean/Asian American culture.

Though on the surface *Ktown Cowboys* and *K-Town* appear only to reify these discourses [of consumption and authenticity] through their consumption-laden portrayals of Koreatown, a deeper contextualized reading illustrates how they also work to reimagine the current state of both Koreatown and Korean America. (ibid.)

Whereas Suh inquires into how second-generation Korean American men step into available spaces as cultural ambassadors, thereby gaining agency in representations of Koreatown as a consumptive space, my inquiry into Dumbfoundead’s ethno-poetics in “Murals” is interested in the contingent implication of the viewer-listener. Although Dumbfoundead’s divergence/diversion of stereotypical images of popular consumption opens out of a similarly “consumptive ‘frontier’ space” (ibid. 409), “Murals” particularly lures spectators into an unsettling virtual space in Koreatown. This space is a heterotopia, a conceptualization of space which Michel Foucault first introduces in the preface to his text *The Order of Things*. Referring to a short essay by Borges, Foucault quotes the writer’s fantastical and incongruous list of animal classifications. Foucault describes this list as a heterotopia because the seemingly ridiculous collection of categories, for example, “(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs [...],” brings together an imagining of impossible concepts. Put differently, there is a semiotic space that can be identified as a heterotopia because of the incongruence of the collection therein. However, Foucault’s identification of this space also inconspicuously suggests that the heterotopia is a

heterotopia because it throws the reader from a stable epistemological position. As Foucault writes, “where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language” (xviii). This language is curiously reminiscent of Debord’s *détournement*, as a disorienting reorientation of one’s relation to space. Through a reading of “Murals,” I aim to reconsider “the immaterial sound of the voice” as “the non-place of language.”

“Murals” is a song from Dumbfoundead’s 2016 album project *We Might Die*, which also includes a song titled “Safe” that found significant publicity as a critical engagement with the 2016 Academy Awards controversy in which comedian Chris Rock led Asian American children onto the stage as props for a joke. In an interview for music streaming website Bandcamp, Christina Lee writes, “On his previous albums, rapper Dumbfoundead was just as likely to turn his racial identity into a punchline as we would a source of pride [...] But on *We Might Die*, that kind of self-deprecation is nowhere to be found.” Rather, this album project is thematically concentrated around an autoethnographic impetus to write his legacy into history. The lyrics for “Murals” offer an autobiographical reflection that charts his development through a narrative “legend.” However, the visuals in the music video tell a different story. The fictional narrative, which opens with a humorous scene in the liquor store, unfolds the life narrative of a Korean American from boy to man and beyond. In this legend, the Korean American meets his life partner as a child and grows up to become a shopkeeper who replaces the first shopkeeper from the opening scene, whom we might designate second-shopkeeper for descriptive purposes. The fictional narrative is punctuated with quotidian events, which seem to correlate with historical events via references to the 1992 Los Angeles unrest in the lyrics as well as the liquor store’s

geographical location in Koreatown, Los Angeles. The fictional visual narrative offers a backdrop for Dumbfoundead's autoethnopoetic lyrical narrative, and these two narrative levels converge not only through the figure of Dumbfoundead, who appears throughout to rap his lyrics, some of which appears in written text across the screen, but also through the visual artist Joseph Lee and his hyperrealist mural. Lee's mural of Dumbfoundead's visage is interspersed throughout the music video, suggesting a compositional narrative that traces the production of the music video as well as the mural. Although the fictional visual narrative and the lyrical narrative suggest a linear continuity and temporal progression, the third level compositional narrative reveals the cuts in this "passing of time." For example, in the early process of painting the mural, there is an arrow-pierced heart that is painted in place of Dumbfoundead's mouth. The second-shopkeeper-as-child simulates spray-painting this image, and the first-shopkeeper (played by actor C. S. Lee) playfully carries him off within the fictional narrative. Here, I am drawing attention to how Dumbfoundead's performative rapping within the frame and Joseph Lee's painting constitute a compositional narrative level that consistently disrupts the fictional narrative even as Dumbfoundead's performative acting seems to manifest the lyrical narrative of the voice/song in the space of the video. With the start of the second verse, Lee's painting progresses, the heart disappears, and the second-shopkeeper has grown older as a teenage couple now stands in the frame. In the bridge that follows the second refrain, the couple is presented as an adult couple with a daughter who is dressed in graduation attire. As the bridge leads into a final refrain, the fictional narrative closes with a scene in which the woman and the daughter are leaving a vigil. The camera zooms out from a framed photograph of the second-shopkeeper-as-adult, revealing the completed mural, and moving into a wide shot that reveals Dumbfoundead

standing on the roof of the building. And so, the question looms, what or where is the heterotopia here?

Foucault invokes heterotopia on three different occasions: in the introductory “Preface” to *The Order of Things*, a lecture published as “*Des espaces autres*,” and a radio talk with a group of architects. The first two have been translated into English. As noted earlier, Foucault conceives of heterotopia in terms of the Borges story that invokes a strange laughter from within him. The strange quality in this case concerns a reader’s relation to the text. However, in “Different Spaces,” Foucault creates his own strange story, as he delineates heterotopia as a concept and brings together an odd list of heterotopic spaces. In a sense, the essay, or rather, the lecture transcribed as lecture, is a performative example of heterotopia, discourse as “emplacement.” Replacing “a [nineteenth-century] space of localization,” “[e]mplacement is defined by the relations of proximity between points or elements” (176). Heterotopia refers to “emplacements [...] that have the curious property of being connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designed, reflected, or represented [*réfléchis*] by them” (ibid. 178). For a first example, Foucault offers the mirror, as both a utopia, “a placeless place,” and paradoxically also a heterotopia, “in the sense that it makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at my self in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal” (ibid. 179). The virtual space holds an utopic impossibility as a heterotopic confirmation of space. In other words, what has no space in reality is paradoxically found in reality beneath it all, and this heterotopic possibility bumps against what is otherwise a stable sense of reality. Foucault’s exposition of heterotopia continues as he distinguishes “crisis heterotopia” from the increasingly prevalent “heterotopia of deviation.” What develops then is a sense of heterotopia as a

liminal space, not as a transitional stage as can be found in Victor Turner's anthropology, but as a holding space for that which contrasts with the stability and fixity of a social reality. Put differently, heterotopias "have the role of creating a space of illusion that denounces all real space [...] as being even more illusionary [...] or, on the contrary, creating a different space [...] as perfect, as meticulous, as well-arranged as ours is disorganized, badly arranged, and muddled" (ibid. 184). Indeed, Foucault's concern here is an explication of "*des espaces autres*," and an understanding of heterotopia therefore insists on a recursive weaving through the "real space" to which it is opposed and maintains. What is most relevant for a reading of Dumbfoundead's "Murals" is perhaps Foucault's scene at the mirror.

Foucault's description of heterotopia, as a possible glimpse of utopia, by way of the mirror metaphor, shifts in our reading of "Murals." "Murals" manifests this metaphor of heterotopia in visual terms, rather than a conceptual context. It is not simply a figure looking at one's own reflection, but a figure standing in front of a visual representation as both "look back" at the viewer who is other than the figure. Admittedly, Foucault's concept of heterotopia threatens to break apart in my reading, because the referent material here is not a sense of one's own body in a mirror-stage, but instead, a sense of another's voice. What connects the viewer to the heterotopia of the music video is the song and the voice. In other words, one's perception of reality is not dependent on a visual perception, but an impossible to localize aural perception. Of course, the source of the sound is the apparatus of the internet connected device as emitted through headphones or speakers. However, what is apparently elided is the fact that the focus of one's visual perception is given over to a manipulation of images, which maintains the heterotopic vision through the continuity of a listening experience. In fact, Foucault's examples of heterotopia seem to rely on visual

partitions, which proves for an incongruous reading of “Murals” as heterotopia. Yet, with the note that one is both a viewer and listener to “Murals,” I attempt to show how “Murals” may be productively read as a heterotopia. One may differently view “Murals” in relation to a screen, listen to “Murals” in relation to a music player, or experience the mural in person. The viewer enters a relation with the fictional narrative of the music video, the listener enters a relation with Dumbfoundead’s recorded voice, and the visitor to the mural enters a relation with Koreatown, Los Angeles that is mediated by Dumbfoundead. The question remains, how are these relations transformed by “Murals” as an audiovisual emplacement? Or, in blunt terms, what effect does “Murals” have, to recall the earlier invocation of the Situationists, that isn’t descriptive of a spectacle? This second question asks, put differently, isn’t Dumbfoundead’s “Murals” an appropriation of Koreatown, Los Angeles in a commodification of his identity as a Korean American? To offer a terse response to hold open these questions, “Murals” is a heterotopia insofar as the space of sound threatens the stability of the fictional narrative and reveal the provisional visual understanding that is necessary for a comprehension of what is in fact available in Dumbfoundead’s ethnopoetics.

In order to understand “Murals” as a heterotopia, it is helpful to follow the defamiliarization in the refrain. As suggested through *détournement*, Dumbfoundead reappropriates and defamiliarizes stereotypical images through a verbal rearticulation. In “Murals,” there is an available instance of defamiliarization in the appropriation of Snow White’s Witch-Stepmother’s magic mirror. Like Snow White, Dumbfoundead is a figure set within a tale, “raised [by his parents to be] a legend.” In a reading of three “re-visions of Snow White,” Cristina Bacchilega argues that Snow White is a (re)production of the late mother’s internalized female ideal, per the opening scene in the Grimm tale (4), which is revealed to be, via folklorists Johanne Bolte and George/Jiri Polivka’s version of the tale,

“the father’s wish (camouflaged as the mother’s)” (ibid. 6). Bacchilega’s reading is driven by the story’s mimetic cultural work as available in the “authority of the mirror [that] legitimates sexual production and, at the same time, ratifies narrative production” (ibid. 3). Analyzing the mimesis, Bacchilega identifies an author(itiz)ing function with the mirror as a male voice who frames the reflected possibilities of ideal womanhood, and proceeds to read three “re-visions” that distance the fairy tale narrative from the authority of the mirror. In “Murals,” Dumbfoundead appropriates this function of a framing narrative voice, which manifests in the momentary glimpse of the pierced heart painted by Joseph Lee/second-shopkeeper-as-child, as he speaks himself into existence in/as a legend. In other words, the authority of the mirror, understood via the mural, not only belongs to an author(iz)ing voice who legitimizes and ratifies, but reveals a discursive position that delimits and individualizes the framed subject who responds to the presence of an imposition, the fact that there is a mirror. However, as the mirror is transformed into a mural in Dumbfoundead’s refrain, the reflective surface is exchanged for a writing surface, no longer located on the inside walls of a room but on the outside of a building. In this way, “Murals” functions as a heterotopia, in the fact that it refers in triplicate to the song, the music video, and the actual mural, as a viewer-listener is transported from within the song, through the refrain, “outside” to the streets of Koreatown, Los Angeles. The refrain as *détournement*/diversion/divergence opens into an enchanted space that is heterotopic in concept despite its temporal diffusion as a song-mural-video.

This argument for a telescoped heterotopia is admittedly tenuous. On one hand, this opens the concept of heterotopia to include an artist’s oeuvre, appropriately thematized. On the other, one may ask whether all music videos are heterotopias. In fact, in a chapter on the metaleptic technique, as derived from Gerard Genette’s narratology, Henry Keazor writes,

since the genre of the music video was fostered and deployed as a substitute for live performance [...] due to the almost constant presence of the musician in words and voice, we are constantly reminded of his or her double function as narrator and protagonist of the told story. (123)

Although I am wary of slipping from heterotopia into metalepsis, the latter denoting a transgression of narration levels by the narrative voice, Keazor's comment on the stream of the voice through the "nested realities" of narration draws attention to the fact that heterotopia's definition is determined in terms of an *impossible ordering* of time and space rather than the *necessary ordering* that makes possible a metaleptic transgression. In other words, heterotopia is perhaps the in-between space in which metaleptic narrative technique disappears and across which it transgresses. My purpose here in invoking Genette's narratological technique is to de-idealize the spatial terms of heterotopia, insofar as it does not seem to be a singular spatial location so much as it is a singular experience of space. The multiple narratives that run through the music video, fictional, lyrical, and compositional, attest to this, as they unfold in the virtual world within the frame. The heterotopia that unfolds reveals Dumbfoundead, artists, and actors in play, or perhaps more precisely, at play in the space of "Murals." In other words, Dumbfoundead's author(iz)ing voice sets the fictional narrative into motion for the listener-viewer, but also encourages the compositional narrative that re-presents the author(iz)ing voice as a work by another in the figure of Joseph Lee. In this sense, viewer-listeners are challenged to duly note the obvious fact that the song produces both the fictional narrative of a typical life in Koreatown through the figure of the second-shopkeeper and the compositional narrative of a(n a)typical life in Koreatown through the figure of Dumbfoundead. For careful viewer-listeners, there is then a following question, what does one do with these two narratives? What's the difference? The significance of the difference?

Since it is the correspondence of Joseph Lee's mural that effectively cleaves Dumbfoundead's song with the music video to produce the heterotopia as previously discussed, I turn to the final moments of the music video in which the viewer-listener witnesses how it all comes together. It is in the final zoom-out to a wide shot that the fictional narrative comes to a close, with a scene of mourning that leaves one fixed to the image of the completed mural before discovering Dumbfoundead perched on top of the building. In the wide shot from above, Dumbfoundead is noticeably smaller in scale in relation to the mural. The music video, as well as the song, shifts in tone from excited noise to a scaled down solemnity in anticipation of the inevitable end, dramatized by the passing of the second-shopkeeper. To return to the transcription of Foucault's lecture on heterotopia, he notes that "a society can make a heterotopia that exists and has not ceased to exist operate in a different way," "tak[ing] as an example the curious heterotopia of the cemetery" (180). In short, the operation of the cemetery transforms in history, as the secularization of Western culture "inaugurated what is called the cult of the dead" in an ostensibly new-found awareness about "those mortal remains, which are finally the only trace of our existence in the midst of the world and in the midst of words" (ibid. 181). This awareness yielded to "an obsession with death as a 'disease.'" He continues, "Cemeteries then no longer constituted the sacred and immortal winds of the city, but the 'other city' where each family possessed its dark dwelling." In Foucault's description, the heterotopia is in fact relocated to the margins of the city, as a symbolic correlative for the place of death, the dead, and the decaying in society. Significantly, the disorientation of conventional understandings and author(iz)ed narratives in "Murals" reorients the various "emplacements" in the space of its heterotopia in relation to a symbolic image of Dumbfoundead's visage that indexes the death in the fictional narrative as well as his own mortality. As an appropriation of a space in

public view, “Murals” produces an image of a legend that brings together the autobiographical line in the song, the collaborative line in the music video, as well as the viewer-listener’s line of sight. The *détournement* of narrative authority in effect transforms what one might call a real space, to refer to the viewer-listener’s understanding of space, and Joseph Lee’s mural functions as a trace of the transformative work that brings together various actors at play. The appropriation of discursive authority therefore produces an appropriation of a space in Koreatown, Los Angeles as ethnic enclave. What remains necessarily unclear, effectively providing “Murals” with the sense of unease per heterotopia, is the sense of compositional negotiation. It seems as though, yes, this is Korean American, but the question lingers, how?

I propose that Dumbfoundead’s autoethnopoetic “Murals” unsettles an understanding of Korean American because of the contradictory location of the Korean American in Koreatown, Los Angeles. It seems as if all is as expected. However, “Murals” complicates this through a fictional representation of an “ethnic narrative,” as charted in the fictional narrative of second-shopkeeper’s life of mischievous fun and meaningful relations despite the presence of violence and conflict. The Korean shopkeeper was once young, had dumb fun, and proved liable to fall in (exogamous) love. Moreover, Dumbfoundead’s real-life trajectory as a “professional” rapper-artist transgresses the bounds of the model minority myth. In a paradoxical way, if “Murals” is just a performance, the viewer-listener is implicated as being disconnected from reality as it is articulated through the interconnected narrative levels in “Murals,” and yet, it is a performance, highlighting the distance between a viewer-listener’s reality and the heterotopia in “Murals.” To rearticulate my reading, most poignantly, the outer boundaries of Los Angeles loom in the background behind this (filming) location in Koreatown, and the signpost for a Korean barbeque business peaks out

behind Catalina Liquors. The restaurant's name, which roughly translates to "charcoal fire shack," with the Catalina Liquors signage, thus closes the music video for a song that begins with an infant "playing with a Molotov cocktail." "Murals" presents a heterotopia, not only because the viewer-listener is destabilized in terms of an understanding about Korean American Koreatown, but also because "Murals" is vulnerable to destabilization regardless of the viewer-listener. In 2019, three years after the mural was painted, Dumbfoundead's visage was tagged, or graffitied over. In social media posts, Dumbfoundead and Joseph Lee, though disappointed, seemed grateful for the three-year run, and were not unwilling to accept the defacement. Foucault concludes "Des espaces autres" with a last example of "[t]he sailing vessel [a]s the heterotopia par excellence":

a piece of floating space, a placeless place, that lives by its own devices that is self-enclosed and, at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean [...] not only the greatest instrument of economic development [...] but the greatest reservoir of imagination. (185)

Here, I move to the last section of this chapter, in which I consider the diasporic thread, keeping with Foucault's example of the sailing vessel, in terms of its transformation in ethnopoetics from a knot of loose ends to a nautical sense of movement through the transpacific imagination.

Rhymes & Rhythms

I began this chapter by way of Juliana Chang's definition of *jouissance* as a "violent yet blissful shattering of self" and proceeded to read the Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle and "Murals" as divergences/diversions of preconceived understandings that opened space for an experience of drift in a virtual space of a heterotopia. Hopefully it is clear how the drift of *dérive* may lead to *jouissance*, which I aim to elaborate in this final section by way of Henri Lefebvre's concept of *rhythmanalysis*. In *Inhuman Citizenship*, Chang reads Asian

American literature with the aid of jouissance “to sharpen our awareness of how the racial inhuman and its attendant affect of jouissance both disrupt and sustain the prevailing ideologies and fantasies of the U.S. nation-state” (14).

Jouissance is experienced as a traumatic intrusion that brings pain as well as pleasure. This is because jouissance goes beyond the pleasure principle: experiencing such an excess of pleasure that the pleasure becomes painful and unbearable. In this unbearability, it is a sensation that threatens the very foundation of the subject. [...] Jouissance stands for that elusive, primordial sense of being that we sacrifice in order to enter into the Symbolic order of law, language, and culture. The abstractions of the Symbolic, particularly in the form of linguistic signifiers, alienate us from primal being. Compelled toward this primal sense of being, we unconsciously seek jouissance despite—or perhaps because of—the suffering-satisfaction that it promises. (ibid. 9)

Chang’s study brings together critical race studies and posthuman scholarship “to query our axiomatic beliefs about the human” (ibid. 11), particularly as it concerns Asian American figurations as inhuman, racial others. Caught by the social order as the abject “primal being” that is both a symbolic exclusion and symbolic representation of alienation, the Asian American serves to remind the non-raced normative subject of what is at stake in maintaining one’s civil(ized) being as a figure of contemporary mythology.

Dylan Evans offers an outline of Lacanian jouissance by drawing out an influence from Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel in a discussion of the master-slave dialectic.

Evans quotes Lacan,

Indeed, beginning with the mythical situation [of the master and the slave], an action is undertaken, and establishes the relation between pleasure [*jouissance*] and labour. A law is imposed upon the slave, that he should satisfy the desire and the pleasure [*jouissance*] of the other. (3)

Evans explicates this imposition of a law of economy upon bodies by way of Georges Bataille’s work with the erotic. In fact, Bataille’s notion of the general economy may be relevant here. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille writes, “what *general economy* defines first is the explosive character of this world, carried to the extreme degree of explosive tension in

the present time,” “in which the ‘expenditure’ (the ‘consumption’) of wealth [or excess of energy], rather than production [is] the primary object” (40, 9). The symbolic order, written over this general economy, not only occludes and con-fuses a system of consumption with a system of production, it banishes “primal being” as that which is unrepresentable by virtue of its unbelonging to a symbolic order. As Slavoj Žižek writes, “this [“subject presumed to enjoy”] does not have to exist effectively, to produce his effects, it is enough for others to presume that he exists” as “the Other” (212). This recalls Lisa Lowe’s triplicate description of “the phenomenon of Asian immigration to the United States, as a racial formation, as an economic sign, and as an epistemological object” (1998: 30). To paraphrase Chang, the non-raced normative American subject achieves one’s own coherence by projecting alterity onto the Asian other, who presumably enjoys by virtue of being made a subject-object that subtends the norms of Western civilization (ibid. 15). One therefore claims to know the un/kn/own by naming the unknown, which allows one to presume (a discursive position of) knowledge through the symbolic order of language.

To return to Dumbfoundead, he has produced numerous songs about Koreatown. An early production from his first album project *Fun With Dumb* (2008), titled “K-Town Story,” which precedes the audio version of the Dumbfoundead-Tantrum battle, recounts a coming-of-age narrative in Koreatown that distinctively pays homage to rapper Slick Rick’s cautionary rap-tale “Children’s Story.” His second album project *DFD* (2011) begins with a song titled “Town,” in which the refrain ends on an ambivalent note, “As much as I love it here I wanna leave/ But this town won’t set me free.” In 2013, Dumbfoundead released *Old Boy Jon* as a free download to coincide with his birthday, as emphasized by the opening track’s sample of Marilyn Monroe’s infamous birthday song. Years into his vocation as a rapper, *Old Boy Jon* includes a song titled “24K-Town,” which draws on his appreciation for

his hometown. I meditate on this particular instance from Dumbfoundead's recurrent returns to Koreatown to turn focus to the transformation of space through an anthropomorphic use of language. Extending Joseph Jeon's reading of objecthood in Asian American avant-garde poetry to "24K-Town," Dumbfoundead's defamiliarization of Koreatown as a symbol and allegory of the phenomenon of Asian immigration plays with(in) the process of reification. In *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop*, Imani Perry identifies how the powerful roots of Hip-hop "lie in the use of commodity to dislocate commodity" (203). Despite the threat of co-optation by the market and the not unrelated "threat to quality among avid listeners," the form ideologically "allows for open discourse" and offers "abundant space for moral expression as well as critique" (ibid. 192, 5-7). In other words, the ethnopoetics in "24K-Town" de-idealizes Koreatown as an abject space of jouissance and instead plays with the terms of reification that may produce Koreatown, and by association the figure of Korean American, as a racial form, economic sign, and epistemological object.

In the opening verse, Dumbfoundead begins, "feel the pressure, yea I feel the pressure/ when I'm the one who speaks in the voice of my ancestors." Like Denizen Kane, Dumbfoundead is a corporeal instrument, channeling absent presences as an embodied heterotopia. The first verse draws out the tension between Dumbfoundead's "privilege to pursue [his] happiness" and the burdens of "[his] crew/ [who] got a list of things to do before dreaming about the future/ running the family business, handling father's sickness." This tension between individual and community, play and work, or, more generally, freedom and responsibility, comes together in the next phrase, "all the sacrifices given, I'm doing this all for you/ it's a letter to my homies, you will never have to owe me." These lyrical moments read as mimetic representation, detailing realities in rhymed forms of

language. However, as available in the last line of the first verse, “24K-Town” is a more complicated text about the space of relative pressures and “trying to write a happy ending to this [shared] story.” Put differently, the song is not simply *about* mimetic representation and playing *into* a racializing and reifying system, but rather, the song plays *with* mimetic representation *in* a racializing and reifying system. “And the homies out on Western are saying they’ll represent us/ So I’m forever tatted, fuck a temporary henna.” This becomes explicit in the refrain: “I’m bringing gold to my city, who’s with me?/ Gold watches for all my people, did you miss me?/ Bought them all off the jeweler by the pound,/ a couple karats turn this bitch into 24K-Town.” On one hand, the language is superficially crude, susceptible to critique about a lazy rhyme and capitalist misogyny. However, the rarified gift of time in the second line and the gendered inhuman position in the last suggest that there is more at play.

In a book on diction and speech, Geoffrey Forward writes, “An affricative consonant is a speech sound created by combining a plosive consonant and a fricative consonant” (223). The affricative is a complicated sound produced by fusing a sudden stopping of sound with an expulsion of sound, a contradictory confusion that reorders sonic differences in terms of time measured by language. The affricative sound in the refrain disrupts the clear syllable count of language, “-tch,” in the measures, and also carries into the “into 24K-Town.” Dumbfoundead reappropriates a position of jouissance, the affricative affliction, and opens the sound across into a transformation from an accursed discursive position of alienation into an enriched sense of a space. In part, I am suggesting that a critique of the affricative affliction as a misogynistic term is too superficial and unfounded. In “24K-Town,” the play on words that infuses the ethnic abbreviation (“K-”) with another commodity value (“karats”), is not unaware of the arresting function of the symbolic order,

“fuck the police/ cuffin’ you, your wrist will have a Rollie.” In this sense, the “dislocation of commodity by commodity” may be read as liberatory wordplay with reference to, pace Jacques Attali, the shouts of suffering in the music. Attali writes, “Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that it is appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political” (6). Dumbfoundead’s ethno-poetics reappropriate the affricative affliction to let loose sounds of “24K-Town,” “When they’re drunk, they yell it at the top of their lungs/ but over drums, they’ll hear it for generations to come (K-Town!).” As Attali notes, “before the commodity, music was a simulacrum of the sacrifice of the Scapegoat” (26). Although there is a danger of reiteration with the affricative affliction, Dumbfoundead’s second verse proposes “a celebration of the past-tense,” through which one may be encouraged to keep on keeping on, “my brothers with resolutions/ my sisters with no excuses/ I salute ya’/ let’s go and make some moments in the future.”

As earlier gestured, my focus on “24K-Town” is interested in Henri Lefebvre’s notion of rhythm-analysis. “[E]verywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm” (15). Place is distinct from space, as Michel de Certeau notes, “a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence,” whereas “space is composed of intersections of mobile elements” (ibid. 117). The difference between place and space is made on the point of relationships. The rhythm-analyst then is particularly attuned to the elements “distributed in relationships of coexistence,” who “will not be obliged to jump from the inside to the outside of observed bodies; [but rather] come to listen to them as a whole and unify them by taking his own rhythms as a reference; by integrating the outside with the inside and vice versa” (ibid. 20). Lefebvre’s description of the rhythm-analyst, perhaps idealistically, assumes a position in relation to others in a place, attuned to the rhythm of the terrain. “24K-

Town” offers a textual example of what this might mean. The affricative sound in the song is not only in the refrain, but manifests in different forms. Before the rap verses, there is the affricative sound of the snares that absorb the vibrations of the initial strike on the drumhead in the opening measures. Prior to the affricative sound of the snare hit, there is also a hi-hat sizzle, which carries forth the vibrations of the hi-hat cymbals. Eight measures into the song, the production changes to signal the impending entrance of Dumbfoundead’s verse, as the snare and cymbals are tightened up so that the punch of the percussion doesn’t carry an overpowering reverberating fricative tail. As Dumbfoundead’s verse begins, the first phrase, “feel the pressure” catches on the affricative rhythm and “pressure” particularly falls directly on the downbeat as he raps on. “24K-Town” thus demonstrates how Dumbfoundead, as rhythm analyst, “tak[es] his own rhythms as a reference,” bringing a density of relational pressures in Koreatown into his music over the rhythm of the beat, “not [to] signify a closed totality, but on the contrary an open totality” (ibid. 89).

Lefebvre’s project proposes a “rhythm analytic therapy [that] would be preventative rather than curative, announcing, observing, and classifying the pathological state” (ibid. 68). Developing his theory about places with the metaphor of living organisms, Lefebvre provides four categorical descriptions: eurhythmia, “a state of good health in which the living body presents numerous associated rhythm”; isorhythmia, “the equality of rhythms” or a rhythm of “equalities and equivalences”; polyrhythmia, a totality “composed of diverse rhythms”; and arrhythmia, which “goes as far as morbid and then fatal de-synchronisation” (ibid. 67-68). The first two seem desirable, however, Lefebvre suggests, ambiguously, “iso- and eu-rhythmia are mutually exclusive” (ibid. 67). As he illustrates with an example of the band conductor, iso-rhythmia is orchestrated by “a higher order,” and eurhythmia, as it subsumes polyrhythmia, perhaps functions in a more organic fashion. Rhythm analysis

therefore proposes a difficult sociopolitical activity, in which the rhythm analyst ideally helps transform social life.

The act of rhythm analysis transforms everything into presences, including the present, grasped and perceived as such [...] the act of rhythm analysis integrates these things in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presence. (ibid. 23)

The question then is how one performs this act of rhythm analysis. Lefebvre's

Rhythm analysis includes a reprinting of a short essay composed with Catherine Régulier, titled "Attempt at the Rhythm analysis of Mediterranean Cities." It seems that written critical discourse is how one manifests an act of rhythm analysis. However, Dumbfoundead's ethnopoetics suggest how rhythm analysis may be available in audiovisual form, especially in (sub)cultural forms as ethnopoetics. In fact, such a sociological detail may be found in the music video, which captures everyday life in Koreatown, not only in terms of moving presences, but in the texts such as the signage that reads "pawn shop/compro oro," "money to loans/casa de empeno," the graffiti that reads "excelentes prestamos," and the restaurant awning that reads "abierto las 7 dias." In this sense, "24K-Town" not only speaks to a re-valuation of the ethnic, but also gestures, perhaps unknowingly, though revealingly, toward a sense of how *jouissance* is triangulated in time in terms of an unending yet calculable day of work. The subject of *jouissance* denotes a transgression of the symbolic order in terms of time as well as space, in an inversion of Lefebvre, through Dumbfoundead's "mediatised everyday" (ibid. 50).

There is a notable difficulty in proposing a reading of Dumbfoundead's ethnopoetics as rhythm analysis, which concerns the question of how exactly his music "transforms everything into presences." However, this question unfairly demands that his "musical rhythm [...] brings compensation for the miseries of everydayness, for its deficiencies and failures" (ibid. 66). It is difficult to gauge the compensatory effectiveness of his

ethnopoetics. However, on a barometer of wordplay, Dumbfoundead is recognized by well-known Toronto actor-turned-rapper Drake, and appreciated by Californian rapper-activist Bambu (“log onto Grind Time, and rewind, to catch another Dumbfoundead punchline,” “Old Man Raps,” *Paper Cuts*). In an essay titled “Straight Outta K-Town: Dumbfoundead,” scholar Oliver Wang details the subcultural institution of “Jeet Kune Flow,” an early-2000s open mic run by Dumbfoundead and Koreatown promoter/activist Kublai Khan out of the offices of Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates,

built and earned, week to week, month to month, through lean years where only hyper-locals knew or cared about them. But in providing a space, they helped artists to engage each other and improve their craft and equally important, created a way for audiences to find them, building the kind of local communities that make a scene, “a scene.”

This collaborative work continues in the present day, most notably in the form of the collective BORN CTZN. For the purposes of this dissertation, I turn back to an earlier album, *DFD*, to consider the final song in the tracklisting with relevance to the diasporic line.

Although the source of Dumbfoundead’s ethnopoetics is undeniably “L.A.,” as manifest in references to Los Angeles neighborhoods and cultures, the story of Jonathan Park has roots/routes from elsewhere. In “Are We There Yet,” the first verse begins, “Mama had a dream, but she gave it up for me,” and describes his family’s move “from Argentina to Mexico, and finally L.A.” In an autobiographical fashion, Dumbfoundead raps, “Now I was only three when she brought me to the States,/ my sister only one, crossing borders wasn’t safe./ What she did was very brave, I think about it everyday.” In contrast to the curated image of preferential professionals in post-1965 Asian immigration (Song 177), “Are We There Yet” recounts a story of undocumented Asian immigration from South America. Kyeyoung Park explores Korean immigration to and through South America as “a

rhizomatic diaspora that covers three or more bases of relocation” (484). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome and Paul Gilroy’s theorization of the Black Atlantic, Park “conceptualizes how migratory processes are culturally organized across Korean networks concentrated in Latin America, South America, and North America” as global economics and media shape the everyday lives of the rhizomatic diaspora (ibid. 484). Reasons for Korean remigration through Argentina specifically include “the deterioration of the economy, the unearthing of a government-enforced ‘Dirty War’ that resulted in the disappearances of up to 30,000 people, and high residency fees associated with settlement” (ibid. 499). In “Are We There Yet,” the American immigrant story develops according to convention, “Yes, she made it really far, someone give her an applause/ got herself a job an apartment, and a car.” However, Dumbfoundead’s rap diverges from contented closure, “but the struggle isn’t over so I keep doing my part/ straight spitting out them bars that’ll get us to the stars,” and diverts to the rhetorical refrain, “tell me mama, are we there yet?” The second verse moves through a developing romantic-sexual relationship into a similar rhetorical refrain. The last verse takes up his realized career, “When I wake up every morning man I wonder if it’s real,/ look at what I worked for, everything I built,/ when I really think about it, it be giving me the chills/ ‘cause I’m eating off my music and I’m paying all my bills.” Again, deferring contented closure, Dumbfoundead raps, “I think I made it y’all, I don’t need a fucking deal./ What the hell am I saying, man, I gotta check myself/ that’s for real ‘cause when things are going well, I get gassed up/ that’s when I look in the mirror and ask/ tell me brother are you there yet.” Although this chapter has explored Dumbfoundead’s representational location *from* Koreatown, the rhetorical refrain in “Are We There Yet” makes clear that arrival is not the point of concern.

The previous digression through the “rhizomatic diaspora” runs a risk of shifting a focus on ethnopoetics to a sociological discussion of immigration routes, however, my point is not to emphasize un/belonging as the subject par excellence so much as direct attention to the transnational context of a singular Korean/Asian American figure. Moving through selections from Dumbfoundead’s oeuvre, the dissertation’s opening concern with postmemory seems to fall away. Yet, what becomes clear is how the suffering is sublimated through the enjoyable work of his music. In the space of a song’s text, wordplay leads listeners through a sonic *dérive*, into “a time that forgets time, during which time no longer counts [...] it is a time, but does not reflect on it” (Lefebvre 76-7). References to diasporic immigration or the work of everyday life are not present in all songs, nor are they necessarily the focus. However, there is always a negotiation of rhymes, which is to say, a negotiation of rhythms. To recontextualize Lefebvre’s comments on time, there is a break in time, which we might understand as a diasporic dislocation of the present through presence. Drawing influence from Dumbfoundead’s use of legends, children’s stories, and fairytales, one might consider the homophonous sounding of a transpacific past in “Are We There Yet.” In Korean, *yet* sounds like the word for “past,” in the sense of “A long, long time ago...” Admittedly, this is a stretch to presume such an authorial intention lies in the choice of the title. However, it is in this space of sound, between the rhythms of a future-to-come and a legendary past, that the diasporic question of present being leads, into which I have inquired. The critical challenge yet remains, to hear the (A)I(I)I(EE)E(EE!) in “CTZN” and follow the diasporic articulations in the entanglements of the present.

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