

CONTAGION OF LIVING

EAST-WEST EXPERIMENTATIONS WITH AFFECTIVITY,
SUBJECTIVITY, AND POLITICAL EMBODIMENT

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

CONTAGION OF LIVING: EAST-WEST EXPERIMENTATIONS WITH
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by

UNA CHUNG

Adviser: Professor Steven Kruger

A key challenge in ethnic and cultural studies today comes from a political impasse and critical exhaustion in confronting the ethnic subject's identity crises, psychic ills, and traumas. How is this challenge being addressed in the spheres of Asian American and Transnational Asian literature and film in the late twentieth century? What kinds of cultural production are motivated by the desire for a practice of living politically in the face of threats to the subject posed by constrictive ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality and biopolitical techniques of control? *Contagion of Living* explores why Asian American and transnational Asian writers and filmmakers in the 1980s and '90s align the crisis of the subject with crises of East-West politics, emerging at the end of the Cold War and especially with the rise of China within the global capitalist economy. Insufficiency of modern institutions such as the nation-state to secure the subject's identification has precipitated new formulations of 'the ethnic subject' as mediator for transnational capitalism within studies of postcolonialism and American minority social

formations. The authors discussed in *Contagion of Living* envision political potentiality in the very fragility of the subject that is the target of the violence of ideology and biopolitics, and claim affective experimentation as a new mode of writing the nexus of affectivity, subjectivity, and political embodiment. I explore at the level of rhetoric, genre, media and aesthetics the question of English as the global language, the bodily inhabitation of subjective tropes, and the political force of desire that always exceeds subjectivation. In four chapters, I work through four rhetorical tropes of ethnicity, which I term the *turn*, *fold*, *cut*, and *switch*. These tropes work collaboratively to show that complications of ethnic identity are precisely the place from which a new understanding of the politics of the ethnic body, beyond biopolitics, might emerge. The significance of subjectivity then lies in its potential—as a site of crisis and, thus, a site for affective experimentation—to engender new modes of embodiment.

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INTRODUCTION

ETHNIC TROPOLOGY

...in moral matters we are still weighed down with old beliefs which we no longer even believe, and we continue to produce ourselves as a subject on the basis of old modes which do not correspond to our problems.

– Deleuze¹

In this dissertation, I am working specifically within the context of late twentieth and early twenty-first century critical and aesthetic engagements with ethnicity. I focus in particular on ethnicity modified by *Asian American* or what I tentatively call *Transnational Asian*. Tellingly enough, the adjectival ‘Asian’ contained in ‘Asian American’ at times has little to do with Asia itself—that land mass which is neither a political region nor an economic entity. It seems that to be Asian American has primarily to do with a particular modification of American identity that invokes ‘Asia’ as a racial category legible within U.S. political economy. ‘Transnational Asian’ is intended only as a conceptual tool that allows for a discussion of how the ‘Asia’ of ‘Asian American’ circulates globally in other articulations of ‘Asian’ ethnicizations. I would like to emphasize that ‘Transnational Asian’ is not intended to refer to, much less produce, a pan-Asian/Pacific regional entity in any way. Not only do I find it crucial to consider the specificities of particular nation-states and national cultures as they exist in the time period within which this dissertation locates itself, I also believe that the pan-ing of a U.S.-based racial category might end up proving to be a dubious affair. Unlike the anti-

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 107.

colonial context in which Negritude movements took place in the early twentieth century, there does not appear to be in the global capitalist economy of today the suggestion of similar conditions for a pan-Asian movement.² Furthermore, the racializations around the ambiguous adjectival ‘Asian’ have not roused oppositional political and aesthetic collectivities on a global scale. In fact, ‘opposition’ no longer seems to be the keyword in the political discourses I examine from this period. I would argue that the impact of globalizations on ‘Asian’ has been at least in part to transform the function of the ethnic category of ‘transnational Asian’ toward describing a mediating node for transnational capital.³ As an alternative to this global capitalist appropriation of the ‘ethnic Asian’ as such, I will explore other ways of using the force contained in processes of Asian-izing.

I am greatly indebted to the historical and critical scholarly work which has examined the epistemological assumptions produced by certain disciplinary holds on *the ethnic*, specifically certain state-invested forms of anthropology, area studies, and sociology; as well as scholarship which has explored uses of the ethnic that have helped to produce interdisciplinary and critical methodologies, *i.e.* cultural studies, ethnic studies,³ postcolonial studies, globalization studies, and critical ethnographies. Needless to say, I will not be engaged in producing sociological information about or writing social histories on Asian Americans. Following the space-clearing and new lines of thought modeled by diverse critical work of the past several decades years, at least since the groundbreaking work of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which in many ways symbolically marks the widespread recognition and increased investment in what we now term ethnic

² See James Clifford’s “On Orientalism” in *The Predicament of Culture*.

³ See Gayatri Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*; Aiwah Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*; Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic*; and Colleen Lye’s *America’s Asia*.

and postcolonial studies, I find myself in the interesting position of being able to consider the question of ethnicity from a new angle.⁴

To this end, I have learned and been inspired by much in the diverse scholarship that one might loosely collect under the aegis of studies of *affect*, the *affective*, and, my own preferred term, *affectivity*.⁵ Of particular interest for my own project is the work of Patricia Clough, who has elaborated what she terms the “affective turn” in cultural studies in the 1980’s and 1990’s.⁶ Clough makes two interesting arguments that are relevant here. One, she suggests that thinking through affect gets us not only to the emotional and intersubjective component of trauma but to an understanding of the subjective as existing as machinic assemblage. From this I have taken the cue to consider how ethnic identification might also be productively rethought via the affective. Second, she brings together the psychological, the phenomenological, and the technological, showing that we might think of media as well as humans as the bodies of affect; thus enacting a move decisively away from the humanist emphasis of cultural studies and of science studies. Clough thus effectively opens up Deleuze’s readings of affect taken from Spinoza onto an altered cultural realm. Interdisciplinarity itself can thus come to be thought of in terms of the affective. Clough’s thinking thus takes us in a quite different direction, at once synthetic and innovative, from other studies of the affects—understood

⁴ I would also like to acknowledge the political commitment of various activists who installed and have continued to support ethnic studies as an institution of higher learning in the U.S. from the 1960’s to the present.

⁵ In a sense, I use the term ‘affectivity’ as a revision of ‘subjectivity’; however, I do not intend affectivity as a corrective that would replace subjectivity in common usage. I attempt to use subjectivity in conjunction with affectivity, in a way that is perhaps similar to Deleuze’s use of the terms ‘definite’ and ‘indefinite’ in relation to life. The aim is to neither bolster nor eliminate the notion of individual identity, but rather to put it into grammatical play, or tropological movement.

⁶ See Patricia T. Clough, ed. *The Affective Turn* (forthcoming); “Future Matters” in *Social Text*; and *Auto-Affection*.

primarily as emotion—such as in works by Eve Sedgwick, Teresa Brennan, and Sara Ahmed, who offer critiques of individualism via non-ego psychology and intersubjectivity. My own analysis of multiple media and disciplines is attentive to the affective in the way that Clough models.

My own theoretical engagement with the concept of affectivity focuses most closely on Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Judith Butler.⁷ The “affections,” as Deleuze understands them through his reading of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, do not simply replace identities with emotions or sensations, nor static relational models with movement, but rather involve relations of motion and rest, speed and slowness, such that a basic dualism between affect and what is affected can no longer be permitted: “expression is, in God, his very life.”⁸ Difference does not arise from a foundational separation of bodies distinguished from a background, nor from the abstract spatial distance separating distinct bodies; instead Deleuze encourages us to re-think difference as “difference in itself,” as intensity outside relations of identity. We might think of the self-differentiation of a body through time, a body in “duration” in the Bergsonian sense. Affects are not things or relations which derive from bodies, so much as bodies are defined as that which are involved in complex relations of differential velocities and engage in composition or decomposition with other bodies.

Popular notions of race and identity politics are based on an idea of difference which makes of the ethical act a very passive inaction—the common injunction is to do nothing (bad) in response to the perception of racial difference. For Spinoza, as for

⁷ For excellent discussions of the work of Gilles Deleuze, see Brian Massumi, Keith Ansell Pearson, and Manuel Delanda.

⁸ Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 99.

Nietzsche and Deleuze, the moralism of good and evil is not a precise way of understanding reality. As we gain a more adequate idea of reality we forego judgment and injunction for questions of compositional experimentation: “How does one live on a plane of immanence?” “How do individuals enter into composition with one another?” Adequate ideas bring us to ever more active joys (ultimately reaching toward, for Spinoza, “blessedness”). It is not that affects are guided by our concepts of good and evil (ability to align attitudes and psychic responses between those moral poles) but that more adequate ideas of reality will increase possibility of action, enhance joyfulness. It is still a question of what allows us to take action but the essential element of understanding here is that action is not seen as a distinct thing undertaken by a willing agent (agents only ever exist in action) and the joy of the acting agent in question (or more precisely body) cannot be separated from the action itself. Retrospective judgment is not what determines the “rightfulness” of the action, but the joy of the action itself.

For Spinoza, freedom is not a property of the will, but rather, in Deleuze’s words, “Man ... is free when he comes into possession of his power of acting, that is when his *conatus* is determined by adequate ideas from which active affects follow, affects that are explained by his own essence.”⁹ In other words, freedom cannot be defined by consciousness of one’s desires and will (these are not first causes), but only in terms of actions which are not the expressions of a particular consciousness but—for Spinoza—infinite substance, God, nature, or—for Deleuze—pure immanence. Deleuze calls pure immanence “a life,” an indefinite singularity.

For Deleuze, the term ethics then no longer seems adequate given its reliance on judgment and will; he instead suggests a new use of a term—ethology—as a more

⁹ Ibid, 70-71.

accurate concept for what it is that we do that is ethical, or we could say differentiable. For Deleuze “minority literature” and “third world cinema” are not defined by particular ethical stances or political goals, but provide instances of living a Spinozist way of life. The political power of literary and cinematic experimentation is not in its opposition to social power but in its innovative compositions: creating new relations of minor to major (in the compositional terms of language and music) can lead to lines of flight, intensity, freedom. As a result, such minority or third world artists give us a new ethology of becoming minor. Nevertheless, Deleuze does not take up consideration of what American literary scholars would commonly call ethnic literature and film. This is not a matter of French neglect to be answered by (my) ethnic recuperative application of Deleuze’s concepts to a broader field of American and transnational literature. What seems to be at stake here is rather a question about aesthetic and ethnic genres. Rey Chow has pointed out—most notably in her reading of “Hiroshima Mon Amour” and in her critique of Derrida’s discussion of Chinese writing in *Of Grammatology*—that the value of avant garde art for many European poststructuralist theorists (of whom Deleuze is and is not quite one) is its distinction from the category of mimesis, where the mimetic relation tends to define the ethnic as such. Coercive mimeticism, as Chow calls it, requires that the ethnic subject turn to the autobiographical or confessional mode, and this in turn leads to self-hatred and impotence, thus belying the emancipatory promise of self-referentiality. (Self-referentiality, for the poststructuralists, counters one’s objectification in others’ representations.) ‘Asian American’ cannot be the name for an individualism that resists social forces but rather refers to a transindividual category that negotiates the demand that certain individuals find their true selves reflected in that category, “in their *genre* of

speaking/writing as nothing but *generic* Asian Americans.” Rey Chow thus links the literary and the social at the level not of representation but of contact between genres, or simply generic contagion.

Like the poststructuralists that Chow cites, Deleuze also objects strongly to Platonic idealism which links the image with mimesis and makes of representation an altogether suspect basis for ethics. His response to the Platonic tradition in Western philosophy, however, does not then seek a solution in self-referentiality, textuality, and hybridity. Textuality, or literariness, does not provide Deleuze with the desired mobility and dislocation of the sign. Instead, he goes to Spinoza’s affection and Bergson’s duration, leading him to revise the idea of difference such that time becomes the primary means of understanding difference: true difference in nature is understood as self-differentiation in duration, and not the difference of spatially distinct things (identities), which he calls numerical difference. (Differentiation as actualization.) Deleuze thus makes bodies, rather than texts or discourses, the key term of analysis. Also, he neither denigrates nor glorifies the image, instead submitting it to sensory-motor coordination and the abstraction, or inorganic life, of time itself. The significance of Deleuze’s reworking of identity and difference through what we could also call the ‘time-body’ to an understanding of ethnic literature has not yet been fully explored (Deleuze’s own discussions of minority literature and third world cinema notwithstanding). The question of leaping genres and especially of moving among levels of abstraction (genus, species, class, *etc.*) comes into much clearer focus through Deleuze’s notion of transversal becoming. Whereas coercive mimeticism works through interpellation, which assumes the inevitability of the individual’s turn toward power, away from what Slavoj Žižek has

called the “terror of complete freedom,” transversal becoming gets beyond the terror by transforming passive (terrorizing) perception of unformed space into an affirmation of passage. This freedom of affirmation that cannot be contained by a subjective consciousness is nevertheless freedom and not dissolution because the absence of reference point for being is precisely what allows movement in the being of becoming. The absence of a reference point, however, means that it no longer makes sense to talk in terms of identity; rather we might invoke Nietzsche’s “eternal return.”

At the same time, if Derrida has, in Chow’s view, made the error of defining logocentrism as the property of the West, then Deleuze has perhaps gone even farther in demarcating the East as outside of logocentrism. For Deleuze the possibility of difference between East and West is a question of degrees of stratification, which he articulates in his book on Foucault as: “The question would be: is there a Self or a process of subjectivation in Oriental techniques?” Buddhism—to take a random sample from possible “Oriental techniques”—does indeed teach the illusion and impermanence of the self, yet this hardly seems reason enough to suppose the existence of a history of ‘Eastern’ cultures which had managed to avoid the development of subjectivity. It is hard for me to imagine why such a lesson from Buddhism would have needed to be repeated for over 2000 years to people who had never consolidated a concept of Self. Wouldn’t it make more sense to assume a history of Eastern *critique* and to then explore how techniques of subjectivation, in becoming culturally bound (at least in our philosophical discourse), exert differential effects of deterritorialization on the appearance of other cultural forms? More to the point, if the differentiability between the static and the dynamic is to actually hold, then these affective states cannot be so broadly spatialized

once again between East and West (even if it is the East that comes out on the side of dynamism here). In any case, what most concerns me in *Contagion of Living* are the ways in which ‘Asian American’ artists raise questions about such philosophical claims of an East/West divide in techniques of subjectivation and the capacity of such conceptualizations to affect ways of living the Asian American mode. *Contagion of Living* takes up consideration of various aesthetic explorations of such questions, which do not construct narrative texts around the figure of the ethnic subject but rather engage directly in experimentations with living. I would argue that such experimentations are philosophical, in Deleuze’s double sense of abstraction and activation of lines of becoming. These are experimentations which offer us a new ethology, such that becoming Asian American must always be understood as enacted through multiple lines of inter-ethnic-becomings and ‘East’ and ‘West’ are now understood to describe affections or modes rather than broad geographical areas or philosophical traditions.

Experimentation in autobiography does not necessarily pertain only to the minor/major relations of language, which was Kafka’s path to minority writing (and so important to Deleuze), but rather is involved in complex generic contagion. The fact that much of ethnic literature is autobiographical (texts belonging to other genres becoming less ‘ethnic’ even when written by the same ‘ethnic’ authors) is not merely an indication of its availability for sociological insight, along the lines of a social validation of personal experience, but rather the sign of a dense site of possibility for investigating what Deleuze calls the anonymous forces of individuation. The East-and-West pair might be wrested from its appearance as a cultural dichotomy, synchronous with colonial and Cold War geopolitics, and made to lead an exploration into bodies of transversal becomings,

thus opening up the nineteenth and early twentieth century tales of the mythic journey of Asian body into American personhood, as well as the newly rising post-Vietnam War story of the American self coming apart in Asia, into complex series of micro-inter-ethnic-becomings. This re-orientation of the approach to ethnic literature and film pushes us to think of the inter-ethnic as not only a space between, a gap, a miscommunication, a visible difference, but also as the time of becoming inter-ethnic. It is not in the goal of a passive sympathy with others that our ethical struggles lie. We are being called, very simply and directly, to never cease living that line of becoming, moving through countless Easts and countless Wests.

What is to be gained by constructing this Spinozist approach to ethnic literature, as it were, is a way to undo the subordination of the inter-ethnic to identity, and thus to make visible the true nature of political action as the ‘being of becoming’ rather than the judgment of beings. *Contagion of Living* thus perhaps takes a more philosophical than strictly historical approach to the concept of identity and to its significance in ethnic literature. The term ‘contagion’ calls to mind a type of transference which is not a pathway for exchange but itself alive; the movement of contagion is one with the vitality of micro-organisms. ‘Contagion’ also has negative connotations, bringing to mind involuntary, uncontrolled intrusions, reflecting common fearful attitudes toward life outside the regulated perimeters of the subject (the ruin of action). The bringing together of ‘contagion’ with ‘living’ is intended to suggest that what we fear may be the livingness of life beyond the subject. The title thus presents an open-ended question: Does the contagion of modes of life reduce the possibility of action to mere ideal? Or can we see in the composition of lives the action that is eminently political? In the texts discussed in

Contagion of Living there is no sense of a determined end or goal which would motivate a programmatic approach to a political life, yet there remains an intensity of what I would call ‘political affect’ that impels lines of becoming. Living becomes experimentation.

This dissertation thus undertakes to diagram ethnicity. I begin with uncertainty, the sense that I am not at all convinced that ethnicity exists in the way that it has sometimes been believed to exist, and yet I see that it has had and continues to have a *life*. Ethnicity may be an empty category (even bankrupt and discredited), as so many critical scholars have been at pains to show, but it is a type of emptiness that seems to be very much living.¹⁰ What do I mean by *life* when I attribute it to the *category and concept of ethnicity*? When I refer to life, I am thinking of Deleuze’s thinking life beyond organicity, that is life as both organic and inorganic.¹¹ For Deleuze, life is movement, differentiation, modulation, transversality. It would be misleading and imprecise to think of life as the life of an object that undergoes such processes, but nor is life the abstraction of such processes away from objects altogether. We could say that life is material and affective, if we understand materiality and affectivity to be not properties of an object but the larger categories within which objects come into and out of existence. Death or non-existence does not pose a limit to life understood from a Deleuzian perspective. Life, according to Deleuze, contains both life and death, living and dying, organization and disorganization, stratification and destratification, territorialization and deterritorialization. Life is a

¹⁰ Scholars such as Ronald Takaki, Lisa Lowe, and David Palumbo-Liu have shown that the categories of ‘Oriental,’ ‘Asiatic,’ or ‘Asian American’ emerged in relation to the perceived racialized labor requirements of the U.S., as well as to the political expediency of diverse U.S. wartime goals throughout the twentieth century. In fact, the inception of such ethnic categories arises with exclusionary immigration laws in 1882, and even up to 2005 (and presumably beyond), immigrant legislation continues to modulate the category of the ‘American citizen,’ according to the perceived political needs of the U.S.

¹¹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.

concept that gets us away from confinement between such opposing pairs of terms. The opposition of such terms is itself seen as a passage rather than a line of delimitation. That life is both material and affective poses an interesting challenge to thought. Life is inseparable from the materiality of objects, but at the same time life is not concerned with preservation of the borders of objects. Affectivity stimulates and stresses the borders of the object pushing it to altered states, even if this leads to the de-formation, as it were, of the object. The desire to think what is both material and affective is how we are drawn to this conceptualization of life.

By using the expressions *life of ethnicity* or *ethnic life*, I intend to move thought toward more than the qualities belonging to an ethnicized object or the processes of ethnicizing objects; I aim toward thinking *that* which both produces and destroys modalities of being ethnic, *that* which lives through ethnic modes. I am not concerned with making a blunt critique of the fact that the discourse of ethnicity produces ethnic bodies and disciplines the lives of those ethnicized bodies, so much as with an exploration of how the discourse of ethnicity is modulated by rhetorical figures that reveal the complexity of living connected with ethnicity.

My motivation in approaching ethnicity in what may appear to be a complicated and theoretical fashion is twofold. First, my dissertation attempts to correct the common misperception that ethnicity merely poses a disturbance in the life of the ethnicized individual (psychological problem, societal problem), which a critique would expose. I would argue instead that the crisis of the ethnicized requires neither resolution nor call to arms, but rather a new investment of energy and attention. Second, my work is motivated by a personal interest that cares more about exploring the lives of those living as, with,

through modes of ethnicity, and the futurity of those lives, than articulating the power of institutions to ethnicize such lives. In many ways, this dissertation is itself an experimentation with the contagion of living.

In the dissertation, I use the phrase ‘contagion of living’ to express what it is that exceeds the notion of ethnic identity, and especially the ‘identity crisis,’ as we follow Asian American and transnational Asian authors along their travels to or in Asia. Life, understood as a kind of affective volatility, or capacity for bodily movement in the fullest sense of the phrase, is not simply that which is codified into identities and differential identities among populations; rather life is that which enters into, endures within, and exits from such identities. Life is a concept, or a term, that allows us to step back from identity and consider the kinds of forms—social, political, aesthetic—through which we engage with each other today, especially in heavily conflict-laden sites of contact shaped by globalization. The geographic and geopolitical travels that the authors discussed in this dissertation present show us how it is that a crisis of identity might in fact be understood as the necessary opening to affiliations, networks, even processes of self-formation, that must be articulated beyond ethnic and national identities. The ambiguous, even somewhat threatening, connotations of the term ‘contagion’ are intended to remind us that such ‘openings’ are unavoidably perceived as, and often in fact are, threatening—threatening to the national body, to the individual body, to the borders of any properly identified body. Thus I am not proposing a morally-driven embrace of the notion of opening, so much as describing how difficult it is to think openly about questions of identity, ethnicity, nationality, and so on. The contagion of living is indeed violent, intrusive, destabilizing, as is economic development and military conflict, and yet the

contagion of living is also what enlivens new communities. A paradox then, the conundrum of identity crisis.

I position this dissertation at the nexus of Asian American studies, ethnic studies, comparative cultural studies, anthropology, East and Southeast Asian area studies, globalization studies, rhetoric and media studies. Specifically I am engaging ongoing conversations that address how critiques and self-critiques emerging from the disciplines of ethnography and anthropology, postcolonial theory, and ethnic and Asian American studies exhibit similar interests in not only critiquing common assumptions about identity but also in showing the productivity of such critical stances toward identity taken by both artists and scholars.

Judith Butler's work on subjectivation and tropology in *The Psychic Life of Power* has opened up for me the notion of ethnic tropology as a way to approach the question of ethnicization and ethnic identity. Specifically, I have elaborated four rhetorical tropes, which I term: turn, fold, cut, and switch. Together these tropes both offer up genealogies of key aspects of ethnicity and propose revised ways of looking at the uses and abuses of the notion of ethnic identity. The first chapter focuses on the turn, which addresses Butler's discussion of the turn of subjectivity in relation to Georg W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, which shows that power is not a force external to the subject so much as the subject is an expression of power, *i.e.* power's own expressivity takes the form of the subjective. Similarly, the process of ethnicization involves the expressivity of power as well as the hailing that reveals one as, or turns one into, the ethnic subject in the same moment that one is pointed out as an object dependent

on another's subjectivity.¹² I consider the conceptual relationship of ethnicization and subjectivation in Pamela Lu's *Pamela*, David Mura's *Turning Japanese*, and Zhang Yimou's film *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*. The second chapter focuses on the trope of the fold, which I derive from Deleuze's writings on Leibniz and Foucault. The fold of subjectivity gives us a different way of thinking the temporality of ethnicization in relation to images of ethnicized bodies. The fold offers a figural alternative to the temporal structures of individual trauma in Andrew Pham's *Catfish and Mandala* and to the transnational machinery of forgetting and remembering in the James Bond film *Die Another Day*. The third chapter focuses on the cut, a trope borrowed from Deleuze's discussions of cinema. The cut is an irrational cut that offers a direct image of time rather than subordinating time to the 'rationality' of movement. Thus identity is no longer subordinate to migration (nor constituted by what is lost in motion and translation) in Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch* and Dai Sijie's *Mr. Muo's Traveling Couch*; rather the analytic tools of deconstructing identity are themselves traveling machines. The final chapter focuses on the trope of the switch which has a particular significance in the discourse on Global English, where the switch signifies the functional toggling between different codes, languages, and cultures, as well as the negative connotations generally associated with the notion of switching between different political affiliations or national identities. It is not so much a matter of defining the ethnic subject in terms of a decentered or dislocated subjectivity so much as understanding the modality of switching

¹² I am also thinking here of Frantz Fanon's discussion of race and objecthood in *Black Skin, White Mask*. "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of 'being for others,' of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. ... Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 110).

as it pertains to ethnicity and modes of living ethnically in Lin and Lam's multi-media art installation *Unidentified Vietnam*, which switches between media, and in Wong Kar-Wai's *2046*, which switches between genres. Through the arc of these four chapters I build a narrative or a multi-layered construct about how the self-reflexive turn into a subject then repeats into ethnic and national subjects; these repetitions create folds of self-referentiality into which the ethnic subject grows; these folds are then cut apart and brought together as different groups, populations; and finally we are left with the activity of switching back and forth among these differentiated sites. I use these rhetorical tropes not only to suggest the discursive construction of ethnicity, but more interestingly, to suggest a different way of thinking the materiality of *ethnic life*. The tropes thus attempt to diagram the *time of ethnicity*, or perhaps more simply, the *body of time*, or the *time-body*.

I hope that this dissertation will show not only the vastly different ways in which the trope of ethnicity can be used to articulate the complexities of ethnic spatial and temporal liminality, but also that our ability to perceive such differences and multiplicities within the usually limited sense of ethnicity as a 'naturalized identity' as well as to think them together as related figurations of ethnic life might also loosen the confinement of identity. The forces and processes that ethnicize one are not internal to oneself (though it may paradoxically appear to be so in retrospect) but immanent to the geopolitical flows along which we travel and the multi-medial representations within which we see ourselves.

ONE

TURN

Rather than an exposition of myself, it is an account of what will have placed an obstacle in the way of this auto-exposition for me. An account, therefore, of what will have exposed me to that obstacle and thrown me against it. Of a serious traffic accident about which I never cease thinking.

– Derrida¹³

This chapter is organized around four turns. The first turn begins with a theoretical discussion of Judith Butler and Gilles Deleuze and moves to look at Pamela Lu's poetic turn toward the language of critical-theoretical discourse on subjectivity. This theoretical discussion of *Pamela* is then re-contextualized in David Mura's literary treatment of his travels from the American mid-west to Japan. He seeks an impossible ethnic ancestry that would connect the internees of Manzanar with the hibakusha of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the postmodern world of the 'robot people.'¹⁴ The only way that Japan can be an origin for Japanese Americans is through active assimilation. Turning toward is always a turning into, yet turning into continually turns outward. Mura's turn toward Japan thus ends with a trip to the Philippines, a move which I then further elaborate in the third turn of the chapter in the context of China at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In Zhang Yimou's film, a Japanese ethnographer of Chinese folk dance travels to the Yunnan province and participates in yet another 'turn toward Asia,' as it were, from the ambiguous East/West of Japan.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthesis of Origin*, 70.

¹⁴ Hibakusha is a Japanese term referring to the survivors of the atomic bomb attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

FIRST TURN: *Returning to the Subject*

One of the key problems faced by critiques of ethnic identity is the problem of reference and repetition in discourses on subjectivity and ethnicity. Deconstructions of the subject leveled from within ethnic studies cannot avoid repeatedly returning to the question of the ethnic and gendered subject. What is the significance of such repetitions that re-invoke the phallogocentric subject only to de-center it once again? The rhetorical difficulty of referring retrospectively to what exists *before* the subject from the point of view of the emergent subject is directly related to the problem of deconstructing ethnicity in the name of, and for the sake of, ethnicized individuals. What might be useful at this juncture is to ask what *else*, what other process, is occurring in the time-space of subjectivation, other than subjectivation. Since the temporality of subjectivation depends on the point of view of the emerging subject, we might wonder about the possibility of a different temporality connected with a non-emergent subject, a non-subject, or simply a non-subjective point of view. I would offer the concept of affectivity as a way to engage such a question. Affectivity is a useful term in that it allows us to think about the subjective without requiring a subject (since the affective can be sub-individual as well as inorganic).¹⁵ Additionally, affective processes involve modulations and changes in magnitude, which do not install a threshold (i.e. the self-identified subject) from which radiates a temporal logic (and contradiction). Such a use of affectivity confronts the referential problem in critiques of ethnicity. In fact, I will argue that the concept of affectivity can provide a different articulation of ‘the universal.’ Consequently, I attempt in this chapter to bring together the very different approaches to subjectivity and

¹⁵ See Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*; Keith Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life*; Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: a Practical Philosophy*; Spinoza, *Ethics*.

affectivity of Judith Butler and Gilles Deleuze in order to conceptualize a space for collectivity *beyond* the ethnic subject.

If we are to historicize the decentering of subjectivity in the postmodern period, either at the turn of the twentieth century with modernist skepticism about the integrity of the self or in the 1960s with the emergence of poststructuralist critiques, then we must today re-visit this genealogy of deconstructed subjectivity in the context of late twentieth century economic and political changes in definitions of *East* and *West*, terms which tenaciously persist.¹⁶ The analysis of Pamela Lu's *Pamela: A Novel* that follows later in this chapter considers a recent moment in Asian American literary history when autobiographies of an ethnic individual are giving way to literary experiments with the narrating subject. For example, in Lu's text 'I' has been turned into one member of a collective composed of multiple pronouns of equal status as 'I.' Lu raises the question of the ethnic subject with the brief appearance of a 'Pamela' in a text which is otherwise only peopled by multiple pronouns. Thus Lu addresses the problems of referentiality and subjectivity at the level of grammar. Such poetics, then, might point us toward something *beyond* the ethnographic impulse within Asian American studies. The question of what lies East of the Western subject might be answered in the differential spacing and multiplicity of pronouns competing for subjecthood in the grammar of the Western subject.

In the *Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler's conceptualization of subjectivity contains within it a necessary repetition. Reflexivity here is a re-turn that catches a glimpse of the turning of the subject into itself. The spatio-temporal dimension of

¹⁶ See Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship*.

subjectivity is apprehended in the figural description of a turn, which can be misrecognized as a static figure. The tropological description of reflexivity alludes to the processual nature of subject-formation, even as the static image of a trope elides this very process. What is at stake in the tropological explanation of subjectivity is the possibility and necessity of referring to the subject. The rhetorical difficulty of referring retrospectively to what is not quite a subject from the point of view of the emergent subject is directly related to the problems of discourses on ethnic identity. The critic who wishes to address the falsity of identities by referring to the always already incomplete nature of identity formation has not in fact done much more than point out the very process of subjectivation, repeating the figural description of the subject. While dispelling false notions about the fixed nature of subjectivity still retains political force in certain contexts, the general theoretical value of such explanations lies in the force of their repetition rather than in their ability to forward a new articulation.

How else might we think the temporality of subjectivation? Is there a way to think multiplicity and divergence in subjectivation? This is the question which leads me to bring Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization of singularity in juxtaposition with Butler's explication of subjectivity. The theoretical proximity of these two thinkers could be articulated as different expressions of affectivity. Whereas the subject is a formation, a singularity is a modulation that remains uncaptured by subjectivation. Although the actualization of singularities in subjects may in fact bear resemblance to the turning of the subject, a singularity is never experienced reflexively as a subjective quality.¹⁷ Singularities and individuals are grouped differently, never aligned in such a way as to

¹⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *Immanence: A Life*; Spinoza: *Practical Philosophy*; and *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*.

permit the formation of a single trope.

The concept of affectivity might be employed as a way to include both Butler's understanding of desire (as the force of subjection which exceeds subjection) and Deleuze's notion of immanent life (that carries with it the singularities that are actualized in subjects and objects). Such a use of affectivity tackles the referential problem of deconstructing ethnicity. The ethnic subject might then be useful not simply as a point of *reference* for the rhetorical deconstruction of discourses on subjectivity and a point of *divergence* for contestations over identities but *also* as a point of *convergence* for multiple singularities. Affectivity is the ground of subjectivity, the ever-present threshold from which subjection emerges and at which multiplicity and singularity converge. What is the significance of 'singularities,' instead of identities, for the critical study of ethnicity? This allows for an understanding of the subject as neither a means of securing ethnic identity nor a false consciousness masking the insecurity of ethnicity. Instead, singularities becomes potential sites for collectivity precisely because the subject cannot disappear, remaining perpetually a point of return.¹⁸

The importance of thinking about collectives is also addressed in discussions of "new models of subjectivity [...] defined as heterogeneous, multiple, and inclusive, in contrast to the unitary, imperial, masculine subject constructed in a binary self-other relationship."¹⁹ The claim that this "new subject is grounded in multiple identities and social positions, which unsettle the binary construct of self in relation to its other"

¹⁸ It is interesting to consider that so many Asian American texts include a journey of return to a site in "Asia," whether ancestral or not. Notable examples include: Amy Tan, *Joy Luck Club*; *The Dim Sum of All Things*; Paisley Rekdal, *The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee*; Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*.

¹⁹ Xiaojing Zhou, *The Ethics and Poetics of Alterity in Asian American Poetry*, 12.

involves a difficult rhetorical complexity.²⁰ The notion of being grounded seems incompatible with multiple identities and social positions; furthermore, the capacity to unsettle or the process of unsettling or the state of being unsettled are certainly not grounded qualities. (I will return to the notion of an unsettling grounding, or a grounding disturbance in my discussion of the various tropes of ethnicity. Interestingly, aircraft travel is often used to articulate just such a paradoxical affective state.) What is actually ‘new’ about this subject is then the very re-definition of the subject. This positive formulation of the ‘new subject’ is in part an attempt to re-imagine the ‘postmodern subject’ understood as decentered and fragmented by the agency of late capitalism. Late capitalism has been accredited with the disappearance of the individual subject by critics such as Fredric Jameson.²¹ Ironically, he refers to a ‘postmodern subject,’ which is understood to be decentered and fragmented, yet nevertheless recognizably, or at least referentially, a subject.

One logical result of this line of thinking might point to the possibility that it is cultural difference, rather than subjectivity, that provides a universal ground.²² The notion of cultural difference, however, always invokes terms, for example East and West, which contain the same problem of reference. The paired terms East and West might be intended solely to signify the possibility of cultural difference, or ‘simply’ Derridean *différance*, yet historically their connection with specific geographical locations (different places at different times) makes it impossible to distinguish these terms from the history

²⁰ Ibid, 12.

²¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Logic of Late Capitalism*.

²² Jacques Derrida’s notion of *différance* could perhaps be interpreted in this vein.

of ethnography, area studies, and the Cold War.²³ Furthermore, deconstructing Western metaphysics does not do away with ethnographic questions about not-West and non-Western subjectivity or even simply non-subjectivity.²⁴ Ethnographic investigation links rhetorical or tropological figures with actual individual bodies. Figures do not stay as figures; they become attached to individual bodies that are individualized, interiorized, psychologized, and ultimately depoliticized.

It is at this point, then, that I would like to return us to the concept of affectivity as I previously defined it: the ‘ground’ of subjectivity, the life that is immanent to subjective formations. Affectivity would provide a different articulation of ‘the universal.’ Whereas the framework of ‘the universal’ mediates among particulars through a notion of abstract equality according to a logic similar to commodity exchange, affectivity would allow us to consider the threshold from which subjectivity and singularities emerge.²⁵ This is a threshold that itself shifts. It may now be time to shift our attention away from the Western version of a postmodern structure of subjectivity, as it were, and instead consider how circuits of travel, specifically journeys of return between locales marked discursively as East and West, yield aesthetic representations of such a threshold rather than of subjective identities per se.

²³ See Rey Chow’s discussion of Derrida in *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

²⁴ I am motivated by an inspiration similar to that of Dipesh Chakrabarty, who not only critiques the Orientalizing tendencies of the West but goes further to actively “provincialize” Europe by directing scholarly attention and care on sites in South Asia and “engaging the universals” through postcolonial thinking. It is postcolonial, and not any pre-colonial intellectual tradition that Chakrabarty uses, as he points out (such traditions are not as alive to us in the postcolonial era...as yet); nevertheless, what he accomplishes therewith is a distribution of the concept of political modernity globally such that Europe is merely one provincial version among many. In this dissertation, I hope that the direction of my own energies toward the question of the ethnic subject may have a similar effect of ethnicizing the European subject, as it were—not by attributing ethnic qualities via the universal model of subjecthood but by showing that ethnicization and subjectivation go hand in hand. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

²⁵ See David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick*.

Within Asian American poetics can be found striking attempts to re-work, through formal experimentation, what is formal about ethnicity, that is the figural turn of subjectivity and the rhetoric of ethnic identity. Autobiography is frequently read as an attestation to the necessity for a speaking subject who can decisively tell us what it is like to have lived with an ethnic identity.²⁶ Regardless of whether the represented self is presented as a whole or fragmented object, the rhetorical force of the autobiographical subject's arrogation of voice in the service of self-representation is clear. Such readings implicitly forward a thesis on how the rhetorical subject is related to living ethnic beings or ethnic life: ethnicity lives through the formation of the ethnic subject. Pamela Lu's *Pamela: A Novel* is a brilliant example of how literary experimentation with the poetics of subjectivity can yield more complex ways of understanding the relationship between life and subject. I will argue that in Lu's text, the subject-position has come to be inhabited by the indefinite article and therefore by immanent life rather than individual subjects.

Pamela: A Novel is a literary text which has elements of the novel: characters, events, narration; however, these are present more as generic elements of a novel rather than as fully embodied narrative strategies. The text does not project a world. We are instead given the generic container of a novel, the writing of which could then be categorized as poetry, novel, or essay. The characters are named only by single capital letters of the alphabet, suggesting the abstracted referential writing of mathematics rather

²⁶ Taking Maxine Hong Kingston's *A Woman Warrior* as a case study, I have found that the large body of criticism on this text overwhelmingly emphasizes the 'coming to voice' of the putatively unified narrator, sometimes named "Maxine" (by critics). Only a few critics seem to have paid equal attention to the rhetorical figurations of that voice as well as the life from which it springs. A notable example in this vein is David Leiwei Li.

than the narration of embodied characters whose lives could be filled out by the reader's imagination. The events of the novel do not expand past the specificity of what is described in the writing. Overall, *Pamela: A Novel* enforces a literality to the characters and events, whose incapacity to expand into a life-world suggests a very unusual type of novel indeed. Thus we might consider reading *Pamela: A Novel* as poetry or essay. The references to the apparatus of book publishing that frame the text of *Pamela: A Novel* encourage a poetic reading of the text. Atelos claims that it is "devoted to publishing, under the sign of poetry, writing which challenges the conventional definitions of poetry," and that "[a]ll the works published as part of the Atelos project are commissioned specifically for it, and each is involved in some way with crossing traditional genre boundaries."²⁷ Pamela Lu has also suggested in an interview with Rob Wilson that her text could be read as both nineteenth century novel and theoretical essay: "Some of my favorite novels can be thought of as poetry encased in character and narrative. By the same token, *Pamela* might also be seen as an essay, spoken by fictional characters who exist in real life."²⁸ Thus experimentations with the grammatical subject inevitably engender experimentations with genre.

Pamela: A Novel is a text which teases out and resists the ethnographic urge of the literary critic. The ethnographic investigation would go something like this. Title of book: *Pamela: A Novel*. Author's name: Pamela Lu. The autobiographical question: Is Pamela Lu the Pamela of *Pamela: A Novel*? The ethnographic question: Is Pamela Lu either Asian or Asian American? Is Lu an "Asian" name? The ethno-literary-critical question: Is the Pamela in the novel either Asian or Asian American? Is *Pamela: A Novel*

²⁷ Unnumbered end pages of *Pamela*.

²⁸ Rob Wilson, "Email Dialogue/Interview with Pamela Lu and Catalina Cariaga," 17-18.

an Asian American text?²⁹

The title seems to identify the text generically as a novel, an extended prose work of fiction. In her bio, however, Lu refers to this text as “a book of fanciful non-fiction.”³⁰ The phrase “a novel” contained within the title of the text may itself be a part of the fictional world, rather than an extra-literary classification, and so “a novel” could be novelized as something non-fictional. The novelization of a novel as non-fiction resembles the disguising of autobiographical material as novelistic fiction, but there is significant difference between these two ways of manipulating genre using the techniques of genre. The former demonstrates the skillful and playful quality of the textual language, whereas the latter seems to belong less to the textuality than the ethnography of the author’s writing situation.³¹ Any attempt by the reader to establish one or the other as a stable interpretive context for reading the text is itself indicative of the ethnographic impulse. The instability of genre classification brings to the fore the difficulty of warding off the ethnographic impulse of the autobiographical question.³² *Pamela: A Novel* is a text which addresses critical questions about the ethnic subject through its treatment of the syntactical subject. By playing with what can occupy the position of the subject, pushing it to the limits of minimalism on the one hand and collectivity on the other, Lu

²⁹ Ethnographic questions such as these have plagued Asian American literary study with a type of methodological racism. The very idea of an ethnic literature that is intrinsically recognizable as such, without recourse to the ethnographic identification of the author is untenable. Conversely, if the name of the author does not yield an ethnic identification, then the question of an ethnic genre becomes merely a question of thematization of ethnic issues, such as identity crises and generational conflicts. Furthermore, these thematizations leave aside much of literary analytic methods in favor of simple autobiographical representation and personal discourse that merely reflect the life of a typical individual, if not the author specifically.

³⁰ http://www.scc.rutgers.edu/however/v1_2_1999/current/readings/lu.html

³¹ <http://www.atelos.org/info.htm>

³² The relation of literary genre to ethnography in some ways comes closest to the notions of biological taxonomies; I will develop a divergent notion of the connection between genre and life.

raises questions about the grammatical process of autobiographical subjection in literature.³³

The opening passage of *Pamela: A Novel* introduces alphabetic letters as characters.

Returning to the subject of L, as R and I inevitably did, we agreed she possessed a strange quality of ineptitude, one which caused all her practical actions—from the very simple, such as arriving at the airport on time, to the enviable, such as her impressive ability to command a steady supply of lovers—to seem as miracles: amazing accomplishments we would not have thought possible coming from a woman who appeared conscious of virtually nothing, save for self-effacement. For L existed almost exclusively on the conceptual level: her manner of living consisted of a series of gestures that she did not believe in any way adequate to the situation that was her real life. But the very thought of performing these gestures was immensely important to her, and the space they opened up in the world for her experiences to happen was also important, so much so that the experiences themselves seemed like afterthoughts, spillovers of a gesture that had failed to contain itself. Thus it was not uncommon for her to struggle verbally through a difficult sentence or confession, and to have her body involuntarily break through with an impossibly eloquent posture, like a martial arts maneuver conceived originally for self defense, but materializing instead as a defiant dance. (Lu 11-12)

It is hard not to be reminded of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* whose letters, epistolary writing, served to prove her character, her female virtue. Here a letter is the signifier of a

³³ Pamela Lu discusses her interest in the connection between literary form and forms of political embodiment in an interview with Rob Wilson: "Extreme Asian American gaps in language, cultural experience, and historical time open up opportunities for vocabulary play, invented self-definitions, and appropriations of mainstream or canonical cultural goods with a wink. But at the same time, this is not just play but an almost desperate life-preserving attempt to really, really "own" a form, to have and inhabit a form (both aesthetic and physical) of one's own." ("Email Dialogue/Interview with Pamela Lu and Catalina Cariaga," in *Boundary*.) Giorgio Agamben offers a pithy articulation of the political and philosophical stakes in experimentations with grammar: "Languages are the jargons that hide the pure experience of language just as peoples are the more or less successful masks of the factum pluralitatis. This is why our task cannot possibly be either the construction of these jargons into grammars or the recodification of peoples into state identities. On the contrary, it is only by breaking at any point the nexus between the existence of language, grammar, people, and state that thought and praxis will be equal to the tasks at hand. The forms of this interruption—during which the factum of language and the factum of community come to light for an instant—are manifold and change according to times and circumstances: reactivation of jargon, trobar clus, pure language minoritarian practice of a grammatical language, and so on. In any case, it is clear that what is at stake here is not something simply linguistic or literary but, above all, political and philosophical" (Agamben, *Means Without End*, 70).

character, but whether that character is a person, a style of embodiment, personification of a theoretical concept or ethical position seems difficult to determine. In the eighteenth century novel, letters also served to disguise the true identities of characters based on real-life people, such as “Mr. B” in Richardson’s *Clarissa*. We might wonder here what it is that Lu’s letters disguise or reveal. If writers such as Richardson worried about accusations of libel, writers such as Lu might anticipate the ethnographic impulse that looks for racial identity in the names of characters.

Our understanding of grammar lets us determine that “L” is “she,” “a woman.” The gender of “L” is indistinct but referentially given through the pronoun, assuming that grammar remains stable.³⁴ Is “L” a proper name, an abbreviation of a proper name, or possibly a pun on “elle,” making it nothing more than a glorified pronoun, referentiality raised to a proper name? What about “R”—proper name, abbreviation, or a pun on the verb “are”? What is the status of that intransitive verb, that grammar of being? What about “I”—proper name, abbreviation, pun on “eye,” or pronoun? If it weren’t for the peculiar ambiguity introduced by “L” and “R,” we might never have questioned “I.” But once the question of what is occupying the subject position in the sentence is raised at the level of pronoun reference and predication, of gender and being, the easy conventionality of “I” as first person pronoun becomes an interpretive uncertainty.

Even though it is quite possible that these letters are to be treated as proper names and fully embodied characters, the effect of the letters on the writing sustains the referential quality of the characters, which repeatedly returns us to the desire to identify the subject. The brief appearance of “P” and “Pamela” creates an effect of distance between “I” and “P” and “Pamela,” resolving nothing.

³⁴ Monique Wittig experiments with the use of pronouns in fiction that destabilizes gender identification.

The introduction of the letter “A” presents an even more complicated reference problem. The letter “A” is usually an indefinite article, usually in lower case, except at the start of a sentence. The capitalization of “A” forces a propriety on the indefinite article and makes of it a definite proper name or abbreviation of one. Treating the indefinite article as a subject turns the embodiment of subjectivity into something other than what might belong to an “I.” The indefinite article “a” usually refers to an object, an indefinite or generic type of thing rather than an individual. By turning the objective reference into the subject of a sentence, indefinite life comes to the fore in the place of the autobiographical subject who is merely one of many subjects explaining their and each others’ lives.³⁵

As the indefinite article thus takes on the role of the subject, it gains a life of its own, and yet, as the signifier of the indefinite, it cannot properly own anything. The life that belongs to the indefinite exhibits qualities of subjective experience, yet it can never fully be owned by the subject, because the subject’s own proper name is itself an index of the indefinite. The subjecthood of “A,” then, might be read as “a qualitative duration of consciousness without a self,” and the life of “A” as immanent life.³⁶

Deleuze defines immanent life through a discussion of a Dickensian character. A rogue, a bad man, on his deathbed, receives the attention and sympathy of acquaintances at the moment when he is no longer a good or bad man, but merely *a life* struggling with death. Judgments based on social identity disappear not after a person is dead but at the

³⁵ “A” is an indefinite article, yet also a “he.” The powers of indeterminacy which have been identified as a female subject (L/elle) are also being attributed to the masculine subject, in the economy of Asian American poetics and critical theory, a necessarily transgendered subjectivation. For a different poetic experiment see Louis Zukofsky’s book-length poem “A”.

³⁶ Deleuze states: “We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life” (Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 27).

moment when a person, with a proper name and personal record, recedes and “a life” pushes forward. “A life” is not an individual’s life, self-possession by a transcendent self, but a re-description of the indefinite article that allows for life to appear in a dispossessed form along with the individual—not identical nor synchronous, but somehow co-present, co-existing. The individual’s life and *a* life are neither mediated nor mutually determining, but rather co-functioning to provide contexts for experimentation. A life yields the life of A. The indefinite can thus be invoked by use of the language of the definite, because the definite is produced by the making-proper of the indefinite article. Lu shows us that it is only by using the language of individual selfhood that we can make the singular appear. The rhetorical postures of ethnography and autobiography can, and must, be engaged if one wishes to express the singular as it appears somewhere near the outlines of the individual subject.

A life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given lived objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects.³⁷

The singularities and the events that constitute a life coexist with the accidents of the life that corresponds to it, but they are neither grouped nor divided in the same way. They connect with one another in a manner entirely different from how individuals connect.³⁸

“A” does not have the identity of a proper name but can therefore best be described by singularities. In fact, “A” favors singularities of the human voice over individual attributes.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, 29.

³⁸ Ibid, 30.

³⁹ As a definition of “singularity,” Deleuze gives the example of the smiles of children who do not yet have individual personalities yet are capable of singular expressions; the smile of a child does not represent some unique aspect of the child’s personality so much as express liveliness itself but in a non-abstract singular

For A, the richness and texture of the human voice lay somewhere between the static of the phone and the phoneme, as sighs, throat-clearings, and nonsyntactic utterances such as “um” or “uh” revealed moments of passion and existence far beyond the scope of most dissertations. (Lu 66)

For “A,” the voice does not articulate a person, translating and appropriating sensation into personal attributes, but rather an impropriation of individual traits into an impersonal field of intensities. The “um” and “uh” are “between-moments” or “between-times,” opening the passage from one sensation to another into literary expression.⁴⁰ A singularity does not occupy a moment but is precisely what can only appear in the in-between of moments. This is not the work of representation so much as an experimentation with genre at the level of the syntax of the subject. If personal expression is what makes autobiography generically recognizable, then *Pamela: A Novel* shows us that personal expression is already a fixing of the flows of life in subject and object positions, which makes it fundamentally impossible for this form actually to tell the story of a life. “Everything boiled down to ‘a feeling,’ which could be demonstrated but never named because its very precision existed on another level altogether, irrelevant to the field of names” (Lu 32). A feeling is not the emotions of a person, a name, but a singularity of affect.

How do we distinguish a collective of singularities as opposed to a collective of individuals? Lu’s text has been referred to as a “collective autobiography” of Asian

way. A singularity does not come out of the process of subjectivation by which subjects and objects come into being, but we might want to speak of singularities in the same breath with subjects, because both are ways of coming into being. It is not that “we” have both but nevertheless both have to do with us and we participate in giving rise to a-subjective life. Actualization in subjects and objects does not exhaust immanent life; nor does the presence of subjects and objects block the emergence of singularities. (Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*)

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 29.

American poets in the Bay Area in the 1990s.⁴¹ The history of Asian American literature is also a history of ethnicization and categorization. At the turn of the twentieth century, publishers solicited memoirs such as *When I Was a Boy in China* (Yan Phou Lee, 1887) and *When I Was a Boy in Korea* (Il Han New, 1928) that satisfied the growing taste of the U.S. public for exotic tales of faraway Asia told in the first person. This Orientalist desire, which was the cultural counterpart to U.S. imperialist longings in Asia, came to symbolize ‘the American reader’ of Asian American literature. Racial antagonism, and actual international conflict, thus subtly shaped the context in which Asian American authors were to write in subsequent decades and explains in part the urgency of these writers’ counter-desire for a ‘common reader.’ The shifting current of Asian American poetics through the twentieth century thus indicates an aesthetic realm shot through with political contestation at every turn. Asian American authors themselves have frequently engaged in critical-political debates over their writing.⁴²

In the 1960s, the self-naming of ‘Asian Americans’ as such replaced the label ‘Oriental’ and precipitated a categorization of an Asian American literature and history which emphasized the individual voice speaking out against erasure, anonymity, stereotyping. Anonymous poetry etched onto the walls of detention centers on Angel Island off the coast of the Bay Area was reclaimed as the true origins of Asian American writing. ‘Asian American’ indicated a collective that could not shake off the abstract

⁴¹ “Pamela Lu Arrives in Blogland”: “But we had banded together to begin with out of a common knowledge and desire, and we would work this commonality to the ends of the earth, if there were in fact anything to be had there, and we would shape our work as the collective autobiography that it could only be, outside of the invasions and ambushes that throttled history.” (<http://tympan.blogspot.com/2005/06/pamela-lu-has-arrived-in-blogland.html>)

⁴² Two notable examples are the feud between Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston over the direction of ethnic studies and feminism, and the controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Blu’s Hanging*, which resulted in the revoking of the Association of Asian American Studies’ Book Award.

categorization that is also an ethnicization. Asian American poetics has thus continued to serve as a technology of ethnic subjectivation.

In striking contrast, *Pamela: A Novel* announces itself as *a* novel. The indefinite article in the title emphasizes not only genre but a generic belonging to that genre, unspecified, unethnicized. The collectivity of the “we” in *Pamela* directly challenges the type of categorization indexed by the ethnic subject. The “we” in *Pamela* is not a transparent grouping of individual letters, a move of universalization; instead the “we” offers a point of contrast, critique and opposition to the individuality of letters that operate within a framework that purports to negotiate the universal and the particular. The “we” acts like a *genre in the subject position*. (In times of war and national crisis, however, Lu notes that the “we” can become a mere expansion of the “I.”)

So we found it natural, if not imperative, to be assaulted and overwhelmed by memories which were not our own but which we nevertheless carried as though they had actually happened to us. In this sense, the history of our lives was always the history of something else. We were forever displacing ourselves in the chain of events without knowing who exactly was doing the displacing, and our lifetime goal, if we desired success in the conventional sense, consisted not in getting to know ourselves, but in getting to know ourselves less. The self was a mystery so consumed by its own questioning that it had no room left for us, a condition which we nevertheless preferred since we were totally unprepared for the alternative. Nothing was more sublime or terrifying than the thought of waking up each morning completely renewed, with only ourselves to fall back on. We desperately depended upon the spectacle of the large “I,” with all its artifice and white noise, to keep us alive and functional in the world. We sometimes wondered who this “I” really was. Raw speculations placed “I” at the dawn of Western civilization—“I” was the shadow on the far wall of the cave, in which we were still living, or it was the cave itself, in which we were still living, or it was the cave itself, which had evolved over the years to accommodate us more comfortably, like a second skin that we could never shed or live without. In this sense, “I” (which expanded during times of war or crisis to “we”) was the most ubiquitous, and therefore elusive, self we could imagine: there was no way to find “I” without by definition losing it, and therefore losing ourselves. (Lu 33)

The between-moments of passion and existence that extend “far beyond the scope of most dissertations” are here contrasted to the totalizing consumption of self-questioning by the self. The academic quality of an analysis of autobiography, which unavoidably merges with methodologically autobiographical analysis, is here identified with the self-consuming uses of rhetoric by individuals stepping in for the “I.” Lu projects “I” onto Plato’s cave wall which serves not to objectify the subject so much as to suggest that the gesture of taking up the “I” to mediate voice/speech is itself a representation (an autobiographical performance) of our own self-deception, an illusion by which we remain mesmerized in endless self-consumption. The regime of “I” in explicitly self-embodying discourse has served to secure the individual/universal coherence of “Western civilization” as such, which equates Plato, western civilization, and “I.” The “we,” who questions the “I,” raises the question of ethnic subjectivity at the nexus of syntax, genre, discourse, and the field of life. Resorting to “the pieties of multiculturalism” or the universal-particular model of cultural difference will not aid us in answering the question as it is here offered to us.⁴³ It is not a simple matter of determining differences spatially (geopolitics, imperialism) or temporally (anthropology, primitivism and developmentalism), because the revealing of immanence in singularities of *a* life will repeatedly flood that ethnographic impulse. Singularities are not related to each other through an abstract notion of difference (difference-equality) but only connect through immanence which determines their emergence.

Where does this “we” come from? We are given the barest of gestures toward a history of “we.”

⁴³ Peter Hitchcock, “Decolonizing the English Language.”

We were living in a time when each thing was in flight from itself, and we from ourselves, who watched all this happen from the sidelines and felt strangely ecstatic with disbelief. (Lu 35)

The “we” situates itself in “a time” that is qualified by the thing’s “flight from itself,” the collective’s ecstatic state. This indefinite time, “a time,” is a determination by the singular and not a symptom of empirical indeterminacy.⁴⁴ The time of Lu’s experimentation is not a historicization of a theoretical state (say, poststructuralism or Deleuzian philosophy) nor the ahistorical application of those theories; rather it is a pinpointing of a specific moment in time that does not extend into a full-blown historical narrative.

The literary style of *Pamela: A Novel* produces an effect closest to academic writing as genre. The sentences have a syntactical fullness and complexity, following one after the other with a relentless drive to conceptualization, unconcerned with readers’ abilities to ground those concepts in the world. The letters/characters that are the subjects of the sentences have a referential quality similar to that of theoretical writing, and explanations of the characters of the letters/subjects take on the language of secondary literary criticism. The sustained intensity of the prose which uses critical-theoretical language to write in the context of the autobiographical genre (rather than in the genre itself) makes it difficult for content to accumulate into an organic narrative. References to concrete objects never fade into the background, naturalizing the activity of the subject in the foreground; here there is no real foreground. Although the letters/characters appear as

⁴⁴ Deleuze offers this clarification of indefinite determination: “The indefinite as such is the mark not of an empirical indetermination but of a determination by immanence or a transcendental determinability. The indefinite article is the indetermination of the person only because it is determination of the singular. The One is not the transcendent that might contain immanence but the immanent contained within a transcendental field. One is always the index of a multiplicity: an event, a singularity, a life” (Deleuze *Pure Immanence*, 30).

individuals, these processes of individualization are small, isolated and repeated, as if never sustainable. In the end, we are left with a sense of the process in the most generic form rather than with any feeling whatsoever that we have had encounters with representations of embodied individuals. References to the bodies or bodily postures and movements of these letters/subjects introduce embodiment in an essentially tropological form.

Or else he paced back and forth between the walls of his sentence in search of the perfect armchair or reclining futon in which to realize his insights, the pendulum motion of his speech making successively shorter and shorter swings until he was eventually drawn to his purpose and promptly sat down, in the middle of his statement. ...

And if A was himself the subject he infinitely deferred through the sweep of his inquiry, then we too assumed sympathetic states of repose, our arms and backs sinking into cushioned chairs that provided relief from the difficult critical positions into which we had nearly but not quite succeeded at folding ourselves. (Lu 63)

The “states of repose” and “critical positions” are bodily postures and discursive—or even syntactical—positioning. These subjects are not shown in those positions, exactly, but in the process of moving into and out of them. These are positions “into which we had nearly but not quite succeeded in folding ourselves” and states which they are assuming with “arms and backs sinking into cushioned chairs.” “L’s” eloquent postures beginning as martial arts and ending in dance suggest a passage of becoming that moves from the subject’s defensive positions toward the formal, impersonal gestures that make up personal expression.

Theoretical engagement counters the *abstraction* of ethnic categorization. Ethnic categorization extracts and identifies, caught in the perpetual swing between individuals and types, or between types and types of types. Theory, on the other hand, traces, tracks, and enables shifts; theory moves, dances, figurates, and travels. To theorize ethnicity is to

provide rhetorical figurations for the life that is captured by and yet exceeds ethnic subjectivation. Travel, the privileged trope in *Contagion of Living*, works to materialize such figurations of ethnicity *beyond* the ethnic category. Thus “I” becomes “aware of the potential for travel”:

Or like the time I walked through Berkeley with L shortly after the rains had stopped and suddenly became aware of the potential for travel—how the street tilted east and west in a line which one could follow indefinitely, walking straight into one’s life as if it were one long distance culminating in freedom, leading away from and then back toward one’s starting point in an orbit that magnified (or perhaps restored) the world to spectacular proportions. During moments like these I faltered. I tricked myself out of desolation; I could not tell if I was moving or moved. (Lu 51)

The potential for travel appears on the axis of east and west. It is an indefinite journey into “one’s life,” an individual, rather than singular life. Moving on this line requires a single direction—either east or west—and for this same reason, east and west are not differences that can be maintained in the spatial structures of the mind even as they are maintained geopolitically. The life of singularity begins to emerge as the subject falls back—“I faltered,” “I tricked myself,” “I could not tell”—and as doubt rises as to whether “I” is “moving or moved.” Is “I” an agent or effect? Is this travel a life’s journey of the self or an affective experimentation with subjective effects? Will “I” be the site of active or passive affection?

This uncertainty turns into pure indefinite movement at the end of the novel, when we find “I” suspended on an airplane over the Pacific Ocean in the midst of crossing from San Francisco toward Tokyo. The description of the flight suggests that “I” is not on a journey so much as merged with travel itself, that is with the potential for movement that *is* the definition of *affect* in its barest form.

For latecomers like R and me, it seemed as though the examination had

been postponed indefinitely, and the question of our admission to the living suspended like aircraft over the interminable stretch of ocean between continents. ...I had lost 17 hours between Tokyo and San Francisco, on a predawn Pacific flight that tested the patience and exhaustion level of all concerned. For a long while I watched the dim, deferred light of the sun as it struggled to climb over the slipping horizon, and then fell to napping intermittently in my seat, fully absorbed by the steady orange glow and hum of jet engines, until approximately halfway across the Pacific, when I awoke to meet the influence of a sudden, unstoppable panic. Nothing horrible had befallen me; nothing even remotely urgent had happened or was about to happen around me, except that I was suddenly flooded with the distinct sensation of being overlapped—as if all my thoughts, actions, feelings, preoccupations, and regrets were being compressed into one another at a rate of several hundred miles per hour in preparation for the approach of a new, mysterious replacement. The transcendence took the form of a vertical ratio, and I, as the lower half of an undefined term, ducked beneath the dividing line that rushed forth to meet me. For some time I remained sunk in my seat, fingers clenched around the plastic armrests, until the sensation advanced and passed through me, leaving me afloat once again in the perpetual predawn light and more than willing to let the whole subject drop, in the midst of a moment that technically never existed. (Lu 97-98)

“I” enters a space described in affective terms: suspension, deferred light, slipping horizon, intermittent napping, and full absorption by the “steady orange glow and hum of jet engines.” Abruptly in the middle of the flight, “halfway across the Pacific,” a sudden awakening and “unstoppable panic.” A flooding of “I” by sensation, a compression of individuality in the “approach of a new mysterious replacement.” The “transcendence” is not of the subject rising above sensation but rather the sinking of the “I” ducking “beneath the dividing line.” “I” cannot pass through the line of East-West, the line of transcendence. We might think instead of an immanence of affect in which “I remained sunk,” a point which sensation “advanced and passed through.”

Pamela: A Novel thus drops abruptly to a close mid-air, in the “perpetual predawn light,” crossing from West to East, U.S. to Japan. “I” chooses simply to drop the subject. For “I” to drop the subject of subjectivity is either suicide or a total opening out of the

strictures of the subject onto the field of affectivity, the plane of immanence. The ‘return to the subject’ that began the novel is now followed by a ‘dropping of the subject.’ The ‘turn of subjectivity,’ as Butler describes it, is here repeated as a drop. I would suggest that in this drop is envisioned a return to affectivity that destabilizes the subjective turn. Reflexivity is not a closed circle, a closed turn, but spirals out, as self-reflexivity catches a glimpse of *itself* through the *critical* gaze. That this occurs in the indefinite space between East and West suggests that the critical gaze that has traditionally looked from West to East faces a challenge from the East (that is, the East as its own reflection, its self-reflexivity) in the form of a drop. The dropping of the subject that results is also a re-opening to affectivity. The turn toward the East does not give us an exteriority but a drop back into affectivity, at the threshold of the Western subject.

It may be useful now to revisit Judith Butler’s discussion of subjectivity and consider how it differs from Deleuze’s reworking of Spinoza in order to see the limit at which the subject-oriented and the affect-oriented approaches appear to converge. This vanishing point is both a returning to the subject and a dropping of the subject.

When we examine the origin of subjectivity following Butler’s account in *The Psychic Life of Power*, we do not find a process of subject formation carefully laid out in stages of becoming but rather startle the form of a figure mid-air, already fully formed.

The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning *on* oneself. This figure operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced, and so there is no subject, strictly speaking, who makes this turn. On the contrary, the turn appears to function as a tropological inauguration of the subject, a founding moment whose ontological status remains permanently uncertain.... How is it that a subject is wrought from such an ontologically uncertain form of twisting?⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 3-4.

It is uncertain whether this figure is embodied or disembodied. The figure's ontological status is *permanently* uncertain, and thus partakes of the indefinite. This insistence on ontological uncertainty could be understood as a positivist force, specifically that of affectivity understood as an immanent field or plane. The literary genealogy of rhetorical strategies that figure that fundamental ontological uncertainty as a turning, a twisting, suggests a persistent thread in Western philosophical thought concerning the pure transitivity of subjective movement and formation that goes against the logic of development. This turning and twisting is intimately linked with what we think of in ethnic discourse as a crisis of identity.

Jose Muñoz describes ethnic identity not as an identity so much as an affective organization.⁴⁶ The notion of “feeling brown” enacts a subtle shift from the one who feels to the process of feeling and the feelings themselves. A feeling is a moment of affectivity that actualizes a network of language and sensation/perception. This network is what Spinoza would call the body.⁴⁷ Affects, or emotions, are the personalized, individually charged, qualities given to/taken on by affectivity, itself an open field. Thus it is that brown functions as a color experiment of ethnic identification.

If subjectivity emerges from the field of affectivity, however, affects can never be possessions of the subject that secure the subject (“I am enraged at the President; thus I am a revolutionary and he is a dictator”). For Spinoza, affects neither indicate nor represent subjects, because affects are purely transitive.

⁴⁶ Jose Munoz, “Feeling Brown.”

⁴⁷ Our language is very imprecise in its use of the word “body,” which can at times be a thing, the object for a subject, and at other times can be the network within which this objectification (or subjectivation) occurs. Consequently, we say that it is *a* body that gives rise to *the* body, or to *one's* body.

It is certain that the affect implies an image or idea, and follows from the latter as from its cause (II, ax. 3). But it is not confined to the image or idea; it is of another nature, being purely transitive, and not indicative or representative, since it is experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states.⁴⁸

Hate, for example, cannot function as a sign of a racist person or an act of violence. Hate is simply the duration between two states; it is the movement from greater to lesser (or lesser to greater) power to act. Hate does not indicate the cause or the reason for a transition; it *is* the transition. Enacting this affective transition, however, occurs on the line of personalization. There is no actor who objectively observes this transition, because it is affect transition which individualizes one. Similarly, the organization of affects that becomes ethnic is a type of genre functioning that can produce individuals but also pull them back into the generic. When subjectivity appears in crisis we might then anticipate the appearance of a gap in creativity through which affectivity might unmask itself—a return to terror or an opening to radically different forms of subjectivity.

It is only with a type of referentiality, paradoxical and empty, that we can express the figure of subjectivity. Similar to Pamela's letters, this referential discourse functions all the better for being uncertainly embodied.

We cannot presume a subject who performs an internalization if the formation of the subject is in need of explanation. The figure to which we refer has not yet acquired existence and is not part of a verifiable explanation, yet our reference continues to make a certain kind of sense. The paradox of subjection implies a paradox of referentiality: namely, that we must refer to what does not yet exist.⁴⁹

My question is: What *does* exist—or to use a more precise but awkward expression, *how does existing occur*—while subjectivity does not yet exist, which might help to account

⁴⁸ Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 49.

⁴⁹ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 4.

for the formation of subjectivity? What kind of existence might reflexivity have if it can have no self, no body of the self? The ontological uncertainty of subjectivity is directly connected to the body of affectivity.

In her discussions of Hegel and Nietzsche, Judith Butler identifies the source of the figural turn in fear or terror. The turn is a turning away from fear or terror. In Hegel absolute fear is the refusal of death, annihilation of the self, self-destruction.

Strangely, then, a certain self-recognition is derived from the radically tenuous status of the bondsman; it is achieved through the experience of *absolute fear*.

This fear is a fear *of* a certain loss of control, a certain transience and expropriability produced by the activity of labor.⁵⁰

...the imperative to cling to oneself is motivated by this absolute fear and by the need to refuse that fear. Inasmuch as it is an *ethical* injunction, this imperative is the disarticulated refusal of absolute fear.⁵¹

The fear of destruction of the self comes before the formation of the self as an active agent, a speaking subject. We might insert into Butler's analysis, at this point, an imagined moment of affectivity before the fear becomes fear by gaining an object—self-preservation—and thus gaining its subject. Without the subject, there is only affectivity not yet formed into subjective emotion. This affectivity is the only thing that persists throughout the turns and solidifications of subjectivity and emotion. This affectivity has intelligence although it does not have self-consciousness. This 'body' of affectivity is not identical to the 'body' of the liberal subject's self-possession.

From terror and fear, from the turning away from terror and fear, develops the feeling of anxiety which becomes conscience. The terror and fear are not properly emotions *of* the subject, not only because the subject does not properly exist in the

⁵⁰ Ibid, 39.

⁵¹ Ibid, 43.

encounter of those as affects but also because terror and fear are never emotions the subject can contain—they are always threats of opening to an overwhelming affectivity *out there*. The fear or terror at the absolute level is not a personal emotion or feeling but something which provides the creative violence for processes of personalizations.⁵²

The turn is a move from power to the self. When the self feels the pressing of power, it is also coming into existence through the (same) power to feel that pressing. In Butler's analysis, subjectivity is not properly a thing nor a position which a thing might occupy but is more precisely described as a tropological movement. The turn is essentially a figural turn which constitutes self-reflexivity. Paradoxically it seems that self-reflexivity is prior to the self: it is in the moment of trying to know what we are that *we are*. Auto-affection is likewise prior to the affects of the self: the turn can be a turning back, a turning on, or a turning to, which is driven by affective responses to the ground/field of affectivity itself (Hegel's terror and Nietzsche's absolute fear), from which we derive our individual emotions only later. The subjectivity of the "I" is gained by a turn which participates in affective dynamism in which there is no subject-object differentiation but which is that which also produces that differentiation. The paradox of referentiality noted by Butler is in fact unresolvable because it is nothing but the expressive power of immanence itself that turns and returns. This unresolvability actually touches on the necessary indefinacy of immanent life.

I would suggest that it is because the turn of subjectivity emerges out of affectivity that it inaugurates not only subjectivity but tropology itself, or in the Nietzschean sense the power of creativity. If we understand that a fundamental unity

⁵² This notion of violence bears resemblance to what Walter Benjamin calls divine violence—that which can institute new symbolic systems—in contrast to reactive violence. See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence."

exists between affectivity on the one hand and subjectivity and creativity on the other, then we might see in this continuity what Spinoza calls the univocity of being. The turn is not a line distinguishing the difference between the field of affectivity and the forms that emerge from it, so much as the turn brings to appearance the slide of motion with which Being differentiates itself. The turn is in fact the essential act of a philosophy of expressionism. The subject's coming into being is a form of externalization, or expression of substance. We are produced, but what produces us? It is only as the producers that we are produced.

Butler emphasizes the rhetorical nature of subjectivity, the tropological nature of the turning body folding on itself. The permanent uncertainty of the ontological status of tropology could be re-described as a modal distinction. Spinoza calls the distinction between the rhetorical and the physical modal.⁵³ Thought and extension are but different modifications of the same substance. If we understand substance as affectivity itself, then we can see how relations of motion and rest, and increases and decreases in the power to affect and be affected, are alive for both thought and extension.⁵⁴ In Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, affectivity is both organic and non-organic life. Affectivity moves across what we perceive to be different levels or types of being—genre, species, qualities of reality, etc.

What is most important about the figure of the turn itself is that it is the image that lasts. It is what we are left seeing, after affectivity has always already vanished from view. It is what we see first when we look in the mirror before our face centers into view, that flurry of motion preceding vision proper anchored by the object at the center. It

⁵³ This is permitted by the univocity of being, or immanence.

⁵⁴ "Extension" refers to physical extensions in space, which could also be called bodies.

makes sense then that Butler goes quickly from this turn of subjectivity to the pliability of social being. The images that inhabit and regulate the social realm are challenged and questioned by the blur of motion betrayed by the turn.

SECOND TURN: *Turning Japanese*

Let us begin by considering how Mura takes up and reworks the title of his travel memoir *Turning Japanese* (1991). What does it mean to turn *Japanese*? Is it turning ethnic, turning modern, turning not-ethnic, turning technological, or what? What does it mean to *turn* Japanese? Is this a becoming, a transformation, a regression, a return to something native, an exclusion (turning one's back on), a betrayal (turning on, turning against)? Is the "turning Japanese" a gerund indicating process and movement or is it the subject, a Japanese who is turning? We are once again returned to the question of the subject and subjectivation.

For Mura, travel is a way to alter the affective situation and permit other subjective forms to arise from his own body as it increasingly opens to the field of affectivity. Mura's experimentation with self recorded in *Turning Japanese* focuses back on the turn itself, on the relation of the self with the whatever it is that one was, or still is, as well as oneself. This is an experimentation whose purpose is to increase the field of affectivity; in a sense, to re-encounter absolute fear and terror—in smaller doses. What would it mean to turn (again) toward that absolute fear and terror? Who or what would be impelled to make *this* turn? In what material contextual cofunctioning could such a turn take place?

The significance of Japan to this theoretical question concerns the transvaluation not of the subject and subjectivation but of gaps in subjectivity, identity crises, etc. The space occupied by the turning, twisting figure is a liminal space. The trope of liminality does more than describe the formation and habitus of ethnic subjectivity. Through its circulation in discursive struggles, it has also undergone a process of valuation by which it has become in some instances a fetishized object and in others a fetishization of subjectivity itself. In Rey Chow's discussion of a sinologist's criticism of the translatability of Bei Dao, she describes this exchange between rhetorical stance and the singularity of embodiment:

It is not only that the sinologist would like Chinese literature to remain forever authentically Chinese by fact of its intranslatability; the sinologist himself would have to be able to hold onto his special ability to see both sides of this divide of non-translatability. His ability would remain personal, something in his private possession which *he* could reveal, represent as he chose. One can become attached to the "in-between" once it has materialized for oneself as (illusions of) place. One's position is merely a rhetorical stance, a description of one's enunciative situation, but one might mistake position for identity, and identity for position. In truth, neither position nor identity have permanent territory. Liminality is an aspect of existence.

Chow emphasizes that liminality is a rhetorical stance, not an actually bodily situation which determines, and distinguishes, one's ability to speak unique truths. A rhetorical stance is "an aspect of existence" rather than a specialized, academic ability. In this sense, the rhetorical stance of liminality is generic, an index of the indefinite which cannot secure an individual's claim to a superior bodily capacity to speak. The sinologist's discourse can utilize the complexity of certain tropes of subjectivity, but these cannot in return give his words greater materiality. The belief in the possibility of such enhanced embodiment via deliberate deployment of tropology is doomed to failure.

In a different context but a related vein, Naoki Sakai describes the effect of the valuation of liminality on the enunciative situation of Japan scholars:

In order to articulate the very cultural difference they participate in, the students of Asian Studies, like immigrants from Asian societies in Western Europe and North America, are obliged to occupy the liminal positions of ‘in-between’ and as a result, they find themselves in the midst of an antagonism inherent in their practical relations to the object of their study.⁵⁵

Sakai points out that the liminal positioning of Japan scholars requires that actually antagonistic relations between them and Japan are complexified by being made interior to the subject; this subjectification fails and results in the liminal position precisely because of the reality of antagonism. For Sakai, liminality *is* the contact zone.

It is *not* that in this liminal topos of ‘in-between’ the students of Asian Studies come across the crisis of their identity; rather, it is that they are forced to face their *identity as crisis* in this critical ‘contact zone’ of liminality. It is because they are in crisis that they obsessively identify themselves with their ‘own’ West or Japan. The identity thus installed through the disavowal of anxiety cannot but be an identity based on ‘homosociality,’ an identity that, in the final analysis, can be installed only in negative, exclusionistic terms.⁵⁶

Sakai suggests that the conventional notion of an identity crisis is necessarily an inter-subjective affair, and the maintenance of the identity crisis as such requires a disavowal, a turning away from the anxiety of homosocial identification. If we take anxiety as a cue for a point of departure/entry to the field of affectivity, we might see here that homosociality is founded on the subjective turn away from affectivity toward identity. Both Chow and Sakai are referring primarily to non-Asian scholars of Asian studies who appear to have experienced a form of ethnicization and gained the value attached to

⁵⁵ Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 126.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 127.

ethnic subject positions as writers in their fields. This transvaluation of the very genre of ethnicity has produced a discursive confusion which masks fundamental ontological uncertainty in the guise of specifically ethnic forms of subjectivity. This suggests that there is always a process of racialization that accompanies the production of homosocial bonds.

Homosociality is produced through relations of universalism and particularism that provide the most conventional language for articulating identity and difference. In contrast, Sakai argues for the “singular eventhood of cultural difference,” against the weight of the individual’s subjectivation via homosociality.

This essay has attempted not to demonstrate the general applicability of a certain interpretative scheme, but rather to point out the working of denegation, which necessarily requires the repression of the singular eventhood of cultural difference, as well as the forgetting of historicity, of what cannot be arrested in the phenomenality of the representable within the economy of chronological temporality. It is in order to disavow the destabilizing “feeling” in the encounter of cultural difference...that universalism and particularism, oppositional stances that demand one another in their complicity, are brought forth in due course.⁵⁷

The oppositional stances of universalism and particularism are themselves, much like the rhetorical stances of individual positioning that derive from them, ways of turning away from destabilizing feeling. Taking up liminality as a position and locus of enunciation is in fact a way of stabilizing what is actually destabilizing about the experience of liminality—that opening to, or eruption of, uncontained, pre-socialized affectivity. The field of affectivity opens up not only in the absolute encounter of life and death but in the encounter of cultural difference. Cultural difference is that singular arising of affectivity.

The identity crisis is a product of the ethico-political framework of universalism and particularism. In the context of American ideology of race, groups are believed to

⁵⁷ Ibid, 149.

have particular identities that differ from each other but share in the universal condition of having a particular identity. Pluralism thus reinforces racial thinking. This framework mediates differences according to a static relational model that does not account for the process of differentiation and self-differentiation essential to the temporality of turning. The temporality of turning has nothing to do with chronological or incremental time but belongs to the processual nature of becoming. Rather than fixing on the individuality of given differences, of forms of cultural difference, Sakai seems to suggest the importance of exploring the process by which difference is given. Cultural difference is a singular emergence participating in complex histories of economic, philosophical, social conflict that do not meet each in their proper spheres, discourses, and genres, but inevitably cross into each other. Such conflict is always a conflict moving across categories, genres, disciplines; this is a conflict which might also be seen as a generative contagion. Both terms, conflict and contagion, do not in this context have distinctly positive or negative valences. It is only as necessarily a-ethical entities that coexist on a plane that they can participate in a cofunctioning from which emerges singular affect—cultural difference—and the containment of it in spatial positioning which articulates ethical, moral, political differences. The question of ethnic embodiment is not only a question about how ethnic bodies are valued or how certain bodies become identified as ethnic to begin with but also a question about how embodiment yields differences and ways of assigning differential values.

Ethnicity no longer (if ever) merely describes cultural particularities shared and passed on within a population but has itself become a descriptive genre. An individual might lay claim to the title of “ethnic” itself in contradistinction to others who are in that

context less or non-ethnic. (Similarly others lay claim to abstractions such as “tradition” or “morality” or “civilization” which have no specific meaning other than a value-laden distinction from others, instead of contestations over specific cultural practices or symbols.) It is the formal container of ethnicity itself which is increasingly becoming accessible today in the rhetorical trope of a liminal identity position which leverages a politically invested insistence on a heightened bodily existence connected to that liminal position.⁵⁸ The question that remains unanswered has to do with the connection between tropology and embodiment as a simple aspect of existence, neither particular nor universal, but immanent in the field of affectivity.

Spinoza believed that we remain in bondage to emotions as long as we do not understand them and experience them only as passive affects, or passions—emotions that are caused by something other than ourselves. The path to liberation involves increasing our active affections, those of which we are the adequate cause. In the ultimate state we come into full formal possession of power—a state of “blessedness.” To assume full formal possession of this power—to invoke Spinoza’s language—would involve something other than deploying self-identifications of ethnic in order to achieve ulterior aims. Assuming full formal possession of power necessitates an engagement with the field of affectivity that does not instinctually, or merely, turn away from it into various forms of ethnic subjectivation. One would rather be required, as strange as this may sound, to increase the joys of ethnicity, to become more active in one’s affections at the moment of the arising of destabilizing feeling, anxiety, terror, antagonism, in encounters

⁵⁸ The trope of liminality has perhaps found its most eloquent theorist in Homi Bhabha, see *The Location of Culture*.

with the field of affectivity that become recognizable as encounters with cultural difference.

Turning Japanese involves, for Mura, experimentation with sensation, feeling, and social identity. Given the changes in Japanese economy and society and the perceptions and attitudes of American media in the 1980s, these experimentations are ways of registering globalization as economic threat to U.S. hegemony. As Japan's economy grows, its exports rivaling those of the U.S. and its currency on a par with the dollar, there is a shift in the value of the Japanese side of Japanese American ethnic identity, and thereby of Japanese American identity altogether and eventually of ethnicity itself qua identity. The production of liminality (of subjects, bodies) in ethnic discourse occurs in the material context of Japanese globalization.

The contact zone of Japan and U.S. can only appear as an in-between within an anticipatory context heralding a resolution and unity established by U.S., or alternatively Japanese, global hegemony. Considering the scholarly desire for connection between Asian and Asian American studies in her essay "Missile Internationalism," Kuan-Hseng Chen points out the need "to mark out the historical conditions of possibility within which the desire for linkage takes place."⁵⁹ The linkage that takes place through the subjective has an economic function. Many Asian diasporics in the U.S. have become the "frontal forces in the operation of transnational capital (TNC) in Asia" and "have also become middlemen mediating between the United States and Asian states through funding/donation."⁶⁰ Chen points out the failure of an approach that sees current U.S.

⁵⁹ Kuan-Hseng Chen, "Missile Internationalism," 172.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 173.

cultural imperialism as operating from the outside to impose itself on Third World subjects. Since the mid-nineteenth century, “America” has never been outside “Asia” and “Asia” never outside “America.” Subject signifiers, Asian and American, thus face an indistinction of national, cultural, economic referents. Identity crises come out of this subjective crisis of indefinacy which paves the way toward and actively produces functions necessary for globalization, and furthermore these functions are not to be understood in the hindsight of global telos but as simply “aspects of existence.” Referential language in relation to Asia or America in this context is plagued (or favored) by the indefinite.

Chen suggests that we look at the “negotiation and articulation of political-economic forces vis-à-vis local histories in various sites” and pose the question: “how and through what processes and mechanisms are capitalist and imperialist globalizing forces dialectically articulated to the local cultural formation?”⁶¹ Rather than deploy global-local in a way that mimics the universal-particular, it might be more productive to consider the cofunctioning of different contexts of globalization and look for the “local” in the emergence of singularities rather than in the global configuration of individual locals. My shift away from the dialectical articulation of globalization is not intended to challenge its usefulness as a descriptive and politically invested analysis, but only to open up that analytic framing to processes of becoming-global and becoming-local which resist definite geopolitical mapping. These processes, which are processes of subjectivation and processes of opening to affectivity, are available for artistic experimentation with the micropolitics of the definite and indefinite, genre contagion and the language of the subject. In the case of Japan, the figure of turning Japanese then gives

⁶¹ Ibid, 177.

us a way to consider the becoming local of a Japanese American in Japan (*Turning Japanese*) and the becoming global of a Japanese fisherman in a southwestern province of China (*Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*).

In *Turning Japanese*, Mura gives an indefinite answer as to why he went to Japan in 1984 and what he is actually doing there as a writer.

I am a *Sansei*, a third-generation Japanese-American. In 1984, through luck and through some skills as a poet, I traveled to Japan. My reasons for going were not very clear. (Mura 7)

The lack of clarity and the indefinite quality of Mura's motives for traveling to Japan and living there for a year are followed by a diverse assortment of possible reasons that give us a snapshot of American perception of Japan's globalization. He explains in a page or two the spectrum of meanings that Japan has had for him: an unimportant part of his childhood in the suburban Midwest (absent grandfathers, dead grandmothers, teriyaki versus hamburgers), the object of post-WWII stereotyping in images of the "yellow peril," weird and cheap stuff (Godzilla, low-budget films), and the "robot people" of the wealthy and technologically advanced Japan of the 1980's (Mura 8). Mura also attributes his lack of interest in going to Japan to his character as a "true landlocked Midwesterner," in contrast to his non-Japanese wife Susie, the cosmopolitan, eager to prepare for the trip by reading books and going to see films (Mura 9). On the plane, she already knows where she wants to go immediately upon arrival (the World's Fair at Tsukuba). David, on the other hand, thinks of his going to Japan as merely accidental, less preferable than a trip to Paris.

Then he tells us that in his writings he has already been making the journey to Japan over and over: "it was obvious my imagination had been traveling there for years,

unconsciously swimming the Pacific, against the tide of my family's emigration, my parents' desire, after the internment camps, to forget the past" (Mura 9). Mura's literary work on issues of Japanese American history have as their source an imagined return to Japan. It is not Japan itself, so much as the repeated activity of turning toward Japan, of going toward Japan, that expresses the past of Japanese American history. The thickness of the past exists as a fog, dispersing light rather than extinguishing it. Uncertainty and unconscious desires are not negatives but diffusions. This diffuse quality has become a basic state of being for Mura, one which absorbs intense affects: "Then I nodded off. My nervousness and excitement had gone inward, into somnolence" (Mura 10).

In Japan Mura experiences a much more unstable and intensive rhythm of affective/subjective openings, closings, re-openings, re-closings, and so on. A new word, a Japanese word that had once been a part of his own name—Uyemura—and excised in the U.S., stirs up longing for ancestors, questions that merely point to the absence of those they would inspire with speech, leaving him alone as the abbreviated Mura. Being in Japan awakens interest in family history but chasing after ancestors only leads him to follow their footsteps back to the U.S. Affective openings follow closed circuits.

On the day Mrs. Hayashi taught me the character for *Uye*—it means plant—I felt a sudden sense of connection with the language and with my grandfather, with my ancestors and the farming village from which my name Uyemura, derived. I wished I had known my grandparents, wished they were alive so I could talk to them in Japanese. I wanted to ask questions; there was no one to answer. (Mura 49)

In Japan, as my interest in my family background awakened, I began to read more about the first Japanese immigrants. . . . It was not a new world they were seeking but a route back to the old one. (Mura 50)

The few mental images of him I possess start with his return to Japan about ten years later to find a bride. I constantly forget his first decade spent trying to earn enough money for the trip back home, the dreams of

being able to buy a plot of land sufficient to live on. I know that something must have changed inside him in that period, that gradually the center of his world must have shifted, or rather, the concept of Japan as home somehow began to disappear. For when he returned to Japan, it was to get a bride to bring back to America... (Mura 51)

He turns toward Japan only to be turned away from Japan. Immigrant narration closes the circuit of global movement. In this context his articulation of U.S.-Japan relations through the immigrant narrative of his own grandfather brings Japanese globalization in line with Japanese American immigrant history.

The current charges of unfair Japanese business practices go back a long way. Ironically, the many barriers that the whites on the West Coast put up against the Japanese immigrants probably helped ensure that those immigrants became permanent. If the immigrants had been able to make their bundle quickly, they would simply have returned home. Instead, over the years, they began to cut their psychological and emotional ties to Japan just as my grandfather did.

As for his grandson, eighty years later, I was simply a student come to study his grandfather's homeland. I wasn't going to stay, to become uprooted. (Mura 52)

In his first visit to Miura, his sponsor, however, Mura encounters a block to the immigrant narration of Japanese globalization which would explain his travels to and within Japan as recovery of immigrant pre-history and linkage between the Japanese American move toward its own traumatic past in the relocation camps during WWII and the Japanese trauma of nuclear bombing at the end of that war. Miura tells him not to visit Hiroshima, that the Japanese have moved forward and don't look back at that history anymore. Mura himself feels an inhibiting guilt and anxiety about writing on such material as himself a part of American culture.

"I see you want to go to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I don't know if it's a good thing for you to visit there," said Miura.

I suddenly grew attentive. Having written poems about hibakusha, the atomic bomb victims, I had cited a desire to go to those cities in my grant proposal. Perhaps naïvely, I felt I might somehow capture the

Japanese perception of the event, but with an American eye. Still, I worried about seeming like a vulture, scraping away at the remains of the dead. Was Miura picking up on this?

“It’s best you forget about such things. We have gone on from there. This is the new Japan. We have forgotten such things.”

I nodded feebly. What did he mean by “We have forgotten such things”?

“There’s so much else to see. I’ve read you’re interested in visiting your grandfather’s hometown. Where is that?”

Smiling and maintaining a polite demeanor, I felt my usual self-righteous voice grow silent. I was a guest here, this man was my sponsor. Even though he was condescending, taking the tack of the elder and wiser writer and dismissing my interest as youthful misguidance, was that a reason to instantly loathe his presence?

It was a posture I was to take often in Japan: the smiling, simple, and assenting American, polite and silent, without protest. (Mura 19)

The structure of subjectivity (“I”) is at first believed by Mura to be capable of adopting a liminal position and thus capturing an inter-cultural, multiply-embodied perspective: “I felt I might somehow capture the Japanese perception of the event, but with an American eye.” The coming together of an American eye/I and a Japanese perception of the event, made possible by a Japanese American man traveling to Japan, seems a reasonable expectation from the point of view of U.S.-based articulations of minority identity as being composed of some mixture of racialized body and nationalized subjectivity. However, the conversation does not progress as Mura hopes. Miura’s response is indecipherable to Mura, who immediately experiences a deflation of affect. Mura ends up taking the posture of “the smiling, simple, and assenting American, polite and silent, without protest.” His resistance to being pushed into the posture of a model minority in the U.S. does not translate into a similar ability to avoid becoming the model foreigner in Japan. When he tries to express an extension of his interest in the history of Japanese Americans and the internment during WWII to his interest in visiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he is not able to establish a stable notion of ethnic value that extends to the

culture of the 1980s which was dominated by the American fear of Japanese economic power. Right at the beginning of his stay in Japan, he feels denied what he had thought would be an opportunity to increase his capacities as a writer through affective expansion and the ability to more complexly embody the identity position of liminality that would generate new writing.

Turns and re-turns are articulated in terms of writing and genre. Although known as a poet, Mura is struck with the desire to write novels and memoirs, genres which provide different means of formalizing the rhythms of affective/subjective closings and openings.

Shortly after this talk with Mrs. Hayashi, I began to think about writing a novel about my grandfather. Only by having come to Japan, I realized, could I even begin to attempt such a novel. Previously I was able to know only the American side of him, and that only through the sketchy stories told by my aunt. His Japanese side was beyond my experience. I was just beginning to understand how much about him I didn't know. (Mura 49)

Mura thinks of living in Japan as a condition for producing a novel and novelistic discourse.⁶² The significance of the novel, in Bakhtin's analysis, is the development of a new type of discourse. Novelistic discourse is for Bakhtin a way of registering that an author's discourse is polyphonic and every voice in a novel necessarily internally dialogic. A character in a novel is not an objective representation of an individual life but

⁶² In his analysis of novelistic discourse in Dostoevsky, Mikhail Bakhtin emphasizes the significance of double-voiced discourse. Double-voiced discourse may be in one voice but it contains within it recognition of and address to another voice. These different voices are different world-views. Bakhtin does not link world-views and voices with identities in the sense of late twentieth century U.S. multiculturalism, and it is precisely for that reason that I find his discussion especially useful in reading Mura. For Bakhtin, novel is discourse and novelistic discourse is internally dialogic. The dialogue between different worldviews takes place not necessarily between two characters who are each figures representing different worldviews, but internally in the narration. It is as if the narration is aware of difference and opposition and begins chattering with itself among the conflicting worldviews. The narration is not unified nor divided amongst bodies (multiple narrators) but itself internally in dialogue with itself. This internal dialogue with itself is peculiar to the novel. (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.)

the nexus of multiple consciousnesses that make possible the emergence of singularities coinciding with an individual embodiment. If Mura wishes to capture his grandfather through novelistic discourse, being in Japan must mean that Mura do more than observe other Japanese who in some way resemble his grandfather; he must be able to understand the polyphony and the cofunctioning of different modes of life and noncommensural affects as they appear in Japan.

He anticipates: “I think ahead, and I think there will be no story.” There will be no story—but of course we know that this is the story. Failing to realize the novel, Mura turns to the self, writing about turning Japanese and writing *Turning Japanese*—both of which are co-present, simultaneous but not identical projects.⁶³ When there is no narrative form available for a certain individual or life, the memoir exists as a formless form that permits an experimental narration that is not driven toward the depiction of a worldview or multiple worldviews but that lays open the coming together of a subjectivity necessary for a worldview or that records the subjective process of perception. If a certain failure or closure of novelistic discourse is connected to self-writing for Mura, this is the fortuitous circumstance which permits him to present a surprising type of experimentation with self, life, and writing. It is the idea of subjectivity as essentially and unceasingly experimental that emerges from *Turning Japanese*—a text that necessarily includes/excludes the field of the non-textual, living production of writing as/from/to the self.⁶⁴ This is the positivist force of affectivity that underlies, or

⁶³ As yet, Mura has not published a novel. He has mentioned in recent years that he is working on one. He is also involved in theater and performance art. A uniquely balanced multiple genre artist, the novel still seems to elude him.

⁶⁴ “V.S. Naipaul has remarked that traveling for a writer is a gamble; something interesting may pop up, some crucial incident or revelation, and then again, nothing may happen. Fortunately, given my racial

crosses through, every crisis of identity. Mura's memoir is not a conventional memoir, giving us the account of his turning into an object of memoir, the ethnic subject as such. Mura only writes about subjective positioning in such a way that it comes to appear absurd—where can there be an embodied “Asian American in Asia” and what is it that can be said from this locus of enunciation? Thus there can be no novelistic discourse. He does not write from a point of view, with perspective, but rather perspective itself is shown in reified form *as himself*.

The popular American notion of multiculturalism assumes that one can be two or more things and that it is multiplicity which throws identity into crisis; furthermore, such a multicultural subjectivity is believed to be articulatable in the autobiographical “I” of much ethnic writing. Mura struggles with the idea of multiculturalism, with abstraction itself, we could say, more than with experiences that push him toward that ideal. The story of the grandfather that Mura wishes to write into a novel is the promise that such a story exists. The elusiveness of this project of transnational storytelling suggests a certain failure of individual subjectivity to contain that story of becoming-global, even as he gestures toward this project again and again. It is in Zhang Yimou's *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles* that we will begin to see a more concerted experimentation with transnational storytelling that brings forth global becoming. But I will turn to that film at the end of this chapter.

When Mura finally makes his pilgrimage to his grandfather's hometown of Shingu, he slips it into a different itinerary—visiting the places that the poet Bashō had

background, my stay here in Japan isn't really a gamble: the dice are rigged” (Mura 58). Mura suggests that race might be a factor that precludes real experiment, that “the dice are rigged.” However, I would suggest that experimentation, as I understand it, is not “a gamble” so much as a way to work with the rigging that is unavoidably a part of all forces of socialization.

once visited on his journeys. “On the way to my grandparents’ village, we passed through Toba, home of the Ise Shrine” (Mura 352). At the Ise Shrine, Mura makes offerings to his grandparents. The scene appears to be one of empty ritual, meaningless repetition. He stares and stares but there is nothing to see; he makes offerings—throws coins, claps, thanks, prays—but there is nothing given or received.

I threw a coin in the offering box and stared at the white banner cloth hung in the entrance gate, behind which, when the wind moved, I could see the stone courtyard and the shrine inside. I clapped my hands twice and thanked, as I had done so many times in this country, my ojii-san and obaa-san, from my father’s side, from my mother’s side. I stared at the white cloth. A breeze flared; the flap flew up, then fell back down again. As I turned, I saw a priest walking across the stones, in a white, loose-fitting gown, light-green khaki trousers, a black cap tied to his head. I was struck by the fact that he wore glasses. I knew my grandparents had been Buddhist, but I didn’t know if they were Shinto, though most Japanese consider themselves both. It didn’t really matter. I had made my pilgrimage. I had said my prayer. (Mura 355)

He is struck by the random fact that a priest walking by is wearing glasses. There doesn’t seem to be any particular significance to the glasses, but the fact of the priest himself seems to trigger other questions about the significance of the pilgrimage for Mura. He wonders whether his grandparents had been Shinto as well as Buddhist. He confirms that they were Buddhist but throws doubt on whether they were Shinto, although he notes that “most Japanese consider themselves both.” In some ways this question had already appeared in his observations of the actual shrine.

The wood of the shrine, which is like that of the entrance torii—unpainted, a deep-grained, rough-hewn gray—supports a thatched roof, whose strands are visible yet so closely packed together as to seem welded solid. The effect is one of a startling calm and simplicity, which makes the largeness of the structure seem merely the impression gained by looking at it from a closer distance, rather than the force of imperial and lofty imposition, which you sense at many other shrines. Standing before it, I felt the peasant origins of the architecture, the source of Shintoism in the

ancient gods and rites, in the primeval forests and mountains, in the worries and backbending labor of the rice fields. (Mura 355)

Mura notes that this shrine, where Bashō left his mark by writing a poem, differs from many other Shinto shrines in the absence of “imperial and lofty imposition.” Instead, this structure makes Mura feel “the peasant origins of the architecture.” We have here a convergence of Japanese imperial history and the peasant origins of Shinto which pre-date the existence of a specifically “Japanese” nation. In questioning his own ancestors, Mura wonders about the Japanese American sansei’s connection to this convergence and desire for linkage, both of which are impossible to resolve in the vanishing of his familial past.⁶⁵ He thinks, “It didn’t really matter” (Mura 355).

What my grandparents experienced, what kind of people gave birth to and raised my father, all this represents an impossible knowledge. Does culture ordinarily form a net of remembrance, a safety guard against forgetting? Does it provide the individual with at least some clues, some vague outlines, from which to discern his family history? All I have are these doubts and feelings of loss, these questions which pull me on, step after step, a dance of folly. Over and over, knowing it is futile, I try to create my own myth of history. (Mura 358)

The immigrant narrative which drove the return to origin is shown in its utter futility. His remark that “It didn’t really matter” and his reference to a “dance of folly” leave ambiguous the question of Asian America-Asia linkage.

⁶⁵ See John Okada’s *No-No Boy* for a novelistic treatment of the dilemma of Japanese Americans who retained loyalty to the Japanese emperor during WWII and their children, who emerge through ethical conflict with both their parents’ imperial longings and the racism of American policies regarding loyalty oaths and relocation camps, as the new Asian American. These new Asian Americans define American identity in terms of loyalty to the true ideals of American democracy and the struggle for civil rights. The question of what, if anything, connects Japanese Americans to the history of Japanese imperialism in Asia is excluded from the new Asian American discourse. The trope of coalition-building within Asian American politics thus excludes consideration of how intra-Asian struggles and alliances connect to intra-Asian American and American inter-racial (as it is now being called) issues. This exclusion of history, however, serves to all the more racialize the category of the ethnic minority in the U.S. and makes it difficult to see anything beyond the appearance of racial identification or racial conflict. It is precisely this exclusion that gestures toward the global coming from American Studies are perhaps meant to address.

Japan for me has been the land of lost connections, of wanderings from the path of the guidebooks, missing what I was supposed to see, and yet always knowing that I am seeing something which strikes me, which I will always remember, which I have never seen except in dreams. So often, though, the significance remains occluded, lost, the connection to the past impossible and impenetrable. (Mura 356)

The self with its guidebooks and anticipated connections wanders lost, unable to get it together, but there is always also something going on, something that strikes the “me.” Affect and identity work together in this way. The “I” feels lost because it feels (as confusion, as crisis) the affectivity that is excessive to the subject. And this is a fabulous opportunity—losing that I. In that in-between of I losing itself, there is always “something which strikes”—the singularity of affect.

Finally at Shingu, Mura sees “a typical Buddhist temple” and “I was pleased to be at a place where my grandparents might have walked and prayed” (Mura 358). Again, he says prayers for his grandparents at the shrine but it is an empty repetition.

It was dark by now, and in the early-evening light, under the glow of the lanterns lit by electric bulbs, I again said prayers for my grandparents in front of the shrine. It didn’t feel much different from similar prayers I’d performed elsewhere in Japan. As we left, Reiko said that the temple was new, had been built in 1959, although the grounds had been a place of worship for hundreds of years. So, I thought, my grandparents never saw these buildings when they were young. The buildings aren’t the link I’d hoped for. Everything is new; the connections are lost. (Mura 358)

He lets go of architectural linkage with its structures of imperial linking—“[t]he buildings aren’t the link I’d hoped for.” Perhaps it is productive to allow certain histories to be lost but only if we have first done the work of seeking them out and learning the significance of what it is that has been lost and that we are now willingly letting go. Just before he leaves Shingu, after he has already given up on his desire for linkage, he gets an unexpected visitation from his grandparents.

As we left, my last sight was of a lighted soft-drink machine, with red dots which seemed to connect little streams of light and a display case where you could see cans of Coke, Fanta, Kirin Orange, and Kirin Lemon. For some reason, I wanted to and now wish I had taken a picture of this. It is what I remember most vividly about the place, what I see most clearly now in my mind's eye. And it is there that I think I glimpse the ghosts of my grandparents: if I close my eyes I seem to see my grandfather's face more clearly, since his portrait did hang for a while in our living room when I was a child, though I can see that my grandmother is dressed in a black dress, a black veil, funereal. They are lit on one side, the side where my grandfather is standing and waving, by the soft fluorescent light of the machine. The other side, where my grandmother stands soberly, quietly, not waving, is the darkness of evening, the darker shadows of the temple pines. As we turn a corner, I am, according to Japanese custom, still waving, till they are out of sight. (Mura 359)

He is struck by a “lighted soft-drink machine”; he wants to take a picture of it but doesn't, because of course it makes no sense to take a picture of something like that—but now, looking back and writing, it does make sense: “It is what I remember most vividly about the place, what I see most clearly now in my mind's eye. And it is there that I think I glimpse the ghosts of my grandparents.” He had been looking for the architectural meaning; he would have taken a picture of a monument if he had been able to find one that contained some sedimentation of his grandparents' presence in Japan. But all he can see on the machine are red dots connecting streams of light and cans of soda. The vision is not representational, but it is vivid. And it is here, at the side of this vivid vision of lights on a soda vending machine that the ghosts enter. They do not haunt his dreams, entering the world from within his psyche but rather stand at the side of a machine.

On his pilgrimage, he does not find fragments of his grandfather's past laid out in the unassembled parts of a novel waiting for him to write into a narrative unity. He is left with nothing but the vividness of the blinking of light on a machine. At the time it was not fully an experience—he couldn't notice it strongly enough to desire to take a picture

of it—but now, later, that is what persists ... the blinking of a vending machine. This signal is what comes to inhabit personal memory. Singularities of affect take up ghostly residence in the in-betweens of personal memory and personal writing.

The split that happens for David Mura is a split between self and life. Ethnicity seems to consist in the recurrence of the turn of subjectivity, in the repetition of the crisis of self-production. The self that repeatedly appears becomes less interesting than the fact of its occurrence, which is repetition of appearing, or the turn itself in this case. The turn itself becomes the main object of attention. When one tries to focus attention on the turn, the self goes out of focus. We wonder what it is that the self turns out of and into.

THIRD TURN: *Facing Empire*

In *Empire of Signs* Japan is (re)created by Roland Barthes into a place of such radically different subjectivity that it is unclear whether one can even refer to an alternative form of subjectivity or whether this is a process of subjectivation that leads to a type of anti-subjectivity.⁶⁶ Barthes' "I" makes the claim to write about a Japan which is "somewhere in the world (*faraway*)."⁶⁷ He claims to use "Japan" to name a system of his own devising.⁶⁸ He begins by considering and putting aside the possibility of novelistic discourse. The novel would permit the invention of a "fictive nation" with an "invented name" which could then be treated as a "novelistic object." The other option he chooses

⁶⁶ See Chow's discussion of Derrida on the Chinese language.

⁶⁷ These writings are familiar to Mura.

⁶⁸ Is the "I" in *Empire of Signs* also a "he"? Undoubtedly my attribution of gender (he) and proper name (Barthes) to the "I" that appears in the opening pages of this text is itself a manifestation of the ethnographic impulse. An Asian American woman critic writing on a white French male writer is yet another context for the ethnographic impulse in literary criticism.

is to not “represent or analyze reality itself,” or, more precisely perhaps, to make no claim to do so as the discourse of the novel would. He has the option of not taking up the “major gestures of Western discourse.” His situation of writing permits his own dislocation from Western discourse—a performance enabled by deconstruction. Rather than have recourse to the structures and politics of the relative autonomy of literature, Barthes opts for a personalism in *Empire of Signs* that gives a very different type of license to fantasy. His travel memoir, as it were, refuses to recount what he encountered out there as if an out-there could be encountered anywhere except in the pre-conditioned comparative schemas which structure our interiors in-here. He ends up taking the name of a very definite Japan and subjecting it to indeterminacy, to five letters j-a-p-a-n which lose material connection to a geopolitically located Japan and enter into a becoming global that is mobilized through the French writer’s desire to become local—a very specific Barthes.

Nevertheless, something out there in Japan, some “destabilizing feeling,” perhaps, presses in on Barthes, turning him inward. Thus it seems that in order to write *Empire of Signs* Barthes needs the specific instantiations of value in Japan and he needs this symbolic system to be somewhere faraway, allowing his own subjectivity to suffuse the text. The chronotope of global movement is thus used to enact the critical view and critical writing of a Western subjectivity in fantasy/self-reflexivity mode. As Naoki Sakai argues, “although the modernization process may be envisioned as a move toward the concretization of values at some abstract level, it is always imagined as a concrete transfer from one point to another on a world map.”⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 157.

For Barthes “Japan” is a place of decentered geography, non-subjectivity and elaborate surfaces without depth. He is not suggesting that there is actually something in the East that counters Western subjectivity (that subjectivity itself is Western) so much as that Western/subjectivity must always imagine a faraway as the possibility of social organization without structures of subjective depth. In fact, this is why “east” and “west” continue to have a distinction of philosophical, and not only geopolitical, significance. Although Barthes begins his text with a disavowal of referentiality, the images and proper names he uses easily cross over the boundary of Barthes’ textual world and become, for the reader, linked to some actual Japan. Within his discussion of architecture, layout of city streets, rituals of gift packaging, food design as signs which do not point to a transcendental meaning, content to exist as surface, the descriptions of faces, however, stand out in their resistance to Barthes’ devising. His descriptions of the epithetic fold of the eye and the flat plane of the face are shocking in their use of what is and is not racial language, in the way that “Japan” is and is not Japan.

Mura redescribes the “Japanese face” as “the play of *honne* and *tatemae*.” His use of ethnographic discourse in fact unsettles the residual ethnographic impulse of Barthes’ explicitly non-ethnographic discourse.

Honne and tatemae are two fundamental concepts of Japanese society. Tatemae is the face you show the world, the social self that gives the expected and appropriate answers. Honne is the private self, the feelings and thoughts you keep in abeyance and let out only on certain carefully chosen occasions. In the workings of Japanese society these two concepts can be more complicated than my simple definition indicates. For one thing, an American is likely to view this division as one between telling and not telling the truth. Our preference, at least in comparison to the Japanese, is for bluntness and honesty, for telling it the way it is. Speak your mind, America, says the Donahue commercial. In contrast, Japanese society runs more on tatemae than ours, and the concept does not involve the moral judgment we associate with the division between telling

or not telling the truth. Tatemae is neither lying nor selling out; it is doing what is appropriate and proper, what everyone expects. Without tatemae,⁷⁰ society would cease to function. Honne is not more true than tatemae; it is simply another way of approaching the world. (Mura 137)

For Mura, Tatemae is the language of the social in much the same way that the face itself is for Barthes. Whereas for Barthes Japan is a place where the conventionality of convention is exposed, without requiring an exposition, and glorified in itself, Mura suggests that there is a play of faces within Japanese society. Furthermore, the Barthesian play of East and West might in fact also function as simply a play of faces.

Mura's first view of Japan is composed of faces: "I was exhausted and exhilarated. Frightened. Astonished that all the faces at customs looked like mine" (Mura 11). On one of his first days in Tokyo: "I saw my face reflected in the glare of the window. Small tears all over my face. I blended in with the crowd" (Mura 22). Exhausted, exhilarated, frightened, astonished—a powerful chain of emotions leads up to a claim of identification with "all the faces at customs." The revelation makes him cry as he walks down a street in Tokyo and, turning to a reflective window, seeing his face covered in tears, declares that he "blended in with the crowd." Intense affects precede the moment of identity. The identification with "all" is not a confirmation of racial identity or racial wholeness but rather an interpellation into the social that for a moment occurs undisturbed by racial cofunctioning.

Abstract thought, conceptualization, and intellectualization are processes with complex links to processes of ethnicization and to ethnic subjectivity. Ethnic identity does not refer to something that resides in the body but the work of abstraction or intellectualization of affectivity into a personal framework. On a train ride with Susie, he

⁷⁰ Misspelling in original.

is irritated when she tries to talk to him, not because he is so engrossed in the book he is reading but because he is attempting to be Japanese by showing that he can sit there and stir no interest. He thinks that if only Susie (who is white) were not there, then he would be able to ride that subway without generating any spiky affective response, and this flatness would indicate something to him. The affective calm would mark a kind of belonging quite sharply in contrast to the typical ethnic experience in the U.S. He works through feedback because there is no inner propulsion. He works with himself from the outside, positioning himself, feeling, then gauging that feeling against the situation and watching for the reverberation. But Susie's presence makes it impossible. "To speak English on the train created an island, separated me from the people around us. I didn't want this to happen" (Mura 22). Mura doesn't want to talk to Susie, brushes her off. But excluding Susie is not possible. It is in the conversation afterwards when he argues with Susie about the train ride that Mura can express himself as the one who asks questions of identity and of the experience that tries to encompass the activity of identity-making. It is the affective situation from which emerges a particular subjective activity of identity-making, rather than an embodied identity responding to what it finds out there—on a train in Tokyo.

Whereas Barthes sees an image of the empty face, Mura sees in the play of faces not only the exposure of conventionality that foreigners see but also an actual political shift in global hegemony.

Still I sensed another meaning in the vast vocabulary that crowded the streets: Miyake and Kenzo, Grass Men's and Men's Melrose, Galamond and Linea Fresca, the solid, luminescent reds, purples, and greens of Jun Saito, the "bad guy" look of Koichi Nagata, or the robe-like layers of Masayuki Abe. All these were more than names and images to spray across the pages of a magazine, more than a simple evidence of the

Japanese cult of beauty. On arrival in Tokyo, Americans may suddenly feel that their countrymen are too casually dressed, are, in comparison, slob. The fashions in Tokyo revealed not just a change in couture consciousness but a change in political power, a shifting of the economic ground; the rise of one country, Japan, and the decline of the other, America.

I was pleased by this conclusion. And surprised. It was as if I were cheering for the other side.

As we walked through Shinjuku, Susie and I talked about all this. “Of course, you love it here.” She laughed. “And yes, it’s superficial. But that’s the reason I married you. You’re just a fashion bimbo.” (Mura 36)

For Mura, unlike Barthes, the becoming-global of this power of transparency and pleasure is directly linked to his becoming-local through the process of ethnicization that is a part of turning Japanese.

The strong emotions stirred by his initial perception of faces gradually settles into a new sense of inhabiting social space in his own body, made possible by the cofunctioning of Tokyo via American racial ideology and narratives of teleological self-becoming that culminate in an American identity, an identity that is privileged because it is perceived to be inherently multiple, hybrid and formed by crossing borders and going beyond frontiers. Affective openings thus lead to revised and enhanced identifications that are no less enclosing for being joyful. On the one hand, Mura’s capacities are increased by affective intensities and instabilities, by real joy, but on the other, he quickly returns to identity closures. He writes in his journal:

And I love it all, the sea of faces, the uncanny resemblances, the hints of foreign genes in the cheekbones or lips or kink of the hair, and yet the singular stamp of Japanese in each face, and I feel a wave of happiness coming over me, a calm and combusive joy, a stamping of the feet in my soul, a smile and a voice that says, You are unnoticeable here, you have melded in, you can stand not uttering a word and be one of this crowd, and in each job in this country, there is someone who looks like you, from the Emperor to the rock singers, from Nakasone to Kazuo Ono, the great Butoh dancer...—they look like you, and you are no longer budgeted by your color, parceled out into certain jobs, certain places of non-power,

certain ghettos of the aesthetically backward and unappealing, of the dull and downtrodden, of the inarticulate and the invisible.

Of course, this is all an illusion. I am American by birth and tongue and cultural manners, and I will never be a true nihonjin, I will always be outside, but even that seems okay—no one told me I should belong here; in fact, everyone said I wouldn't, that I would come to love America here, that I would realize how American I am, how deeply rock and roll and football and Whitman and Huck Finn reside within me.

Instead, the mirror has shifted. When I see hakujin on the train or in crowds or walking down the street, I think how out of place they look, how awkward, how ungainly and even ugly, how pasty their skin looks, how splotchy; how loud, how coarse, how unfashionable, how 'uncool,' how un-Japanese they are.... and I feel like saying, "The power does not reside in faces like your own, in language like your own...How does it feel to be incomprehensible, to face the incomprehensible, your own ignorance, your own displacement from the center of the world?..." (Mura 42-3)

Before he sees that "they look like you" he feels "a wave of happiness coming over me, a calm and combustive joy, a stamping of the feet in my soul." Then he shifts from "I" to "you." "You" refers to the white American "I's," in an address that goes something like this: Because I am now you, I can speak to you the former I's as the new you's; we are and are not in the same situation as subjects, similar but never simultaneous, crossing each other on divergent paths as you becomes I and I becomes you, always different in time. By engaging—in writing—in a series of shifts, moves, and position-takings, he draws into the closed world of identity discourse what were perhaps singularities of affect. There is a real closure, but there is also a contagion of affect that unsettles the rhetorical stances of autobiographical address.

In Mura's account we see how East and West are contained in subjective recoilings, self-reflexive twistings; they become for him mobile units that traverse the spacing of internal and external, of subjectivity and affectivity, allowing him to write a

narrative of the transvaluation of subjectivity.⁷¹ The trope of “an Asian American in Asia” does not allow for a division of reality/fantasy, nearby/faraway, here/there, but rather gets at the non-textual, *generic*, gap that Barthes uses to short-circuit the struggles (including geopolitical struggles) over where exactly reality is, precisely at the question of what constitutes personal writing.

Whereas Barthes uses writing, the literary mode, to generate the life of an autonomous Japan, Mura uses his own life to generate the autonomy of subjectivity in autobiographical writing. Barthes offers the autonomy of the literary or textual from his own life, the autobiographical as context; Mura the autonomy of the subjective mode, autobiographical speech, from the context of ethnography.

It is not that Mura frames his ethnographic descriptions with reflective, self-conscious comparative thought processes such that the object Japan only appears through an explicitly exposed personal filter. It is rather that these intellectualizations are themselves the object of literary treatment. Mura engages with the question of Barthes’ Japan, in a sense, in the context of an embodied conversation between himself and a Gisela, a German woman who speaks Japanese much better than Mura, staged as an abortive seduction scene:

I poured Gisela tea, started to discuss the Japanese. “But where does the energy that they don’t spend in abstract analysis go?”

⁷¹ If we were to accept that there is no outside, no faraway, that freedom does not lie in crossing borders or in making choices, but only in engagement, then we might leave the politics of identity and engage in compositions of living that are driven by political commitments which can never appear as political. The register of the political is not the space of freedom. Politics cannot appear in the political. But what matters is that the living happens, a deeply political living. From a certain standpoint, from a certain over-investment, there will appear to be a loss of the political, a lack. When politics moves directly into ontology, there is no way that it can continue to appear in ways that for us are political (ideological, tropological—the political as a form, a dynamics, of resistance, contrast, of given differences). The process of differentiation, on the other hand, the processes of compositional living, can never really appear political because they are determined not by but into categories. Freedom delivers fixed forms, choices are freely made.

“Or does abstract analysis take place in the culture in a way we don’t recognize?”

We shared the intimacy of foreigners, the power to stand above the culture and observe, criticize. The sense of minds clicking into each other, the give and recognition of intelligence. A laugh of delight.

Momentarily she let down her shield. “There was this time when I was six, I remember the day...” (Mura 162)

Lacking contextual cofunctioning, abstract analysis as Gisela and Mura understand it becomes a type of human activity reduced to, or clarified into, simple energy. They experience this energy as intimacy, the pleasurable feeling of “minds clicking into each other,” delight. The seduction doubly fails. Gisela remarks coldly that she has no interest in a “petite affaire.” Mura himself realizes that the pleasures of abstraction he sought in Gisela were closed circuits of pleasure, a “petite affaire,” and the openings he seeks lie elsewhere. Abstractions of Japan as a *faraway* inevitably return him to the immigrant narrative of global closure.

Rather than *The American Poetry Review*, or the latest minimalist fiction, I read *The Tale of Genji*, *The Tales of Heike*, *the Tales of Ise*, the theories of Zeami, who weaves an aesthetic around hana (flower) in a discourse that seems bafflingly vague, self-contained, intuitive, and circuitous, that lacks the specificity, directness, or linear logic of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. I study poems of Buddhist doctrine, Noh plays about Gods, feudal *daimyos* (lords), and princesses, stories of lovers in tiny inns, temple monks, fishermen, merchant daughters in Osaka. All of them say the form is empty, the self decentered, the substance you learned in the West is absent here.

As I fall asleep, I think of sleeping in a bed two feet above the ground. The idea seems awkward, surreal. I think of my grandfather, his emigration. Of a circle closing. When will I return to the place he was born? (Mura 181)

Mura, the mobile self, circles the site of decentering, fascinated by those, like Gisela, like Barthes, who perform decentered subjectivity as a subject position, as a subjective language, as a seduction that merely circles and circles, decentered but nevertheless easily drawing others into elliptical orbit—turn, return, emigrate, immigrate.

Openings come from a different quarter. Mura, who has never danced before, decides to learn Butoh. Dancing Butoh is at first a strategy for Mura to become Japanese; he thinks that he might be able to surprise in his body something that eludes him mentally.⁷²

I suddenly realized that with my stumbling Japanese, perhaps the only way to break the barrier of language was to enter the culture through my body, through sight.

Working with the positions of the body—squatting, prone—through Butoh gives Mura a bodily context for investigating self-consciousness, reflexivity.

I start with a squatting position, what seems the least affected to me. I put my hands on the floor in front of me and begin to lower myself into a crawling and then a prone position, all the while trying to keep thoughts about appearing ridiculous out of my mind, trying not to see the whole situation as an American, or someone unfamiliar with Butoh, might.
(Mura 64)

Practicing Butoh is for Mura a practice of not engaging thinking. Counter to the previously discussed instances of affectivity drawn into new thought, new identification, here he shows us the opening to affectivity at moments when thinking stops.

Somehow I sense he wants me to stop conceptualizing, to stop thinking how ridiculously or awkwardly or poorly I might be dancing, to forget what I am trying to represent with the dance, what I am trying to symbolize or imitate.

And, at certain moments, I do stop thinking. A brief unnameable sadness seems to well up within me, and yet is offset by a rising joy. I start walking toward the screen door, where I see my grandfather and grandmother. I present them with the flower, a greeting bearing some part of me that has wandered through the world, unwhole, lost, bewildered, alien, fading in and out of the sense of playacting, of pleasing the sensei. I get a glimpse of what my self-consciousness misses. (Mura 65)

⁷² Butoh is a modern Japanese avant-garde performance art form that emerged through a confluence of transnational influences, including not only indigenous tribal forms from within Japan (though not necessarily “Japanese” per se), but also German expressionism, surrealism and dada, and writers such as Artaud, Genet, and de Sade. Butoh is also a hybrid form that incorporates theater, dance, mime, as well as established Japanese art forms such as Noh and Kabuki and non-Japanese dance such as flamenco. Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno are considered to be the originators of Butoh in the 1960’s.

His relationship with Ono through the dance lesson gives him a reference point for leaving behind referentiality. He is already walking when he sees his grandparents, and here he offers them a flower, a greeting that resists the ethnographic impulse to narrate his relationship to his grandparents through the construction of closed migration circuits.

As he talks, I watch the gentleness in Ono's hands, their strength, the repetition of certain words emphasized with repeated shakes—not the emphatic insistence of didacticism, but the repetition of dance, the retrieval of motion from randomness into expression, the cadence of music and body coming together. (Mura 62)

Watching Ono teach dance through words and gesture, Mura finds a point of connection between rhetorical tropology and gestural discourse. This is not a connection forged in liminality, through the in-between, for here tropology and gesture are coeval, cofunctioning. Dance is for Mura an articulation of the tropological and gestural coming together, like the “cadence of music and body coming together.” The dance thus counters the abstractions of ethnic identity. “I have little relation to my body. I am a writer, an intellectual. An abstractor, a looker. One who does not let go” (Mura 71). Here, at this nexus of the subjective and affective the writing offers up its own dance:

Thinking is too noisy. I become three bright stones. Twisted. Fruitfall. My body knots itself. My eyes must be open, gazing at nothing. Bringing everything in. Eyes open, says Ono-san, eyes open. My arm is shaking in front of me, sweeping across slowly, tensed, fighting itself. The fingers are bent, as if scorched, as if stiffened by a terrible pestilence. I feel myself twisting, a slow heat of pain. Rain leeching from the sky. The vast, open woof and filament, the sea escaped, a lightning dwarf. (Mura 71)

The “I” becomes three bright stones. The turning body is knotting itself. Eyes are open but without objects. An “I” without an object. Eyes open, “I’s” open. A passing through the nuclear rain. I, body, eyes, arm, fingers each move independently, uncontained by a unifying subjectivity—a self which believes it alone is dancing. The body parts move to

their own autonomous rhythms, and in their non-subjective un-unified coming together they form a distribution of embodied sensation and perception that allows for the arising of catastrophe. Other bodies emerge, the hibakusha, and yet other bodies, horses of *Guernica*.

The head bent, the mouth open, the teeth flared. The primordial refusal and screech of the horses of *Guernica*, the eyes filled with the sibylline abyss, the spine twisted back, hoof and drum, futile, stranded, faltering gallops of the mouth, bitter, open in the rain, rooted in terror to the sky, what is falling, the jaws that ache, jaws that shake and tremble with pain, that say no breath, the teeth flared, sweat sliding into froth, neck twisting, limbs leaping, and still the I, constant, remorseful, constantly critical, constantly saying, This is me, this is ridiculous, suddenly conscious: the eye of the teacher, the body beside me, the ruptured night, the crawling that comes, fixing suddenly; the eyes go upward, to the ceiling, expanding, exploding toward the rain; the hoof, the hand, claws the air. I am writhing in my sweat, quaking on the floor, each of my muscles tense, fighting against itself. *Chotto, chotto*. Ono-san stops us. (Mura 71)

Then a return to the subject, registering the co-presence of the rising of singular affect, the singularity of the dance, and “still the I.” The referent of an individual’s body dancing and a writer’s body which holds the memory of having observed that dance do not come close to exhausting the formal movement, the rhythmic quality of the language dancing, as it were. This is a writing of the hand that registers catastrophe.⁷³ This writing gives us the separation of subject and affect, the division of novel and autobiographical, the sign of imperial history and the empire of signs. In his discussion of Francis Bacon, Deleuze suggests that his painting comes from the hand, not the eye. Sensation overtakes the visual regime. The eye/I which orders and makes coherent the painting has been overtaken by the hand which in its direct encoding of sensation to the movement of paint swirling on the canvas, registers the catastrophe, multiple catastrophic events, that have disrupted the regime of the subject.

⁷³ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*.

I have moved for a time in the dance, have lost questions, entered my body.

Where did the dance come from?

It came from my mind's eye. It was much too constrained. From inside the muscles, the sunburst of bones. Another language. Not my own. (Mura 72)

“I” moved in the dance, lost its questions, and entered the body. In the intensified, tightly reduced context of the cofunctioning of “I” and “body” we are given the dance, an emergence of affect unclaimed by the subject: “Not my own.” The “mind’s eye” is not “my own” I. It is as this in-between of self questioning, between-eyes, that the dance emerges. We might ask with Yeats, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?”⁷⁴ This is a question that I’ve offered earlier as the ethnographic impulse, but there is more to be said. Yeats’ poem begins with the subject walking in a school, the hallways of formal indoctrination into grammar: “I walk though the long schoolroom questioning.” The subject’s questioning ends with the actual posing of a question of “we.” How is it that we can know the difference between subject and object? How is it that only as “we” can we pose this question?

Further into his series of dance classes, we see Mura perform another dance in a more formal setting. This dance is composed entirely of a series of turns that turn into other turns. His dance emerges through the formalism of Butoh gestures, uncontained by narrative lines.

For my solo, I slipped on a kimono backward and started from a crouch, my body balled tight as a fist, a knot slowly loosening. Moving through images in my mind, as Ono had instructed, I saw a paper uncrumpling, a larva emerging from the sac of mucus which has kept it alive. Unraveling my limbs, I rose on my haunches. Because the back of the kimono was covering the front of my body, I could lift the thick padded silk off the floor like a giant set of wings, stretching upward, like a sail going up, a kite taking off. My hands were above my head, my legs

⁷⁴ W. B. Yeats, “Among School Children.”

were unbending, my arms reached to the ceiling. I arched on my toes, higher and higher, my body slowly pulling out its bulk, becoming thinner.

As I was bending backward, I felt Ono behind me, slowly stroking the air above me with a paper flower, a withered white daisy; with his head cocked to one side, he looked at me sadly, gently, his face descending. I fell back toward him, brushed his arm. Ono stepped aside. And then I was whirling in circles over and over, wider and wider, then tighter, swifter, until I collapsed, falling flat on my back, writhing. (Mura 131)

He begins with a costume that is not the theatrical cross-dressing of Ono but not completely straight either—a back-to-front turn in orientation of the eye, face, front, back—the back of the kimono covering the front of his body. He isn't just wearing the kimono but being covered by it. Then he turns again to assume his starting position—a crouch, a fist, a knot—that begins to be undone or reversed as the dance begins—"I saw a paper uncrumpling." The reverse turn or re-turn then becomes a transformation—"a larva emerging from the sac of mucus." Then the turning body rises and expands—a lift, stretching of wings, filling of sails, a kite taking off; extends further—"higher and higher"—and approaches the planar dimension—"pulling out its bulk, becoming thinner."

A pause in the writing, a paragraph break, then a return: "As I was bending backward," followed by a sensation: "I felt Ono behind me." As Mura bends backward, covered in front by the back of the kimono, Ono approaches from behind Mura's lowering head and strokes the air above him with a paper flower, "a withered white daisy." Together they cascade downward: Mura looks up at Ono looking down at him, Ono's "face descending," then Mura falling back toward Ono, "brushing his arm." Ono steps aside, and Mura's backward fall spins out into circular motion, "whirling in circles over and over, wider and wider," until "I" collapses. The contact zone of liminality here

becomes the space of homoerotic contact. Mura falls on his back and ends the dance writhing. Is Mura's dance ending in free fall of desire, sensation? But in the next moment the writing picks up again. The writing then proceeds without him for an in-between moment, or more precisely emerges between-moments from the collapse and writhing to the return of "I."

From the speakers, there was the sound of rain, a train whistle rising, fading in the night. Blackness. The sound of rain.
I realized that for the past five minutes I had been unaware of Gisela's presence, unaware of her watching. (Mura 131)

The collapse of "I" is followed by singularities: the sound of rain, a train whistle rising, a train whistle fading. Then the writing just gives us "Blackness"—is this the dark of the night outside, the silence in the room, loss of consciousness—the "I" blacking out—or just a clearing of the screen, a split-second closing the reader's eyes as it passes across the letters B-l-a-c-k-n-e-s-s?

Blackness here is space, a gap in racial identification and the possibility of affective reordering. The gap appears after the whirling expansion. The turn of subjectivity, the subjective seeking itself, the ethnic search for itself, reflexivity, when set into motion spins out into a gap. The gap is a gap in turning, a gap in subjectivity, it is the space of desire, affectivity. Dancing Butoh in Japan provides Mura with a form for experimenting with subjective turns—attraction, repulsion, will, intention—that are essential to his understanding of ethnicity qua American minority. The moralism of ethnic identity in the U.S. is not completely removed for Mura but the dance provides a gap in his usual habitual patterns of moral, ethnic valuation—the ethnic habitus. The gap is a moment of uncertainty and indetermination of ethnic identification and valuation and simultaneously full of, or alive with, affectivity. If there has to be some sort of response

(turn) from the affective field in order for the subject to emerge, then this is a situation in which that self-production is troubled. What happens at that between-moment? There is the flashing of a life as the self momentarily fails to appear. *A paper, a larva, a withered white daisy, a train whistle.*

Then a paragraph break and return of “I.” “I” realizes that an interval of “five minutes” has passed and that in that time “I had been unaware of Gisela’s presence, unaware of her watching.” The homoeroticism of Mura and Ono’s coming together, lifting and descending, falling backward and forward toward each other, generates an affective re-orientation. During the dance, moving with Ono’s body, he had not been aware of Gisela, the presence and gaze of a sexually attractive white woman, a category which had mediated Mura’s sexual self-identifications from a young age.⁷⁵ Affective between-moments are always charged with potentialities of re-sexualizations, which in the dance was allowed to come to the fore of sensation and perception through the homoerotic touch.

Ono’s depictions of the grande dame, of the aging flamenco dancer, seemed a liberating pathway out of the rigid sexual images I’d grown up with in America, images which imprinted themselves on my consciousness, while, at the same time, they excluded me. In the presence of Ono, the feminine traits I felt in my features, in my sensibility, seemed less odd, seemed something I shared with the other members of the class. This identity was more fluid, less neatly proscribed. (Mura 110)

Ono’s performances are “depictions,” new tropes of sexual identity, but the “liberating pathway” occurs through the actual dance that Mura and Ono enact together. Mura’s solo dances allowed for the arising of *a life*, but the dance duet that came together unexpectedly in what had also begun as a solo dance allowed for the arising of an

⁷⁵ See his discussion of finding pornography in his father’s closet and the shock of imagining his father looking at white women. David Mura, *Where the Body Meets Memory*. Also, *A Male Grief: Notes on Pornography and Addiction*.

indefinite social bond—indefinite socially because determined by immanence, by desire without object, which emerged in the experimental context of a Japanese American dancing Butoh with Ono.⁷⁶

In response to Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*, Mura questions his own experience of self-recognition of his "sexual self" in encounters with Japanese "transsexual" or "homosexual" representations and performances:

Early on in Mishima's semiautobiographical novel, *Confessions of a Mask*, even before the protagonist reaches puberty and discovers his homosexual impulses, he speaks of a fascination with becoming someone other than himself and associates this impulse with tragedy and death. One day, after pulling out his mother's clothes, he dresses up as Tenkatsu, the geisha magician. Running about the house crying, "I'm Tenkatsu!" he suddenly encounters his mother, whose look of astonishment and horror causes him to lower his eyes and start to cry. In a fit of shame, he understands for the first time the motif of "remorse as prelude to sin" that is to characterize his life.

When I first read this scene, I felt the force of self-recognition. But how could this be? I had never had transsexual urges, nor was I homosexual. My parents were raised as Buddhist, then became Christian, but there was hardly a strong air of sexuality as sin in our Episcopalian household. Or was there? The isolation that Mishima speaks about followed me for years. And I often felt that it was tied to my sense of being Japanese, of looking different, less masterful, less masculine; my sexual self seemed charged with hints of inferiority and found it hard to believe in the reciprocation of desire.

Somehow this self had been drawn toward Ono. Why?

It has been argued that the white powder of Japanese makeup turns the face to a blank sheet, a space of writing. The white powder isn't meant to make a man resemble a woman; instead, it is an emptiness where, with black ink, the signs of womanhood are written. The makeup is a language, not a pictorial representation. This helps explain why an aging patriarch of a famous acting family, a married man with several children, can don each night the white-face of a geisha in Kabuki or the woman's mask in Noh with an impunity and lack of parody impossible to conceive in the West. (Mura 68)

Mura feels "the force of self-recognition," then tries to investigate that force. He

⁷⁶ Mura is most likely referring to Ono Kazuo, who was influenced by a flamenco dancer named La Argentina.

considers that he has “never had transsexual urges” nor “was” he “homosexual.” The idea of having an urge that is transsexual or a being that is homosexual does not explain the “force of self-recognition.” He therefore brings together the transsexual urge, homosexual being and a “sense of being Japanese.”⁷⁷ The scene which draws forth Mura’s self-recognition is described as a child’s “fascination for becoming someone other than himself.” And it is in the memory of his childhood that he distinguishes “my sexual self” from the proper subject “I” and explains that it was “drawn toward Ono.”

Mura considers the technique of applying white powder on the face in theater as a way to erase the face for a “space of writing” rather than as something which enacts a gender change from male to female. The blank space of writing that Barthes had been able to empty out through a geographical fantasy of a faraway, is here located on the gendered and racialized face. The Japanese face that for Barthes was resistant to signification is “a space of writing” precisely because race and gender are produced through technologies of self-inscription.

Mura connects himself with Ono and the writer Yukio Mishima at the point of a specifically “non-Western investigation of sexuality.”

[Ono and Mishima] represent a complicated non-Western investigation of sexuality. Mishima, the contemporary proponent of the samurai spirit, was a homosexual who lived his public life as a married man with two children. Ono, the portrayer and near-parodist of aging women, is a retired gym teacher who had been married for decades, yet seems to possess the sexual ambiguity one associates with a figure like Tiresias, an ambiguity brought on by wisdom, the body’s withering and the presence of death.

Before I came to Japan, the one Japanese author I felt a strong connection to was Mishima. I had written poems, even a play about him. What I identified with was the sense of transgression in his writing, a view

⁷⁷ There is a large body of critical work which addresses the mechanisms for assuring national identification through intersections of race with gender and sexuality. In particular, see David Eng, *Racial Castration*, David Leiwei Li, *Imagining the Nation*, Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*. Also, see Jaspir Puar for a critique of intersectionality through the notion of a queer assemblage.

of sexuality allied with rage, abasement, and self-loathing, and therefore, with a sense of liberation, a vertigo that comes with letting go all ties to what seems socially sanctioned. (Mura 67-8).

What is it that makes Ono's and Mishima's investigations non-Western, other than the fact of their not residing in the West? This question seems mainly to have to do with what is socially permitted the artist under the banner of hetero-normative social life. Mura connects Ono's sexual ambiguity, a state of permanent ontological uncertainty perhaps, with Mishima's transgression. The liberatory potential of what Mura sees in Ono's and Mishima's performances produces in Mura a feeling of vertigo, an inability to stabilize vertical depth perception and one's position on that scale, the uncontrollable shifting of high and low, above and below, far and near. Mura's collapse at the end of his dance with Ono was a manifestation of this type of vertigo. The letting go is a letting go of abstraction, a letting go into the desiring body, "letting go all ties to what seems socially sanctioned."

Mura re-creates a vertiginous structure in the temporal schema of *Turning Japanese*, by placing at the beginning of the text an account of the end of his journey which is the beginning of his return to the U.S. It is as a recent returnee that we first encounter him. At the end, he is somewhere three years later, presumably in 1988, reflecting again on his trip to Japan, which he says makes him think less of Japan than a moment in the Philippines where he encountered a Japanese tourist and conversed in "Japlish."

The book opens in the week after his return from Japan. Re-entry into the U.S. and into Asian America proves to be the locus of paralysis, an intense becoming-passive. The scene of return takes place in high heat, 95 degrees at one point, in someone else's

empty house. Mura finds himself collapsing several times a day, too weak to move easily from room to room or even to remain standing. He says that it is not just the heat which causes his weakness but rather a condition which he experiences as a loss of his body's substantiality: muscles like jelly, blood flow to the brain slowed, and thoughts turned into the haze of unconsciousness (Mura 6).

For more than a week after I came back from Japan, I would find myself collapsing several times a day. The heat had lingered into September, and the house of our friend Kathleen wasn't air-conditioned. But this weakness wasn't due to the heat. It was as if the muscles inside my limbs were turning to jelly, as if soporific drugs were slowing the blood flow to my brain to a trickle, my thoughts to the haze of unconsciousness. I'd try to make it to the bedroom. The bedspread and walls were white, a Vermeer reproduction hung on the wall, the curtains were lace. And the room seemed foreign and familiar, like a tomb, like the women you sleep with in dreams. The bed oddly far away, like a mirage. (Mura 6)

Mura stays in the house, restless, unable to focus for long on a single object or activity. His roving mind goes over his collection of objects from Japan but they are unable to fill out the space of his present. His emotional sensibility is overly heightened and cannot engage with his immediate surroundings—the house, the shopping mall, the collection of Japanese things transported to the U.S. This is not just jet lag, he tells us, it is a different form of vertigo that comes from “a sense of hovering above the earth, from the very unreality of the country I had thought was my home” (Mura 6). Jet lag might be thought of as a disruption in the synchronization of individual body and world, where perception no longer establishes orientation and instead proves disorienting. Perception is immediate to the present, but the body carries rhythms that repeat, seemingly without regard for new perceptual information. We generally think of the body, in these repetitions, as lagging behind conscious perception which can only see what is immediately available and be

with that. Mura's vertigo is not of a feeling that he cannot land into his body, but rather that it is the body which cannot land onto a world. His vertigo comes "from the very unreality of the country I had thought was my home." The unreality is in the world of the U.S., not in his own mind or in the effect of mind-body disjunction caused by jet lag.

Susie's voice breaks the haze of vertigo with emphatic clarity. "I know," said Susie, "It was hard for me too when I got back. But it's not that bad now. You'll get over it" (Mura 7). The jarring "I know" then elicits a quick response which ends this brief chapter. "The thing was, I did not want to get over it. This disequilibrium was like a cold you caught from a brief affair, the only proof of your passion" (Mura 7). Quickly he asserts a difference between himself and Susie in their wishing or not wishing to get over Japan. Whatever Japan was for Mura, he could not bring it back with him, and leaving it, he could not bring himself back without experiencing an excessive flooding of affect which makes it difficult for him to move or feel properly.

There is no question of idealizing his experimentations with opening to affectivity that were staged in Japan. They cannot resist the closing of the body that happens the minute he lands in the U.S. We are reminded that memoirs are deployed as powerful tools in the institutionalization of race and ethnicity such that they paralyze anyone unfortunate enough to be identified racially and ethnically. Identity politics is a tool for creating ethnic populations; resistance is a way of creating populations. What Mura seems to suggest in the ending that comes at the beginning is that we need to find a way to enact the turn in the context of habituation and static location. In other words, we need strategies of non-resistance, of *not* turning and *not* traveling which can politicize subjectivity in its contemporary home.

It makes sense then that the peak experience of uncertainty and affective unsettlement involved Mura's frustrated attempts to participate in a political demonstration in Japan and in the complete failure of his attempt to travel to South Korea with a leftist group seeking international solidarity (Mura 258). The political protest becomes for Mura the most disturbing type of masquerade, because one can never join a political demonstration as a mere tourist. The affective forms must be completely inhabited and the erasure of individual subjectivity can never occur at the site of the personal. Mura dons a "hood, golf hat, mask, and sunglasses" in preparation for the political protest. He thinks, "I have no face," and initially this absence of face (suspension of the play of faces?) seems like it might be the path toward new collectives. However, the writing of the protest is strikingly absent of "we's." It is the "I" which dominates.

Becoming part of the tribe of invisible radicals appealed to me. It was a totally new way of rejecting my American background. And I could do this without consequences. I was playacting, donning a role I could doff as easily as taking off the mask and cap, the sunglasses and hooded windbreaker. (Mura 208)

There is no "we," only an "I" that is "playacting, donning a role." His engagement with the political protest is merely individual, and therefore is affectively empty, closed. "Everything has been orchestrated, impeccably planned" (Mura 212). The erasure of the face that Mura had experienced (which is not exactly what other demonstrators experienced, presumably) serves only to isolate him rather than to merge him with the group. This isolation gives rise to a pricking of conscience, a feeling of acting in bad faith, subjection. "As I chant through the gauze mask, not quite knowing what I am saying, I feel somewhat ridiculous, as if engaging in an act of bad faith" (Mura 213).

He begins to crave greater engagement with the “I” in what is an experience only accessible through the “we.” Mura’s total exclusion from that “we” is strikingly clear. Instead of any affective intensity there are only images of other people’s active engagement, signs of their distress or exhilaration.

Matsuo pokes me. A pickup truck rumbles past; there are wounded protestors in the back, slumped over each other, holding their arms or faces, marred by gashes. Blood drips down their cheeks, dries on their arms. (Mura 213)

Blocked from participation and trapped in an intensifying isolation, Mura begins to crave entertainment—a spectacle of something happening to objects out there.

I am hungry, tired, bored. Despite my initial nervousness about my own safety, I want to see something happen. (Mura 213)

Then finally a “we,” anticipation of action, the protest actually beginning. “But no,” the protest is over.

We march through dusk into night. Suddenly I see lights ahead. We’re finally at the airport, we’re going to make our showing, to confront the riot police. My body tenses. My eyes search the darkness ahead.

But no, a hundred yards down the road our group stops before a large one-story wooden warehouse. The protest, says Matsuo, is over.

I feel like Peggy Lee—Is that all there is? And then: Oh shit, we’re going to have to walk back to the vans. And then: I can’t wait till I get home and eat, I can’t wait to take a bath.

So much for my revolutionary fervor. (Mura 213-4)

The collective experience that he was unable to experience bodily becomes visible in the images on television.

And there on the screen is the demonstration I’ve missed.... Each image flashes across the screen with an immediacy, a clarity that the whole day has seemed to lack. Where did all this happen? How, why, did I miss it? (Mura 214)

“I” can only “miss” the experience of collectivity.

At the end of *Turning Japanese*, when “I” tries to think back to that year, turns back, what appears is the Philippines. He is alone here too, riding with a driver and his friend who “jabber in Ilacano.”

When I think back to that year in Japan, what comes to mind isn't the nights drinking with friends in tiny bars in Tokyo, or the Noh performances, or my dance lessons in Butoh, or even going back to my grandfather's hometown. What comes to mind is the image from my trip to the Philippines, of my riding a jeepney in the mountainous region of northern Luzon...I'm riding along with the driver and his friend. As they jabber in Ilacano, wind and rain slash through the sides of the jeepney. (Mura 362)

Then a man, another tourist, on the side of the road flags down the jeepney. “The man in the road leaned into the jeepney, revealing a Japanese face: ‘*Biupointo?*’ he asked” (Mura 363).

I burst out laughing, recognizing the tones of Japlish, English words pronounced according to the rules of Japanese pronunciation (*v* becomes *b*; no consonants can stand without a vowel attached). Immediately the Japanese man and I began talking in Japanese, asking where each other was from, how long we'd been in the Philippines, and a circle formed between us, as there had been a circle between the driver and his friend. I was now grouped with the Japanese man, a compatriot of a sort. It was probably as close as I came that year to being Japanese. (Mura 363)

Two circles form around Ilacano and Japlish/Japanese. One might be tempted to see in the circle between the driver and his friend, two Filipinos speaking Ilacano, a naturalized ethno-linguistic community, but this tendency is disrupted by the second circle between Mura and the Japanese tourist speaking a mix of Japlish and half-fluent half-broken Japanese. Japlish and the uneven Japanese are ahistorical in-between languages that do

not even bear the appearance of natural or whole language.⁷⁸ This return to identification of a certain sort is then what brokers Mura's return to the U.S.

Being in the Philippines and meeting a Japanese there, someone who can exist for him firstly and only as "a Japanese tourist" whom he talks to in Japanese, provides him with the experience of an isolated affect, standing out in relief from the background. This separation of foreground from background is the ethnic feeling he had learned in the U.S. The experimental staging of that ethnic affect in the context of living in Japan had served to rend apart that ethnic affect onto a broader plane of affectivity. In the Philippines the field of affectivity is abruptly closed, first by exclusion/isolation and second by identification. In the closing of these two circles, we can see the foreclosing of other potentials for inter-Asian collectivities. It is on this failure of articulating actual inter-Asian histories that the imagined success of Asian American collectivity is founded.

The Philippines brings to the foreground the history of Japanese imperialism in East and Southeast Asia. The rise of Japanese economic power in the 1980's, which propels new valuations of ethnicity for Mura and underwrites his trip to Japan, is shown to be layered on the ruins of Japanese imperialism. There is no question of a faraway from the imperial capture of powers of subjectivation. Mura's text shows that the "Asian American in Asia" challenges the articulation of globalization by bringing together Japan, South Korea and the Philippines without the possibility of ever speaking in the "we."

In the last pages of *Turning Japanese*, Mura says that "I came back with a sense of Asia as a continent, of which Japan was just one part..." (Mura 370). Yet, that "one part" is an unequal dominant part. He considers the expansion of Japanese economic

⁷⁸ See Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," for a discussion of how acquisition of a second language by immigrants results in a too-quick identification with a culture in which one's actual position, economic, social and political, is actually entirely tenuous.

power in the intervening three years: “When I first came to Japan, the yen was 248 to the dollar; when I left, it was 155; now it is 127” (Mura 368). Mura ends his book with a reflection on the death of Emperor Hirohito and the difference in what Hirohito’s son represents. “Hirohito’s son, the Japan of the eighties and nineties, the product of that growth, are something else” (Mura 372).

The very last paragraphs of *Turning Japanese* offer us two images—one of a man mourning the dying Emperor Hirohito and the other of his not-yet-born daughter.

... a photo of an old man, in tears, on his knees, rising from a bow, getting set to bow again. He is dressed in a suit, a V-necked sweater, a shirt without a tie. He looks vaguely like my grandfather in the pictures, the same fine silver hair, the long, sad face, not quite stern, but more resigned. Small age spots are noticeable on his cheeks. His hands are thrust halfway out in front of him. The man is praying for and mourning the Emperor Hirohito, who, as I write this, is slowly dying. Hirohito’s death will bring the end of the Showa era and is for this man and for all of Japan a symbol of enormous complexity, enormous change. What we see on the man’s face is an image of Japan we will not see again. (Mura 372)

The loss of his grandfather, not only in his death but in the irretrievability of any serious knowledge of his life, is connected to the loss of Emperor Hirohito and the imperial face of Japan.

Mura’s daughter, parts Japanese, Norwegian, and Hungarian Jew, will grow up to add another fold of complexity to the project of articulating Asian America.

In the in-between of death and life, old Hirohito and young Mura, we are left with an opening to the indefinite life of an indefinite collective of an indefinite global Asia.

FOURTH TURN: *Returning Ethnic*

In order to understand Japanese globalization we must consider Japan’s economic development in the context of other East and South East Asian globalizations. Given

Japan's imperial history in the region, the choices made by various regimes and administrations to emphasize in different degrees a stance toward that postcoloniality which is connected to Japan rather than the West is always a choice determined by the forms of globalization taking shape in that place at that time. I will now turn to a discussion of Japan in connection with mainland China as it appears in Zhang Yimou's *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles* (2005).

In Zhang's film, it is a young educated urban Japanese man who appears in the role of ethnographer of "Oriental" culture, frequently traveling to the Yunnan Province in distant Western China in order to study and film (on video) the performances of operas traditional to that area. Already we see that the anthropological, Orientalist East-West relationship is subverted and complicated by the representation of China and Japan in the place of East and West. To put a further twist on this set-up, in the film, it is the father, a simple fisherman, who takes the son's place as accidental ethnographer and travels to China. The obvious class difference between father and son complicate our perception of who is ethnographer and who the ethnicized "native." The father has no more, and possibly less, familiarity with contemporary technology than the locals of the Yunnan province. He has a lot of yen to throw around but at times it seems that he is more impressed by how much money (and loss of emotional connection) it represents than those who receive it (and ultimately, out of pity, refuse to accept it).

I will now attempt to read this narrative I've constructed through the visual language of the film: A man attempts to visit his estranged son in the hospital only to be turned away at the door: "Why would I want to see him? He's not my father." Like Mr. Takata, we too are refused a look at Ken-ichi's face for the duration of the film. The

son's wife Rie gives Mr. Takata a video made by Ken-ichi in order to enable the father to learn more about his son. The video is about mask operas performed in the Yunnan province in China. The video begins by introducing Ken-ichi as an expert in Oriental folk song and dance. In the video we see Li Jiamin, a performer, being interviewed by Ken-ichi (present merely as a spectral voice). Li boasts that the opera "Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles" is the finest example of mask opera and he the best performer of it. We hear Ken-ichi promise to return to the Yunnan province to film Li performing that opera. The video is interrupted by a phone call. Rie has just heard the doctor's diagnosis of terminal cancer for Ken-ichi. Mr. Takata immediately leaves for China.

Takata is a fisherman whom we see in a small coastal town dominated by snow covered mountains. Details suggest that he is not completely confident about using a video player and that he lacks the cultural capital of his son the expert on Oriental folk culture, the aspect of Japan that can take an ethnographic interest in its Oriental others, a category that had been constructed in its imperial ideology of the previous century. Takata is a reminder of the gaps and fall backs in what appear as seamless total Japanese modernization: images of Rie around the hospital are immaculate surfaces of glass, chrome and receding lines. But he is also a mediating figure whose marginality in postmodern Japan permits him to function in China with a certain unpredictability.

On his first day in the Yunnan Province, working with the help of an interpreter, Takata finds his way to the right place but learns that the performer he seeks is unavailable for performance because he has been imprisoned for a fight he started over his illegitimate son. Liang tries to convince Takata to film the mask opera using a

different performer. Liang says to Jasmine, the interpreter, “with the mask on even the natives can’t hear the difference so how can a Japanese person?”

In the Yunnan Province, Takata becomes the one who wields the camera. He stages two video installations, as it were, during his stay there. The first one is used to appeal to the Justice Bureau director, Li, who can decide whether or not Takata should be allowed to go into the prison where Jiamin is being held and film his performance of the mask opera there. Takata fails to convince the director during a personal interview, where Takata is not only laconic but unable to communicate at all due to the lack of linguistic ability of Li. The director says that foreigners are not allowed, etc. Takata subsequently shoots a video of himself, focused on the face, giving an affective rendition of his own personal tale of father and son, estrangement and illness. At the end of his story, he holds up two red “thank you banners” in sequence over his face, raising and lowering it by inches to hide or reveal his face and the pain visible there. When the face is hidden, the fluttering and trembling of the red fabric is even more affecting. The way that this video is presented to the director is in tandem with Liang, Takata’s impromptu interpreter, who provides a somewhat synchronized translation of Takata’s story and performs the same gestures of raising the red banners. The video and performance by Liang work and Takata is given permission to film in the prison.

Perhaps it is something of the fisherman in Takata that gives him an air that the Chinese around him seem to trust, but it is only by assuming the elite position of his son Ken-ichi that he is able to deploy the technology at his disposal (here in the figure of the video camera) that he can project that personal identity in a way that will help him achieve his own purposes. At the prison, the prison director is friendly and officious, just

giving one gentle reminder that Takata is expected to film something that will help to promote Chinese culture internationally and not to betray this kindly bestowed favor on a foreigner by criticizing the prison conditions. The director tells Takata this without really trying to test him or even solicit an agreement. He has already been entrusted to keep this faith.

When Jiamin is brought before Takata's video camera, carefully installed on a tripod, to perform the mask opera, he fails to sing. Confused they attempt to restart the performance only to encounter Jiamin's silence again. Liang lifts the mask off Jiamin's face to reveal a face dripping thick trails of tears down his face and viscous, visible streams of mucous descending from his nose. The mask of affect lying beneath the physical mask of the costume is the second barrier that Takata must break through in order to get the performance he wants to film. Jiamin says that he is so overcome with longing to see his son that he cannot sing. The prison director suggests waiting a few days for Jiamin to get over his excessive feelings. However, Takata makes a different decision. He will travel to Stone Village in order to find Jiamin's son and bring him to meet his father.

At Stone Village, while the village council confers on whether or not to allow Yang Yang, Jiamin's son, to travel with Takata to meet his father in prison, Takata stares at the mountains. These snow-capped mountains recall the images of the similarly snow-capped mountains near the fishing village where Takata lives. Takata thinks silently to himself—which we hear in a voice over—"I am beginning to understand why Ken-ichi kept coming back here. There is a loneliness in being in a foreign language." He also thinks that it is not good for people who love each other to hide their feelings behind a

mask. In contrast, there are delays in communicating the villager's response to Takata's request, because they insist on explaining their feelings to him, which is difficult because the interpreter Liang really does not speak Japanese. They finally call Jasmine on a cell from a roof top where they can get a signal and she communicates their feelings and thus their assent to his plan.

During his stay at Stone Village he receives a phone call from Rie saying that she told Ken-ichi that his father was in China and that Ken-ichi had responded by saying that "it was the nicest thing you have done for him" but that the opera itself was not important and that he should return to Japan. Takata is unsure whether to believe what Rie tells him, but he chooses to stay in China. Filming the opera has already ceased to be Takata's motivation. His attempt to find Yang Yang for Jiamin is his attempt to express in the mode of action, journey, quest his own longing to know his son's feelings and to express his own.

On the journey from Stone Village to the prison, the truck breaks down, and in the distraction of the driver and Liang over fixing the truck, Yang Yang and Takata wander off and get completely lost. (The most explicit treatment of ethnography is in the scene where Takata takes photos of Yang Yang.) After they are finally found the next day, after hours of intense search by what looks like the entire village, Takata hesitates to continue the journey. He asks the village elders to ask the boy why he had run away and whether he wanted to see his father. At first the elders dismiss his request as irrelevant, saying that they would decide what the boy does. But at Takata's insistence, the man who seems to be a leader talks to the boy. This is the first time we hear the boy's voice. He says very loudly and defiantly that he refuses to go and that he refuses to admit Jiamin as his father.

The elder tries to argue with the boy and to get him to explain why. But for Takata, the expression of feeling is enough. He has gotten what he came for. He returns to the prison without Yang Yang, but he does have photos that he took on his digital camera during the night he spent with the boy waiting to be found. With Yang Yang he was able to express his affection and receive expression in return. Affective exchange circulates freely in Stone Village, unlike the blockages in Japan that had solidified the face itself as a mask of the absence of affect.

On the way to the prison, he receives a call from Rie telling him that Ken-ichi is dead. She reads him a letter that she says Ken-ichi had dictated to her before his death. Takata does not share this information with anyone, simply gazing silently out the window with tears in his eyes.

At the prison, the director has staged a more elaborate theater for Jiamin's anticipated performance. He has roused a full audience of inmates to help encourage Jiamin along during his performance. He has also recruited a group of performers among the inmates to accompany Jiamin on stage. Takata, however, no longer wants to see the performance. He keeps repeating that the performance is not necessary, that he no longer needs to film it. Instead, he says that he would like to show Jiamin photos of his son. Takata then connects his digital camera to a tv monitor and plays a slideshow of photos of Yang Yang. Again, facing Takata's screen, Jiamin and many other inmates cry unreservedly. On screen, Yang Yang appears as the image of the perfect boy—handsome, pensive, playful, bold, affectionate. As the prison director says to Jiamin, "as we can clearly see, he is a very good boy."

The prison director continues to ask Takata to watch the opera, and Takata continues to insist that it is not necessary. Finally the prison director says, “let me put it directly. We will not force you to film the opera, but please just sit down and watch it.” Takata sits down to watch the performance. Again Jiamin stands silent before him. This time he takes off his own mask and approaching Takata, thanks him in a very dignified manner for his kindness and asks formally that Takata film this performance and show it to his own son Ken-ichi. They exchange very formal bows that are able to communicate unambiguous respect and humility without the shadow of a doubt. This is striking in a film throughout which gestural attempts to communicate have always failed.

The mask opera begins at last, but we are shown very little of it. After the first couple of minutes, the images are slowed down and edited into a non-ethnographic rendering. The music and the voice too are gone, replaced by sentimental string music evoking intense nostalgia.

After Ken-ichi’s death, the plot was finished, but not Zhang Yimou’s film. The supplementary scene in the prison and the final still shots of Takata gazing up at mountains, back to the viewer, are significant to what the film is trying to do with the genres of ethnography, travel, autobiography, and family narrative in the specific context of Japan and China. In the prison the supplement is affect excessive to the requirements of the plot, it is intense sentimentality without a subject, distributed across the scene and into the manipulation of genre.

Ethnographic discourse is present throughout the film in the taking of notes to be translated later, interpretation, the native guide who owns the vehicles of transportation and know the terrain, the complexities of gaining the trust of villagers, etc. There is also

another level at which the ethnographic discourse exists—the subtitles on the surface of the screen, in the conventions of extra-cinematic space, a supplementary space in which foreign audiences gather to observe. *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles* was released in the U.S. in 2005, and it is reasonable to assume that the producers knew that there would be subtitles.⁷⁹ The functioning of the subtitles as I've discussed it is not attributable to the designs or even consciousness of a particular member of the vast production crew, including the director and executive producers. However, it is present and native to the film.

In conclusion, I hope this chapter has demonstrated how the turn of subjectivity is implicated in the movement of turning ethnic. By tracing the turns from U.S. to Japan to China, we can see that becoming American, the classic ethnic American narrative, itself opens to further becomings and unbecomings and rebecomings that address mobility and ethnicization in a global context. This challenges us to think globalization beyond notions of Westernization toward more complex turns and returns between sites that may or may not cross the West.

⁷⁹ Zhang Yimou's recent films, especially *Hero*, have been big budget productions financed by transnational capital. See Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*.

TWO

FOLD

Two moves amount to a fire.
– Turkish saying⁸⁰

In this chapter I use the rhetorical trope of the fold to suggest a different way of thinking the materiality of bodies in transit. Luis Francia says in his memoir of travel to the Philippines: “Where are you from? Where are you going? Singly or in tandem these questions have always been put to me.”⁸¹ The Asian American is conventionally described as one who is from somewhere and usually also headed somewhere—the American dream, model minority, upward mobility, etc.⁸² An ethnic identity contains the significance of a journey, a movement, a passage through cultures; ethnic literature is the writing of that journey. It makes sense then that much of ethnic literature is autobiographical—the writing of the life of that movement. “Asian American” has generally been understood as a form of hyphenated identity that tracks a movement.

The hyphenated body (Asian-American, Vietnamese-American) might be considered in relation to narratives of return and hyphenation in relation to a type of East-West experimentation. Rather than narrate the story of ‘how I came to be what I am,’ Andrew Pham gives us an experimentation that asks: What it is that this thing that I perhaps am does in the world? What does this identity make? Thus the subject’s

⁸⁰ Turkish saying cited in Azade Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 7.

⁸¹ Luis Francia, *Eye of the Fish*, 371.

⁸² Another version of Francia’s twin questions might be: “What we should become, what we were” which is a line from Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, and also discussed in Patricia P. Chu, *Assimilating Asians*.

constitutive relation of interior and exterior is problematized. Pham's travel memoir *Catfish and Mandala* (2000) shows that the subject might instead be rendered through the trope of the fold, such that the subject is seen as a point of view on the variation of processes of subjectivation.⁸³ We do not travel across sites of war, exile, refugee camp, and immigrant ethnic ghetto in Pham's memory-scape, but rather encounter these in the folding and unfolding of the subjective such that the exterior too undergoes a corresponding enfolding. In other words, it is with one movement that the fold produces a doubling of interior and exterior—say, war and individual trauma. In the second part of the chapter, I then discuss the film *Die Another Day* and the international controversy surrounding it, which show the complexities of the Korean American hyphenation. This not only involves Korean immigrants to the U.S. and returnees to South Korea but is further complicated by the relationship between South Korea and North Korea that crosses into the category of Korean American. The umbrella, or coalitional, category of Asian American also involves a convolution of hyphenated identities. For example, the forgetting of the Korean War, in contrast to the remembering of the Vietnam War, as well as the interconnectedness of the two wars involving Vietnamese and Koreans; additionally the role of China in both wars.⁸⁴

⁸³ I am invoking the trope of the fold as it appears primarily in Deleuze's discussion of Foucault and somewhat as it appears in his analysis of Leibniz and baroque architecture.

⁸⁴ Korean War is always belated to the Vietnam War. At the Washington D.C. mall, for instance, the memorial to the Korean War was installed in 1986 and memorialized through heroic figurations of American soldiers. This mode of representation had been questioned and challenged by the controversially abstract wall sculpture designed by Maya Lin to memorialize the Vietnam War in 1982.

SINGLE FOLD: Hyphenated Memoir

In 1994 the U.S. lifted the trade embargo with Vietnam. Days later, Coca-Cola launched a new ad campaign for its products in Saigon with an upbeat yet somehow menacing slogan: “Glad to see you again,” or “It’s so good to see you again.”



Why does the ad slogan even mention the war? Why does it introduce Coca-Cola by way of a reference to the return of Americans to Vietnam? Caffeine is certainly an improvement over napalm. We are building the new global economy and a new Asia, and yet it seems that in this insistence on a happy return is a subtle implication that—Hey, we’re going to win this time! A return is then a reconciliation and an affirmation of the continuity of a relation as well as an indication of a troubled absence; a return is a reorientation toward—toward the U.S. The trope of return pulls together the two poles of a complex period of modern history: the end of the Vietnam War with the fall of Saigon in 1975 and the accession of Vietnam to the World Trade Organization in 2007. This roughly thirty-year period includes the end of the Cold War, advances in global capitalism, and new military positioning of the U.S. worldwide. To envision the end of the Cold War as a return of American power is not a neutral act of storytelling. To posit an American return is to pull the open-ended contentiousness of the Vietnam War into the pre-history of American dominance in global capitalism, as if it were always fated to be

so. It makes sense then that Coca-Cola might choose to script itself into just such a return narrative.

How then might we read a Vietnamese American's narrative of return to Vietnam after the same interval of time as Coca-Cola—from 1975 to 1994? Specifically, in Andrew Pham's travel memoir *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam*. The Vietnamese American writer Andrew Pham left Vietnam in 1975 by boat, spent two years in an Indonesian refugee camp, then entered the U.S. in 1977. He returns to Vietnam for the first time in the mid-1990s.

Catfish and Mandala is both an autobiographical tale of emigration and a contemporary travelogue. This text's approach to the notion of return and the complex conditions in which return takes place suggest that we think of the ethnic subject here in terms of the trope of the fold. Rhetorically the fold allows us to think about the connection rather than the opposition between interior and exterior. The subjectivity of Asian Americans has always had enfolded within it a coding of the geographic, and we might now look again at the geographic and geopolitical and unfold them onto the subjective. Additionally, viewing ethnic subjectivity through the trope of the fold makes it more interesting and more useful to think of the broader materiality of affectivity as opposed to the entity of identity as the definition of the subject.

At the beginning of *Catfish and Mandala*, Pham meets a “crew of Mexican ranchers” who see him not as a “gringo” but as “a poor and crazy man,” for who else would be riding a bicycle in the desert going nowhere (Pham 6)? As “a poor and crazy man,” Pham is someone without an identity, in many ways precisely what Pham has come to the desert to become. When the ranchers learn that Pham is from Vietnam, they

greet him as a “bueno hermano,” a friend, a brother, linked to them in brotherhood in common opposition to the U.S., since little Vietnam had after all “golpea” (‘whooped’) big America in the war (Pham 6). Pham tries to tell them that he is actually Vietnamese American, a resident of the U.S. They just smile and answer, “Si, si, Señor” (Pham 6). The complication of the American hyphen seems to be brushed off. They can easily extrapolate the hyphenating of America into their own versions—relating to the Mexican-American War, and Mexico’s position in the other hemisphere of America despite its actual geographic location, and the sometimes conflation of Mexico with the U.S. border altogether. “Si, si” is then an assent, a ‘yes, we too’; also it might indicate a broader inclusion—‘yes, that is what the U.S. generally does, culturally hyphenate regions of particular geopolitical and economic interest.’

When Pham meets Tyle, a white American, a gringo, and a Vietnam veteran, things are very different. Tyle asks Pham where he is from, where he is from “originally.” Irritated by the eternal question of origin, Pham gives false answers. First he says, “Korean,” then he tries, “We *nips* all look alike” (Pham 6). Finally something in Tyle’s face makes Pham feel that he owes him an answer: “I’m from Vietnam” (Pham 6). What is important in this exchange is not the correctness of the answer so much as self-referentiality itself; the folding in is really the answer. In this case there is a specific answer that Tyle wants, that he anticipates, the one that allows him to make his own declaration: “I was in Nam” (Pham 6). Pham has already guessed as much, having heard this phrase many times before.

Vets—acquaintances and strangers—have said variations of this to me since I was a kid and didn’t know what or where Nam was. The contraction was lost on a boy struggling to learn English. But the note, the way these men said it, told me it was important, someplace I ought to know. With the years, this statement took on new

meanings, each flavored by the tone of the speaker. There was bitterness, and there was bewilderment. There was loss and rage and every shade of emotion in between. I heard declarations, accusations, boasts, demands, obligations, challenges, and curses in the four words: I was in Nam. No matter how they said it, an ache welled up in me until an urge to make some sort of reparation slicked my palms with sweat. Some gesture of conciliation. Remorse. A word of apology. (Pham 8-9)

As a child still learning English, Pham didn't recognize the contraction "Nam" but he caught "the note, the way these men said it." The phrase "I was in Nam" became modulated over the years in countless ways. "There was loss and rage and every shade of emotion in between. I heard declarations, accusations, boasts, demands, obligations, challenges, and curses in the four words: I was in Nam." Each time he hears these four words they have an intense effect on Pham—an ache, an urge, palms slick with sweat. Neither Pham nor these various men are identified through this affective entanglement that nevertheless ties them together in a life-long relation.

After announcing "I was in Nam," Tyle continues: "Forgive me. Forgive me for what I have done to your people" (Pham 8). He goes on to instruct Pham to go to Vietnam, to go and tell the people there how he, Tyle, has suffered and how he now lives, without family or country, wandering Mexico. Mexico does not really exist for Tyle except as the place beyond the border, the edge of the desert, metaphorically resonant with his own sense of alienation from American society. Pham thinks in response: Who are my people? (not 'who am I?'), and "why, of us two, am I the savior, and you the sinner?" (not 'why are we not equal?') (Pham 9). These are questions which address the language of postcolonialism and U.S. imperialism, rather than the immigrant *bildung*. The Vietnamese American is here named not immigrant but exile and pilgrim, in Mexico—both empty desert and highly policed border. It is necessary for Tyle that Pham

be Vietnamese American, the one who has left Vietnam and who can now return to Vietnam bearing stories of the Americans, and yet being Vietnamese American has no other specificity. It is in his eyes, like his being in Mexico, a way of being beyond the borders of Vietnam. In the end, Vietnam itself also proves for Pham to be not an origin but a space of negotiation.

This scene suggests something beyond the universality of identity (that everyone has an identity). It is not that everyone is different according to a schema of abstract equivalence, some translation of the democratic ideal of political embodiment. Rather, some people are seen to carry difference itself. Carrying this difference means that a kind of folding occurs whereby one body folds in on itself in order to contain that hyphenating force; one body becomes more complex than the other. This is the key morphological difference between bodies—the complexity of infolding and self-referentiality and autobiographical proclaiming—rather than abstract categories or forms which we share, say “skin color,” by each filling in with different content, say “whatever color.” Tyle is able to posit an exterior savior, while Pham must enfold the two positions, savior and sinner, within himself, as it were.

When Pham is cycling around Vietnam, his hyphenated body is subject to constant modulations. At times, for the sake of survival, he must prove he is Vietnamese, at other times that he is not, that he is rather Japanese or Korean, and so on. “I am in Vietnam” for Pham, much like the phrase “I was in Nam” for Americans, involves a constant affective modulation that is not about a resolution of identity.

In the chapter “Coca-Cola,” we see that Pham’s Viet-Kieu (Vietnamese term for Vietnamese Americans or diasporic Vietnamese) is enfolded into Coca-Cola’s own hyphen. Pham begins the chapter with a brief case study of his own Coke drinking habits.

In eight months of biking, I drink two or three cans of Coke a day, enough to carbonate my blood for the rest of my life. The caffeine picks me up and keeps me from succumbing to the midday low. The sugar gives me just enough energy to boost the heavy bike over the big hills. The carbonation burns the road grit off the back of my throat. The familiar flavor keeps me anchored in strange locales. The wavy-red-and-white logo tells me America has been here.

Coke banners have displaced the Vietnamese flag. You can buy a Coke every five miles from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. It’s everywhere, sold by the case in markets as well as by the can in shacks with a six-pack inventory. At sixty cents a can, it is as dear as a third of a laborer’s daily wage. Coke—or Koh-ka as Vietnamese pronounce it—is a special refreshment, reserved for special events such as first dates and wedding banquets. (Pham 310)

It is the advance guard of Coca-Cola which marks his own presence and journey and gets him into trouble. Pham stops at a small thatched hut for a Coke and asks for it without ice. There are drunken men, members of the Vietnamese army, eating outside, snickering about the Viet-Kieu who thinks their ice is too dirty for him. A man throws a piece of meat to a skinny dog who refuses the meat: “A revelatory silence washes the hut. A humiliating moment. They see me witnessing their shame” (Pham 312). To counter the shame, the three men act aggressively, ordering “Three cans of Coca-Cola,” to which the cafe owner responds with conciliatory pleading, reminding them of their large outstanding balance (Pham 312). Having witnessed their doubled shame, Pham becomes a target of their physical anger, which he narrowly manages to avoid.

A further example of the modulation of Pham’s hyphenated body, a limit-example perhaps, occurs in the encounter of Pham and Cuong/Calvin, a motorbike tourguide who speaks English. This scene takes place in Nha Trang, Vietnam, toward the end of the text

in a chapter titled “Viet-Kieu.” Pham thinks of himself and Cuong or Calvin as doubles, Cuong/Calvin is his equivalent in Vietnam. Similarly, Calvin says reassuringly to Pham that Vietnamese are Vietnamese if they believe they are. They see in the other an image of who each might have been had he been *in* the U.S. instead of *in* Vietnam, or *in* Vietnam instead of *from* Vietnam.

Their conversation, over bottles of Coke, beer, and Marlboros, is an uneasy one that ‘goes too far.’ It begins innocently enough with Pham asking Calvin whether he wants to go to the U.S. At first they trade easy lines about freedom and equality in America, the pleasures of meeting foreigners in Vietnam. But then they begin to push more hostile questions at each other. Cuong challenges: “Right, but do you FEEL like an American? Do you?”; “Do they look down on Vietnamese in America? Do they hate you?” (Pham 327). And in return Pham accuses Cuong: “But don’t you see the reactions on their faces when they see our squalor? Don’t you hear the things they say about us? Don’t tell me you’ve never heard it” (Pham 329).

Cuong answers: “I do. I can’t help it but I do. I take them out on the Saigon streets, you know, the poor parts because they ask me. They want pictures. I see them flinch at the beggars, the poverty of Vietnamese. The chicken-shacks we live in.” He continues, “It’s very hard being a tour guide. Sometimes I feel like a pimp” (Pham 329).

He switches into his tour-guide English: “Here, look at this, sir. Yes, ma’am, these are the average Vietnamese. Yes, they are poor. Yes, sir. Here is our national monument. Very big. Very important to Vietnamese. You impressed? No, not so big?” He shrugs, saying, “I know they’ve got bigger monuments in their countries. Older, more important. What do our little things mean to them?” (Pham 329)

In their different ways, each must straddle a Vietnamese-American relation—both must perform a Vietnamese identity for Americans in different ways. This analogous relation, however, then breaks down and gives way to the return of a discourse on blood.

As his beliefs come barreling out, I know the crushing impact of his words will stay with me, for in them I catch a glimpse of myself and of the true Cuong, the Cuong that came before and is deeper than the suave Calvin facing me. “Vietnamese aren’t ashamed of our own poverty. We’re not ashamed of squatting in mud huts and sleeping on rags. There is no shame in being poor. We were born into it just as Westerners are born white. The Westerners are white as we are yellow. There is already a difference between us. Our poverty is minor in the chasm that already exists. A small detail. The real damning thing is the fact that there are Viet-kieu, our own brothers, skin of our skin, blood of our blood, who look better than us, more civilized, more educated, more wealthy, more genteel. Viet-kieu look kingly next to the average Vietnamese. Look at you, look at me. You’re wearing old jeans and I’m wearing a suit, but it’s obvious who...who is superior. Can’t you see? We look like monkeys because you make us look like monkeys just by your existence.”

“Is this truly how Vietnamese see us Viet-kieu?”

“Some call you the lost brothers. Look at you. Living in America has lightened your skin, made you forget your language [...] Someday your blood will mix so well with Western blood that there will be no difference between you and them. You are already lost to us.” (Pham 329-30)

Although we might expect that blood would be the one thing that remains constant between them, it seems here that the capacity for mixing already extinguishes the blood relation. In this dialogue between Pham and Cuong, we see that these two cannot be put into relation, into an equation of equivalence or analogy; they cannot be hyphenated with each other. The common term can only be Vietnam—a temporary fantasy, belief, blood—or America—the force of their differentiation globally, which comes to dominate their relation.

We could see in these two scenes an identity crisis, the Asian American insisting on his claims to an Americanness that is denied by mainstream society. But would that

narrative really explain what is going on in this scene? Who would be the figure of the cultural dominant here? Not the Mexican ranchers, not the Vietnam veteran, certainly not the Vietnamese tour-guide. These scenes show that what identity produces is the ungrounding of identity: the fold.

Hyphenation without identity is then what we see in Pham's relationship with Son, another local who befriends Pham. Pham and Son are in a different kind of hyphenation. In their final drunken celebration of Pham's departure, Son says to him, "You-me: one. Not two. One. No difference" (Pham 340). The hyphenation of "you" with "me" suggests not mixture but the line of non-commensurability, the "between two." The seven short one syllable words suggest not unity but the spacing of difference that lies between unity and multiplicity. Pham replies, "Yes, Brother! Yes! Yes, no difference!" (Pham 340). The word count here yields three yeses, a no, a brother, and difference. It takes two words to say "no difference" and three to affirm "no difference." Between the affirmation of brotherhood, "yes brother" and the affirmation of difference, "yes, no difference" lies a third yes holding the other two yeses together/apart. Pham and Son together: "We are mad-drunk" (Pham 340). The line of madness and drunkenness hyphenates not two beings but two fluctuating affective states, two moving lines, two axes. The line of the hyphen is not the link but the third axis along which the force of differentiation folds.

Their final moment rests on a slightly more serious tone, as Son switches from Vietnamese to English to ask, "What will you do in America?" "The answer falls on me, a drop of water from a blue sky: 'Be a better American'" (Pham 341). Pham's reply is not a statement of identity. What is "a better American"? Who is "a better American"? The

‘being’ is here a matter of ‘doing,’ an answer to the question of what he will *do in America*. This answer does not come from within, somewhere deep inside himself but rather “falls” on him, “a drop of water from a blue sky.” The outside is this time not a force of the outside folding into him, but simply a drop, a small intense particle, a point of departure.

Ending with a departure, Pham’s return to the U.S., the text refers to the earlier point of departure, Pham’s emigration from Vietnam, folding together the two most distant points into contiguity. The departure enacts a return, a turn, a drop, again in the airplane over the Pacific.

It takes the Boeing 747 twenty-two hours to bring me back to where I had started running a year ago. Our captain announces our arrival in San Francisco and the cabin begins to boil with the nervous energy of nearly a hundred immigrating Vietnamese. They have come under a U.S.-sanctioned program for those who had served America during the war and had been imprisoned for three years or more by Communist Vietnam. [...] One older Vietnamese man, whose seat is across the aisle from mine, is practically in my lap. I insist he take my window seat. We peer through the Plexiglas together.

Below, the curling headland of Point Reyes, just north of San Francisco, comes into view. It is late February, the hills lush, almost tropical if it weren’t for the chill. I remember that finger of land and the punishing, dangerous road that climbs along that enchanting coast. The nights I slept on the side of the road. The hundred friends I made along the way, the Vietnam vets, the hippies, the housewives, the fading retirees. All the ordinary, the extraordinary people who took me into their homes, their lives even, for an evening. I can taste again my stifling fears, my irrepressible joys of struggling up this coast. Below me, all my sweetest memories of America.

“*This is America?*” the man asks me in a reverent tone, eyes never leaving the window, nose pressed to the glass like a child wishing himself into a baker’s shop.

“*Yes, Brother,*” I smile. “*Welcome home.*” (Pham 342)

Pham returns with ‘a people’ of sorts, created by an arbitrary selection criteria in U.S. immigration policy for those who have been imprisoned in Vietnam for having been

aligned with the U.S. during the Vietnam-American War.⁸⁵ These people, soon to become Viet-Kieu, are chosen by the U.S. Pham exchanges seats with the older man beside him. He moves away from the window and the approaching view of the ground. Below him is no longer the ocean of the trans-Pacific journey nor the destination place; it is memory that fills the space below, the specifically political memory of Northern Californian “hippie” and “Vet” culture. The affective here does not encounter terror and fear but is already crenellated into travel-memory. The relation to self, time, memory is what rises up for him, whereas the “immigrating Vietnamese” are “boiling” in nervous energy.

To understand the life of hyphenation, the contagion of living, we must also consider death with life. *Catfish and Mandala* seems to be grappling with death and life in connection with subjectivation and power. The trope of the fold allows for an engagement with these questions through the compositional mapping of the writing. Pham’s autobiographical text is a diagram of living and the force of ethnicizing rather than a narrative that renders the ethnic life as ethnographic object. The force of genre (stratification: life formed by the limits of death, the narrative of a finitude) encounters the force of living death, the life of dying.

At the crease of the narrative fold is the suicide of Pham’s transsexual FTM brother, which seems to be the force that propels, that folds/unfolds the writing. First appearing in the narrative as the young girl named Chi, this character later appears as the post-operative man named Minh. The question of a hyphenated ethnic living folds along the line of this living and dying and the suicide that crosses that line. The chapter “Viet-

⁸⁵ David Palumbo-Liu discusses distinction and blurring of immigration and refugee policies in the U.S. in “War, the Homeland, and the Traces of Memory” in *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*.

Kieu” is enfolded and twisted within the chapters: Chi-Daughter, Chi-Minh, Brother-Brother, Father-Son, Chi-Me. These chapter titles are complex types of hyphenations, modulations of self-relation and diagrams of relations.

The first chapter of the book refers to Chi/Minh as a suicide, someone who became too American to live. As the text then splits into two narratives lines—one following Pham as he continues his cycling travels through Mexico, California, Japan, and Vietnam, and the other going back to the birth of the first child in the Pham family and moving forward to their departure by boat, their stay in Indonesia, and their immigrant life in California. In the early chapters of the second temporal line, Chi simply appears as the oldest child and daughter, but in the later chapter “Chi-Daughter,” the writing introduces Chi as the antecedent of Son, Man, Minh.

A Vietnamese first son is worth his weight in gold, all his life. But I don't think that's why Chi wanted to be a boy. She was just never meant to be a girl. That simple. I had always known she was different. Unusual. A strong, quiet, and thoughtful first child, Chi carried herself in such an unassuming way that I instinctively looked to her as my older brother. (Pham 189)

“Chi wanted to be a boy.” “She was just never meant to be a girl.” What kind of subjectivity, temporality do these lines invoke? The memory belongs to the time of the subject “I,” the writer. It is “I” who has “always known” what Chi wanted and was meant to be. The “Vietnamese first son” and the pronoun “his” do and do not refer to Chi. We know that Chi, the suicide, must have never achieved that value, that weight in gold. Was Chi to become the oldest son or the youngest? First or last?

Chi must have known her life would veer away from ours at some point. She must have stared at the dark ceilings for years, wondering what was wrong with her. Why was she so different? She must have known her unique orientation was in the eyes of her parents a perversion which they discounted as her troubling adolescence. She must have known the

momentum of tradition would sunder her fragile world of secrets—her microcosm of one. (Pham 194)

The use of “must have” in the above paragraph—“must have known,” “must have stared”—writes Chi as the subject of a necessary past linked to the future. The moment of transition, the acquisition of a new identity comes from the outside.

The first thing Chi did when we moved to California was throw away all her dresses and skirts. From her first day at high school, she wore men’s clothing. Her teachers, misled by her confident male body language, instinctively classified her as a boy. One thing rear-ended another and suddenly it avalanched beyond her control. Whether she wanted it or not, Chi had a new identity. At school, she was a *he*. (Pham 194)

The change in gendered pronoun does not also lead to a change in status from daughter to son. In writing the moment of return happens through the changing of pronouns.

Chi survived fourteen years on the street. Once a battered teenage runaway, Chi came home at thirty-one, a post-operative transsexual. She was a man and his name was Minh. Everyone was surprised, but no one was shocked. Minh had called ahead and Mom arranged for all of us to be home for his reception. (Pham 295)

The chapter “Chi-Minh” draws a line between two names, between two people, but in one body. Again, the question of name, identity, and body is posed here.

We duked, jived, joking, hiding the strangeness inside us. I tried looking him in the eyes, but it was hard. His maleness blocked my view. Talking around his void of history, which we were too willing to oblige, he seemed no more than a stout, easygoing guy with a real blue-collar aura about him that I liked. A potbelly in the making kept him adjusting his pants. His fleshy digits, labor callused, said he was very nervous, tapping rhythm, wiping the thighs of his slacks. (Pham 295)

Minh’s apparent maleness blocks vision. The sex change is a “void of history.” The body itself seems easily readable: blue-collar, potbelly, fleshy digits, nervousness. In this chapter which presents us with Minh, we have his absence. “And now, with Minh gone from us, my greatest regret is our failure to make sense of those missing years” (Pham

297). Minh's absence and Andrew Pham's regret. The loss of making sense through an interior narration. Instead we have, in the passage below, the stringing along of nouns and pronouns: Chi, she, her true self, a man, he, as Minh, him, him. Chi traveling into Minh.

After Chi escaped the juvenile detention center, she ran away to San Francisco and reverted to her true self. A man. He traveled as Minh, sleeping on the street and eating out of Dumpsters until a Chinese family took him in and fed him. (Pham 297)

The sex change operation comes later, after he meets the woman he will marry. Marriage followed by divorce and heartbreak. At thirty-two his suicide.

At thirty-two, he died the most Vietnamese of deaths, a brokenhearted suicide. His father cut him down from the ceiling while his mother and grandmother wept. And his family, who could not love him while he lived, grieved his passing. His ashes were scattered on the sea he never finished crossing. (Pham 299)

It is his life as a refugee, making the crossing over from Vietnam, which comes to describe the line extending between life and death.

Pham's father too has difficulty making that crossing, and when he does, the results are just as devastating. Pham's father confesses to Pham: "I should have been a better father to you boys. I should have been more like an American father. They know how to cherish their children. I should have taken you camping...or something" (Pham --). The father's identifying with "an American father" that he "should have been" takes him finally fully across the ocean. However, the writing tells us that the space between father and son is empty: "An emptiness waited between us as I fumbled to find something to say as he tried to utter what was really at his core" (Pham 320). Out of this emptiness the father unfolds confessions:

"Chi," he said at last. "I shouldn't have beaten her like that. I was wrong."
"It was a long time ago, Father."

“I didn’t know better. It is the Vietnamese way. You beat your children if you love them. You beat them to show them the right way to live. You beat them to let them know they are important to you.”

“I know, Father.”

There lurked something else in him. I could feel it.

“My father beat me. I didn’t know any other way,” Father said, averting his eyes. (Pham 320)

“My father was violent. I was an abused child,” Father said. “He was abusive. And...I was abusive.” (Pham 321)

To cross from Vietnam to America is clearly not to move from abusive to non-abusive, but to fold into a self-relation that inspects the self relative to doubled relations of fathers and sons, and to then identify oneself according to the relation. The Vietnamese-American is here neither abusive nor not-abusive, neither unaware nor aware; rather he is the relation to the self which yields such distinctions, such hyphenations. It is not that Vietnamese or American could not individually also enfold the self-relation; all identity is, in this sense, essentially the self-to-self relation. However, the crisis figured in the hyphenation of Vietnamese-American as crossing and emptiness is an intense point of force and counter-force that produces an American becoming, in fact brings it “crashing down.”

I wished with all my might that he hadn’t said it. For him, it was too much. He was a man of the old world, given to the old ways, the harsher values. He wasn’t American, not like me. With this conception of his having been an ‘abused child’—this American definition—he could not survive, for all his guilt, real and imagined, came crashing down on his age-brittle shoulders. Where was his survival instinct—the one that refused to understand victimization—when he needed it most? (Pham 321)

The son sees that his father is “not like me” and then begins to catalogue what his father is like.

I knew his father—my grandfather, the opium addict who was doomed in his delusions of lost grandeur. I knew his son, Uncle Hien, also an addict. The way Grandpa Pham chained his son to a post like a dog to cure Uncle

Hien of what he could not cure himself. Once, Uncle Hien's street gang visited him at the house and slipped him a mini-saw in a baguette, something they must have read in a spy novel. Grandpa chased them into the street with a machete. My father was my grandfather's sort of man, only he was cursed with a dose of sensitivity that surfaced in his old days. He was a giver, a ready sacrifice for his family.

He was a worrier, a planner, a schemer, his brain an algorithm with too many variables which frequently crashed and never yielded the optimal solution. But, again, that was the best thing about him. He was a man of logic, a programmer with a program that could be rewritten and continually updated. He was an intellectual, the quintessential Vietnamese, a man given to passion and mountainous determination. He was a poet, a tireless, award-winning translator of French verse. He was enamored with classical guitar music. And although I never knew it during my school years when he was discouraging me from becoming a painter, he was himself a fair artist. All this in a man whose life was a mad saga: the first son of an abusive aristocrat, a teenager who lost his mother, a war and famine survivor, a refugee from the North Vietnamese Communists, a ditchdigger, a star academic, a disobedient son who wedded his beloved, a civic official, a soldier, an officer in the Nationalist Army, a government propagandist, a teacher of mathematics, a successful businessman, a prisoner in the labor and reeducation camp, an escapee from Communist Vietnam, a penniless refugee in America, a janitor, a college student, a programmer, a software engineer. Amid his travails, his daughter ran away, became a man, came home fourteen years later, and, at last, committed suicide. (Pham 321-22)

Pham does not explain his father, identify him, so much as proliferate likenesses.

Mobility and flexibility are themselves forces. Survival forces him to “rewrite his paradigm.”

He was forever forced to rewrite his paradigm, even if only to survive. Now, looking down the road of his dwindling years, he found that his shifted philosophy—from the Vietnamese to the American way—laid the blame of what he interpreted as our collective misfortunes squarely on his shoulders. The easiest lesson had always eluded him. A survivor does not have the luxury of counting his blessings.

After Grandpa Pham passed away, Father clipped a short newspaper article, hardly more than a blurb, taped it to the lampshade in the living room, and left it there for ten years. It was written by a man who, after his father's death, regretted never having said, “*I love you, Dad.*” (Pham 322)

One of the last chapters of the book, “Chi-Me” is written in small particles. There are two-three: Chi-Minh and me.

“It was only Chi-Minh and me, our final moment.” (Pham 332)

“Slow, heavy steps. Sighs. Silence. Our hands deep in our empty pockets. Big dark trees blotting out the stars.” (Pham 332)

“You, okay?—Yeah.—You sure?—Hard times, just figuring things out.” (Pham 333)

The writing makes visible the linking force but without producing linkages. Then they reach an intersection. They stop and stand uncertain, not crossing, not turning.

We came to an intersection. The streetlamp had burnt out. Winter leaves piled the gutters like old letters from forgotten seasons. Headlights swept across us. Abruptly, we felt naked. We should have made the crossing, or we should have turned the corner. But we didn’t. We stood there uncertain. I should have placed a hand on his shoulder. (Pham 333)

The intersection is a place and time of uncertainty. The light from the streetlamp is out, but then the light from headlights sweep over them. This is not an encounter with terror or fear but a moment of exposure, the exposure of a line, the fold. Whereas the sentences previous to the intersection were arranged along the horizontal, the subsequent ones move along the vertical axis, with extra white space between the lines:

Lonely, he said.

Your ex...?

Just figuring things out.

Take care of yourself, okay?

Yeah.

We gotta hang out together more. Soon, okay?

Yeah, sure.

(Pham 333-34)

The one who thinks, at the intersection, what “we should have” done, the subjectivity of that thinking is the crossing. A retrospective glance and analysis, a present speaking that is nevertheless positioned within the bodies of the past, the feelings that replace the affective and material modes that have been lost with the past. Unfolding is coextensive with folding.

It was my season of unraveling. And his as well. I couldn’t remember all, what it was he said. Nor what I said. Maybe he wished I’d said something. And I him. Perhaps we should have shared our troubled hearts. But in the end—my long-staying memory—I heard only the wavering catch in his voice. (Pham 334)

With the unfolding, the unraveling, the “what” of the utterances is gone, even the subjective wishes are gone, and there is only to be stated now a memory of what “I heard”—the “wavering catch” of the voice, the modulation of all that intersected and did not cross in those bodies at that time and place. The movement of the sea incompletely crossed is what now crosses along the third axis into “my long-staying memory,” or “absolute memory.”

What Pham seems to be doing in the above passages is reworking the temporality of trauma. In Cathy Caruth’s discussion of trauma, she emphasizes the temporality of belatedness, which for her is signified by the trope of haunting, as well as the shock of the present, the “too soon.” On the one hand, trauma is caused by an event that “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known and is therefore not available

to consciousness.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on.”⁸⁷ In both of Caruth’s articulations of trauma it is not the quality or magnitude or context of violence that is used to name the substance of trauma but an invocation of the wrongness of time. It is the lack of synchronicity between body and mind, or between consciousness, self-awareness, and the event that is named traumatic. Trauma is a temporal twist that entraps the subject. “The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or from its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life.”⁸⁸ Andrew Pham presents us with a literary fold in place of both victimized body and narrative of traumatic temporality, precisely in order to show us a different way to think the life of ethnicized bodies.

My reading of Andrew Pham’s memoir might be usefully contrasted with Viet Thanh Nguyen’s reading of Le Ly Hayslip’s memoirs *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* and *Child of War, Woman of Peace*. Nguyen discusses the emblematic quality of the victimized female body that is utilized to enact two reconciliations, one with the traumatized Americans and the other with the traumatized Vietnamese. In Pham’s text, the character who might present us with a victimized body, female and transsexual, is noticeably absent. It is not a body given the power to speak as victim. Nor does Pham himself take over that position of victim with his own status as survivor and witness.

⁸⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

Instead, he pushes to the limit the powers of his own body cycling in the heat of the Mexican desert and the countryside of Vietnam. It is from this exhaustion (rather than fatigue, to employ the Deleuzian distinction between fatigue and exhaustion) that the narrative speaks. Pham eschews reconciliation, with its accompanying false rewriting of history, in favor of presenting us with the enfolding of differential temporalities, bodies, and powers of speech. The challenge of writing trauma or violence is that one cannot simply offer presence to substitute for absence, thereby repeating the original erasure; rather one must make present what was made absent along with the fact of its erasure. The materiality of something lost and brought back cannot be captured by presentness alone. The fold thus offers a way to materialize precisely that complexity of an object's perpetual crossing through absence.

In contrast to trauma, Pham gives us open intersections, textual enfoldings. The previously discussed dialogue between Pham and Chi-Minh in their "final moment" was situated at an intersection of "winter leaves," "old letters," and "forgotten seasons" (Pham 333). The chapter title "Fallen-Leaves" itself piles up in the text like leaves, appearing four times. The first time we get a brief story, all italicized, about a first daughter who had died. The second tells a story about the very young Chi and Pham meeting American soldiers. In the third, a Buddhist monk lights himself on fire. In the fourth, young Pham is caught playing underneath a bed and is trapped there during the meeting of a prostitute and an American GI. These glimpses of the time of the Vietnam War are singularities, fallen leaves, not layered nor stratified and compiled into a text giving us the story of a life during the Vietnam War, the life of Vietnam at war; these leaves simply drift into intersections.

In *Catfish and Mandala*, Chi and Minh might be considered in relation to the fold, along a distributed temporality rather than spatiality (chrono-politics rather than geopolitics). The different moments when we see Chi and Minh are not linked up into a unified story of becoming. It is not possible to say that Chi was destined to become Minh or that Minh was the true person lying within Chi. The trope of becoming often assumes that there are two people, one contained within the other, one more authentic than the other, one surviving while the other is lost. The trope of becoming insists on insides and outsides, interiors and exteriors. The trope of folding gives us a different way of thinking about what (or rather *how*) becoming is.

The hyphenated body in transit shows us the complexities of new contexts in which the immigrant circulates. Not an embodiment of the linkage of two places and things, but rather a point of complication or incompleteness within a complex and volatile nexus of transnational politics. One might not always be from a simple 'where'—the journey 'from' often involves complicated routes and prolonged suspension in places like refugee camps. The destination is also not always clear—no longer the simple version of the American dream.

This would also mean that rather than locate our politics in the act of receiving the immigrant, we allow ourselves to be drawn much farther beyond the borders of the nation into understanding the circuits of travel and political conflict in which the immigrant is formed out there, in which the U.S. citizen is shaped out there. Rather than conceiving of identity as the end product of a migration, we might consider what it means to live along the line. It is not that one literally keeps moving forever but that we make a shift in how to understand the living that goes with the ethnic. Not a living as a hyphenated body but

rather as a living along the line of hyphenation. A type of living as experimentation with the horizon of the self, the thresholds of becoming.

Pham finally takes hyphenation toward a line: “the perfection of our intention is enough.” “There is nothing else. No mitigating circumstances and no power to undo the sins. No was. Only is. Between us, there is but a thin line of intention” (339). Pham reminds us that there is no return that makes whole a broken past or substitutes past defeat with present progress; there is no forgiveness, no reparation, no future-building. This “line of intention” is yet another East-West line, a threshold of becoming, of forming and deforming the time-space of our own livingness.

DOUBLE FOLD: Asian American Cyborg

Foucault argues that domination of others requires domination of oneself, a folded force. We can see Foucault’s conception of folded force at work both ‘inside’ the film *Die Another Day* and ‘outside’ the film in the international controversy that it ignited. In his writing on Foucault, Deleuze writes that the double is a way of figuring the fold: “The double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside.”⁸⁹ “It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me.”⁹⁰ In the film *Die Another Day* we have not only the doubles of James Bond and his nemesis, but also the doubles of each of the two with themselves—original Bond and Bond who has lost his 007 status; original Moon and the Moon who has turned into a

⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 98.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 98.

white man. In the controversy around the film, we similarly see doubling of Korean and Asian American actors. Furthermore, our very conception of the line between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of what constitutes a film might be understood as “a floating line with no contours which is the only element that makes the two forms in battle communicate.”⁹¹ Thus what we see in the film *Die Another Day* and the controversy that it ignited is the enfolding of double hyphenations of Korean-Americans with North-South Koreans, and Korean-Americans with Asian Americans.

In 2001, Cha In-Pyo, a well-respected and successful South Korean actor, was invited to audition for the role of the twentieth arch-nemesis to Bond in *Die Another Day*, the first James Bond film of the twenty-first century. Cha In-Pyo was offered the part but refused to make a decision about accepting it without first seeing the screenplay. The screenplay was not then completed and there were strict rules forbidding anyone besides the producers and writers from seeing the screenplay, so as to prevent leaking of the story to the public, spoilers. Cha persevered in his request and the producers did agree to allow him to see the screenplay. After staying up all night reading and deliberating, Cha decided to turn down the role. He later wrote a letter explaining what had happened and posted it on his fan-website. Many were surely to be disappointed by his refusal. And there was confusion as to whether he had been refused the part or whether he had done the refusing. After Cha’s explanatory letter was posted, there was a huge response from his fans, and the story of his refusal caught on in the South Korean media and became a heroic act gaining recognition from political leaders as well as media and public. Following this bit of an uproar, Cha removed the letter from the website, giving a brief

⁹¹ Ibid, 113.

apology stating that he felt embarrassed about the effect that his letter had had and that he had never intended self-promotion or anti-US politicking.

Turning now to the letter itself, it is interesting to note how sensitive Cha is to the connection between the technology of projection and political affect. He writes:

In terms of the character alone, even though it was a villain, it was an important and attractive role. Since the character fights against 007 for the first 20 minutes and last 15 minutes of the movie, it was the second most important role after 007. Also, the battle scenes with Colonel Moon featured a variety of visually interesting scenes, such as combats with sports cars, aerial combats using flying objects, underwater fights while falling from a waterfall and fistfights with 007 at the end. As far as I looked at the screenplay in this light, my heart was already flying to the UK, and I even imagined briefly my face being projected in the movie screens worldwide. However...

As I read page after page of the screenplay, Jane Jenkins' words that the movie had no relation to the current climate of the Korean peninsula turned out to be a lie. As expected, Hollywood was once again using another country's current climate for its own entertainment purposes. Especially, when 007 arrived in the airport in Korea and went to DMZ (demilitarized zone between the two Koreas), there were no Korean military personnel present, and the US armed forces greeted 007. It seemed that the screenplay kept reminding the audience that North Korea was one of the most likely countries to commit acts of terrorism against the West.

About two o'clock in the morning that night, I decided to turn down the role. Many thoughts occurred to me. Thoughts of my wife and my son Jung-Min, thoughts of my fans on the Web site, many mistakes that I've made in my life. After thinking about many things, I decided to turn down the role.

The next morning, I called Tony and told him about my intention to turn down the role. I hung up the telephone with the angry voice of Tony, saying that I'm crazy, ringing in my ear. Even if I didn't like the screenplay, and even if I don't appear in it, they will make the 20th 007 movie. Also, the main storyline of the movie will be a hypothetical situation with the Korean peninsula as the main subject. I thought of a line of dialogue delivered by General Moon in the screenplay. When facing 007, he says: '50 years ago, you people came uninvited and divided the Korean peninsula into two. After all that, what are you trying to teach us at this point?' The producers of 007 are creating the same situation as the dialogue written in their screenplay. Ultimately, the movie will be produced. However, I do not plan to see it.⁹²

⁹² Cha In-Pyo's fan website: www.inpyosarang.net

Cha deliberates, torn, and finally makes his decision to turn down the role. He points to a specific line of dialogue in the film that turns him firmly against the film. “50 years ago, you people came uninvited and divided the Korean peninsula into two. After all that, what are you trying to teach us at this point?” He draws the conclusion that the film is reproducing that situation. What are we to make of this perceived doubling of history? It is not the politics of representation that Cha is concerned with so much as the efficacy of film technology to produce *statements* and *visibilities*.

Cha imagines his face projected worldwide and then suddenly his feelings shift. Cha wonders: Where are the South Koreans in this film? Why are there no South Koreans in the DMZ? In the absence of South Koreans, the North Korean threat is seen to be directed straight toward the West, escalating that threat altogether. South Korean sovereignty is at stake, both absent and under attack. We see here an example of what Deleuze calls the *coextensiveness of forgetting with memory*. For Deleuze, Foucault “offers the possibility once more of putting time on the outside and thinking of the outside as being time, conditioned by the fold.”⁹³

The invisibility of South Koreans and of the complex nature of the South Korea-U.S. alliance in this screenplay seems to echo the widespread forgetting of the Korean War in the U.S. and the striking absence of the Korean War in an otherwise energetic Hollywood production of war cinema.⁹⁴ Two notable exceptions, of course, are *MASH*—commonly interpreted as a satire of the Vietnam War (and “M.A.S.H.” stands for the mobile medical units deployed by South Korea in the Vietnam War)—and the

⁹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 108

⁹⁴ Chungmoo Choi states: “South Koreans have lived on the same edge of both colonial and (post)colonial borderland.” (Chungmoo Choi, “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea”).

Manchurian Candidate which has recently been remade for the Gulf War of the early 1990s.⁹⁵ We might consider this American forgetting, or non-remembering, of the Korean War in stark contrast to the massive machinery of remembering that is ongoing in North Korea.⁹⁶ Korean history scholar Bruce Cumings' analysis is insightful here. He writes:

Pyongyang's media drum war stories into the brain so frequently that one might think the Korean War just ended; meanwhile, that same war, never understood at the time and forgotten quickly after its conclusion, yields an American tabula rasa. It was therefore a simple matter to superimpose onto North Korea all the media tropes by which Americans were led to understand the 1990-1991 Gulf war. North Korea was not our daily enemy of forty years' standing, but a new "renegade state." This transference began in the immediate aftermath of the four-day ground war that defeated Iraq: Leslie Gelb editorialized in the New York Times that North Korea was "the next renegade state," a country "run by a vicious dictator" with SCUD missiles, "a million men under arms," and likely to possess nuclear weapons "in a few years." Another Iraq, in short.⁹⁷

Although the nuclear standoff between the DPRK and the U.S. is too complex to analyze fully here, we might at least remember that it began at the "end" of the Korean War in 1953 with the U.S. depositing nuclear weapons south of the DMZ and making security plans against possible North Korean attack, which centered on early deployment of nuclear weapons against the North. This provocation to escalation was how the U.S. "ended" a war which had featured extensive air campaigns which leveled North Korea, continuous use of fire-bombing (mainly with napalm) referred to as "precision bombing," threats of nuclear attack—including an "imaginary attack" staged by B-29 runs dropping dummy bombs over the North (all of which forced the North into underground hide-outs), and destruction of huge dams (an unambiguous war crime). We could also trace to the Korean War the inauguration of unprecedented defense budgets in the U.S. (in 1950 the

⁹⁵ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*.

⁹⁶ See Charles K. Armstrong, "Surveillance and Punishment in Postliberation North Korea."

⁹⁷ Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, 125-26.

budget quadrupled from \$13 to \$54 billion), which “built the national security state at home and a far-flung archipelago of military bases abroad, that transformed a limited containment doctrine into a global crusade.”⁹⁸

Another useful reminder from South Korean history is Syngman Rhee, the first South Korean president, an expatriate educated at Princeton during the Japanese colonial era and later aided to power by the U.S. To trace back into this history of South Korean nation-building is to see how intimate an involvement the U.S. has had in the whole of that history, including tolerance of Japanese colonialism, division of Korea following WWII, and the return to stand-off with nuclear intensification following the Korean War. It is not difficult to see how much forgetting is required in order to solidify new enemies in the post-Cold War era, enemies such as North Korea and Iraq. Such a large complex of forgetting is accomplished by the simultaneity of the processes of repression and projection in the global economies of cultural production. Simply put, affective economies which modulate the attention and interest of Americans simply makes the Korean War unmemorable, not traumatic. The consumption of 1950s nostalgia can work micropolitically as the active means of non-remembering the Asian war of the 1950s.

Following Spivak, we might see how the force of the European poststructuralist movement comes out of the failure of the ethical subject following WWI, which she argues has not occurred in the U.S. The U.S. has been putting off such a failure even up to today. The means to this American success can be located in the division of ethical and political labor among the racially segmented social body which again proves useful for the work of American political fantasy. In particular, I will focus on how Asian/American is particularly useful in this context, in a way that is similar yet different from other types

⁹⁸ Bruce Cumings, *North Korea*, 8.

of moral and anthropological divisions which remain highly operative in American society.

Although it is the Vietnam War that stands for the psychic exposure of the U.S., in particular through the loss of innocence of young white American men (and the end of the 50s), it may be in the enfolding of the Korean War within the Vietnam War that we see how far the American soldier has become strange to himself in his attempts to insist on Western self-identity. At this point, it is illuminating to consider Ahn Jungho's *White Badge*, a novel (and film adaptation) about the Korean involvement in Vietnam, written by a Korean writer, who is himself a veteran of that war, and self-translated by the author into English.⁹⁹ At one point in the film version of *White Badge*, we see a Korean soldier, the protagonist, watching a young Vietnamese boy ask him for food and then when refused make the gesture of raising his middle finger. The Korean soldier has a flashback (shot in the grain of a black and white documentary) of himself as a young boy chasing after a truck full of American soldiers while begging for food and then himself making a similar gesture to a GI who throws him nothing more than a nearly empty pack of cigarettes. The proximity of the image of the American in Korea and the Korean in Vietnam suggests something more complicated than the moral analogy or shared dilemma of the Korean soldier troubled to sense himself fighting someone else's war, as the American soldier had been troubled in Vietnam (where racial difference seemed to overcome political conviction). The Korean soldier is not only fighting someone else's war but fighting in it *as* someone else. To maintain so many layers of hallucination is an unstable affair, and lurking on the periphery is the felt sense of a more complicated historical connection, as in the later scene when the Korean soldier befriends the

⁹⁹ A more literal translation of the Korean title would be "White War."

Vietnamese boy's widowed mother and they draw Chinese characters in the sand with a stick. The Koreans and Vietnamese are neither ethnically same nor politically different in any absolute sense, to each other or to the Americans. What is here exposed is the extent to which American alliance requires sharing in the projection of the enemy as racially and politically other, sharing the affective constellation of embodied whiteness.

I think we are in no danger of underestimating the effectivity of powerful affective media in the U.S. to mobilize political support for war in recent years. The effects of international media, and in particular G.W. Bush's personal naming of North Korea as a constituent of the "Axis of Evil" during his 2002 State of the Union address, cannot be underestimated here. (Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the coining of the phrase "Axis of Evil" is ascribed to David Frum, who found inspiration in FDR's speech given after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, an event which was followed by the first plans of the U.S. to occupy Korea.) Rey Chow's analysis of the effect of media on the Tiananmen Square massacre is illuminating in connection with the current situation of nuclear confrontation between North Korea and the U.S.

Sensing the intensity of the world's gaze, the Chinese government, like many of its counterparts in the non-Western world, felt it had to act—not merely to produce action but also to play-act, to perform, to fabricate. Precisely the West's wish that the Chinese government talk rather than act—that is, neutralize the physical feelings of the students' confrontation—was thwarted. Interpreting the gaze of the world's media as *daring* them to respond to their challenge, the Chinese authorities rose to the occasion by putting their best foot forward—by showing that they dared kill even their own students and workers. . . . Visuality became not the policing or investigatory order that it aspired to be but a theatrical order and an exchange—not of gazes but of faces (faces being analogous to honor or pride).¹⁰⁰

In the shift that Chow highlights from gazes to faces, we are alerted to the significance of international media as not simply the empty global space of projecting hate

¹⁰⁰ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, 167.

internationally, much less the transparent reportage of the attentive concern of the world, but rather the organ of the materialization of the face of U.S. empire transmitting hostile affects that prove mutually contagious. The two states which gaze at each other from afar are brought together face to face, and the looking itself becomes the political act.

The DMZ on the Korean peninsula is a daily encounter of faces. Bruce Cumings' contrasting description of the DMZ as seen from the South and North Korean sides is illuminating here. On the South, Panmunjon seems to be trapped in a time warp: a poster of Hank Williams' tour of Atlanta in 1952, waitresses in miniskirts and red lipstick, and the army's version of a war that sounds as though it came from 1953. On a rare visit to the North Korean side of Panmunjon with a documentary film crew, Cumings sees a different image of Americans patrolling the DMZ:

[A]n American soldier, standing about six feet six inches tall, wearing elevator boots and what looked like a pilot's broad-shouldered flight jacket, began huffing and puffing in his best imitation of a tough guy. Quick strides up to the line, big scowl, now a few paces back, arms folded, another scowl-skulk-glare, turn on the heel with hunched-over shoulder, as if to flex the biceps, back front again more skulking and scowling."¹⁰¹

Clearly in such a claustrophobic space, the idea of real political negotiation between two distinct sovereign states becomes phantasmatic itself. The face-off is a denial of complex inter-state-subjectivities. Sovereignty is the perceived point of origin for inter-state politics, the place of enunciation for political attack and negotiation, but this requires disavowal of the history of the necessarily international origins of the sovereignty of any given state. The forgetting of the Korean War (and all that I'm attaching to it right now) is not simply the forgetting by Americans of their racial or neo-colonial Other, but rather a disavowal of the very intimate and interdependent emergence

¹⁰¹ Bruce Cumings, *North Korea*, 146.

of the modern Korean nation-state with the development of the U.S. as aspiring global empire. The self-professed identities of these two nation-states as different and opposed, or even allied, is itself visible only as the effect of an ongoing dynamic of projection of such ideal identities. It is then not the repression of the history of the Korean War that we are seeing later erupt in post-Gulf war and post-9/11 nuclear hysteria about North Korea and its supposedly insane leader, but rather the continuation of nonlinear chains of displacements which constitute international history.

The picture of a newly emerging rogue state, instead of the suspended civil war state in which North Korea sees itself, leaves out the reality of Korean unity/division and the reality of a long history of Korea/U.S. alliance and antagonism. As Jacqueline Rose states succinctly, “identities are not so much unstable and divided, as mutating and inverting themselves through the passage of historical time.”¹⁰² The history of the Korean peninsula becomes altogether phantasmatic, as the fantasy of a clear-cut U.S. v. and DPRK face-off is what becomes gradually actualized through the unstable nuclear negotiations that have been going hot and cold by turns over the span of decades.

Let me return finally to Cha In-Pyo, whom we have left in a Los Angeles hotel room, visualizing the projection of his face to the world. What makes Cha drop down from that global screen are thoughts of his wife, his son, his fans, his personal life history. He returns to the givens of his identity, the lines of filiation and affiliation that ground him in South Korean society, his certainty and conviction, and from that location, he says no to Bond. He drops down from global projection onto the proper side of the border.

Like it or not, Cha cannot avoid becoming a screen for other state-motivated projections, such as the uncomfortable new political value that his refusal to participate in

¹⁰² Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 42.

Hollywood gains in the particular political context of South Korea of that moment. Public outrage over the accidental killing of two teenage girls by American GIs in a tank and the acquittal of these soldiers, without formal apology from Bush, is mounting by the time that *Die Another Day* is released at the end of 2002 (US)/beginning of 2003 (ROK). Netizens linked through the Internet, as much as any common political affiliation, organize a boycott of the film and various demonstrations in front of movie theaters in which the film is scheduled to be released.

Common anger at the film centered on two images in particular. One, a scene in which Bond has sex in a Buddhist temple, and two, the brief appearance in the background of the DMZ of a peasant with an ox-drawn cart. These instances of inaccurate portrayal of South Korean (and North Korean for that matter) modernization and use of another culture's sacred space as an exotic locale for a sexual fantasy are easily articulable in a cultural literacy with a certain version of Orientalism. Rey Chow makes the astute observation that:

What is "internalized" in the age of film is the very *projectional* mechanism of projection. If individuals are, to use Althusser's term, "interpellated," they are interpellated not simply as watchers of film but also as film itself. They "know" themselves not only as the subject, the audience, but as the object, the spectacle, the movie.¹⁰³

The inaccuracy or insensitivity of representations, however minor, can still generate intense affective energy that gets drawn into political posturing. The vocal protest led to the subsequent removal of the above-mentioned two images from the film.

North Korea's official news organ, the KCNA, joins the protest, issuing statements denouncing the film as a burlesque slandering the Korean people.¹⁰⁴ One

¹⁰³ Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism*, 20

announcement even claims that “Bond proves U.S. intent to start war on the Korean peninsula.”¹⁰⁵ In this almost humorous deployment of film critique staged as political counter-attack, we should note not only the opportunity that the KCNA takes to counter-attack the virulence of U.S. polemic, such as the creation by fiat of an “Axis of Evil,” but also the emergence here of a virtual unity of North and South Korea against the U.S. The KCNA reports approvingly the South Korean protests against the film’s release, and seems to emphasize the South Korean origin of protest against Bond. As various organs of international media quip, this controversy over Bond has made visible an impossible unification of the two Koreas in their common disgust at Bond.

We can thus see that Cha’s rejection of Bond has played into complex affective economies. Cha’s departure from *Die Another Day* serves to open up the role to other interpretations and embodiments. If there was an insurmountable difficulty, a perceived impossibility in the film for Cha, a too-solid quality to Cha himself which resists the film’s representational schema, then the opposite seems true for the substitutions of Asian American actors/men that follow Cha’s turning away from Bond. The amorphousness of Asian American identity seems to work, where Cha could not, in the phantasmatic landscape of Bond. The Asian American cast all have different levels of fluency in Korean (mostly none or near to none) and accents. At the same time, the Asian American cast feedback into the representations and affective circuits, lending an irony that flashes back to the American viewers, making the film familiarly American.

¹⁰⁴ Korean Central New Agency (KCNA) archives available through Korea News Service (KNS) in Tokyo. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Will Yun Lee (who took up the role Cha refused) and Rick Yune (who plays Zao) both expressed hopes for the politically progressive potential resulting from the casting of Asian American men in a blockbuster film such as *Die Another Day*, in roles which are undeniably masculine. This is probably quite true. I would certainly agree with Yune that “We don't need anymore Madame Butterflies out there, and we don't need those Charlie Chans.”¹⁰⁶ However, Lee and Yune seem unaware of the ambiguous quality of the term “Asian” as they themselves use it, including both Asian American and non-American Asian actors, racializing the latter without regard for historical specificity which makes them not only different but intimately related to Lee and Yune themselves through different modulations of affective links to the absence of South Koreans in the film and to the non-memorial quality of the Korean War.

In an interview, Lee tells a story about volunteering at a youth center for Asian American teens, when he witnessed one of the boys getting ambushed and beaten up by a group of boys from a rival gang. Although Lee himself spent his childhood in various ethnic ghettos, he had had no direct experience of the daily violence experienced by these Asian American street kids until that day. The boy says to Lee after the incident, grinning, “You have no idea where we come from.” Lee then enfolded into this story a contrasting story about his younger brother who grew up in a predominantly white suburb and faced a different type of racism, more pervasive and constant for being beneath the surface. Subtly ousted from, or successfully going beyond, both the urban underclass and the model minority extremes of Asian American identity, Lee abandons his goals of a career in law and political activism and instead opts for Hollywood. He wants to get

¹⁰⁶ These masculinist comments could be usefully contrasted with Laura Kang's discussion of Korean American women in *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Woman*.

involved in projecting positive role models for Asian American males, precisely because, he claims, he was not able to find another more practical way of becoming Asian American.

Rick Yune's biography reads like an American dream-come-true. A child of poor but hardworking immigrant parents, Yune makes it to an Ivy League college and a job on Wall Street. Thus far just a model minority not yet bruised by the glass ceiling. Then, the fantasy. While riding in an elevator Yune is discovered by a modeling scout and becomes the first Asian American face for Polo and Versace. He is also named one of the "New Faces of '99" by Newsweek. He even travels to South Korea as a triumphant prodigal son. He too wishes to promote positive images of Asian American males through his work in the film industry. Movie stardom as path to political transformation? From margin to stardom, bypassing center? Are these veterans of Wall Street and Hollywood really so politically naïve and earnest? Probably not. These autobiographical claims to politicizing experience seem actually to serve the purpose primarily of mitigating expression of their own pleasure in discussing their personal successes. Instead of pure personal enjoyment, they offer stories about becoming actors as a way to become more fully Asian American and in touch with the Asian American community. The politicization of their identity is offered as a justification and a compensation for their success and enjoyment. This itself, of course, plays into Asian American representational politics in ways they may not quite intend.

After Cha's rejection of the role in *Die Another Day*, which antedates Yune's own acceptance of the role of Zao, Yune's profile in South Korean media plummeted. He was attacked and harassed by reporters, and even shamed on national television, as a well-

known Korean pop singer (Lee Jung Hyun) refused to appear alongside him on a popular talk show. Former talk of Yune's former prodigal "return" to Korea has changed into charges of betrayal. That Yune is Korean American carries no particular meaning in these South Korean situations. "Asian American" merely refers to an open passage between two distant places on the globe, and Yune travels back and forth, good Korean, bad Korean.

The emptiness of "Asian American" as a signifier is of course only a myth, another forgetting, in this case, the lack of interest and ignorance on the part of the general South Korean public about Korean American and Asian American histories, specifically about what it is that has emerged as commonly shared by the necessarily imprecise category of Asian American (race itself). Asian American history is one with much to tell us about the dangers and necessities of becoming other as a way to becoming oneself; of the endless chain of becomings that one unavoidably embarks on in pursuit of self-identity, ever intensifying, and never resolving into home ground, even though one learns simply to be at home in America. Such becomings always work in conjunction with representational technologies and affective media, whose threats are not to be averted by refusal or rejection. We are reminded by Asian American history that a "No-No boy" is sent to a relocation camp or deported and erased from history.

The Asian American bodies in *Die Another Day* become the medium for enacting the absence of a South Korean actor in the casting and the presence of his protest over the absence of South Koreans in the screenplay. These bodies present the multiple affective vectors of transformation, mutation, substitution and exchange that attend

representational schemas and politics. They form what I would term a racial cyborg, a machinic assemblage that produces racializations.

The racial cyborg, as I am conceiving of it in my reading of *Die Another Day*, is on the one hand, simply the character of Colonel Moon (played by Will Yun Lee, and not played by Cha In-Pyo) who in the course of the movie undergoes genetic alteration to become a white man (with an ambiguous Argentine identity). On the other hand, the racial cyborg could be represented more abstractly by the assemblage of three bodies: Colonel Moon, Zao, and Bond himself, as they apportion amongst themselves different aspects of the work of identity and national belonging.

The cyborg narrative that I will draw out of *Die Another Day* does and does not fit in with a more general discussion of cyborgs in film. Whereas most cyborgs appear in techno-science fiction films of the *Terminator* or *Robocop* ilk, or more philosophico-dreamy films such as *Ghost in the Shell*, it is rare that we see, or pay serious attention to, a cross-genre cyborg making a guest appearance in another star's film, especially a rival with the stature of James Bond himself.

Of course we cannot forget that the James Bond films have always had a particular affinity for technology. In fact, one could say that interest in the technology of cinematic special effects involved in the production of Bond films and the technology of weaponry prominently featured in the plots of Bond films is the primary motivation driving the franchise since its Cold War inception in 1952, at the brink of the "end" of the Korean War. More than fifty years later, the reach of technology into the most intimate spheres of social life and the common perception of its singular force in economic globalization raise questions about the continued pertinence of the hallmark Bond

representations of technology. Such questions are perhaps related to the ones posed at the turn of the twenty-first century by Bond producers and Bond aficionados concerning the survival of Bond into the next millennium—is Bond still the right man for the job of saving the world and outwitting death again and again? Will James Bond successfully cross over from profitable representations of the Cold War to survival in the post-1989 global era?

Die Another Day seems to reflect evidence of some attempt to grapple with Bond's existential or technological questions. The cinematic cyborg is generally understood as a form of projection, which makes visible our anxieties about technology in modern life. The cyborg, as part human flesh and part machine, highlights in particular those fears and longings which have to do with the threshold of the human with the non-human, the threshold that is the space of becoming more oneself and more than oneself.

The characters of Colonel Moon and Zao are not simply North Korean enemies of the Western free world. They are rogues within North Korea itself, in rebellion to the authority of General Moon, father and leader of North Korea. The problem seems to be that Colonel Moon was educated in the West, at Oxford and Harvard, an education that he refers to sarcastically as “a major in Western hypocrisy.” Bond replies with sarcasm, “from your modest collection of cars I would never have guessed,” followed by a pan-shot of many expensive race cars.

Bond does not try to deny or refute Western imperialism; he just points to Colonel Moon's loss of right to make such criticism since he has to some degree acquired a taste for Western things (which is not quite the same as having Western tastes). Colonel Moon's evil nature is set up as a matter of self-betrayal, which parallels the betrayal of

father, fatherland, and humanity at large. The anti-imperialist critique has easily been reduced to a charge of hypocrisy which targets the foundation of Moon's identity, implicitly insisting on identity as the proper foundation of political antagonism.

After his initial battle with Bond leaves him supposedly dead, Moon's face is destroyed. He goes to a DNA-conversion laboratory hidden in a medical clinic in Cuba in order to achieve the perfect disguise—alteration of his body into that of a white man by appropriating the DNA of a white body, which is presumably then discarded somewhere, dead. There is never the tiniest hint that this modification causes him any psychological trauma, no identity crisis. He seems to revel in his disguise, becoming a flamboyant media-playboy in England, putting on outrageous stunts every chance he gets. This racial cyborg does not appear through conventional machine materiality—chrome and wires—but through the literal substitution of Asian body with white body, exchanging Will Yun Lee for Toby Stephens. A simple matter of casting generates the greatest special effect, a cheap trick and a political one too. The only side-effect of the racial alteration is insomnia and loss of the ability to dream. Perhaps the abrupt technological becoming-white ends the endlessness of the American dream itself.

General Moon, on the other hand, is a Cold War man, a truly non-Western figure, but a common man, an honorable opponent to Bond. He shares a common humanity with Bond through their valuing of human life and desire to maintain a status quo in the balance of world powers. He gave his son a Western education so that he might become a bridge between worlds. Instead, it seems that Moon has simply gone mad. Unable to handle the pleasurable excesses of Western culture, he has become obsessed with gaining ultimate power in order to unite Korea under Northern rule, pushing events toward

endgame. His desire for re-unification, however, is clearly a superficial pretense, since he has no rational strategy for maintaining sovereignty or dealing with the consequences of antagonizing the rest of the world. He is a madman with fantasies of national attachment. What he does have with undoubted sincerity is intense feelings about the power of Icarus (an imitation secondary sun, weapon of mass destruction and source of raw energy). He expresses desire and fascination for the mechanical arm-piece that will allow him to control the weapon as if it were a part of his own body.

Colonel Moon was always already traitorous when he received a Western education and proved merely that he had the *capacity to assimilate*, to become not only a first-rate imitation (model minority) but politically a fanatic, without grounding in “proper” politics. He is a resentment-driven shadow of the white man he hates only as a step toward hating everyone else. Identity has become spectral, no longer tied to his once Korean surface, the social interface between inside and outside, nor given anew by the new white surface he acquires, which is a mere means to power. Social identity has been lost to pure reflexivity, the continued impulse, the energy in circuit, body in motion, of the grasp for power—itsself nothing but a larger arm, a stronger hand, with the power to strike a blow that can kill one million people instead of one individual foe.

The inhuman nature of Colonel Moon slips easily into the nonhuman. His desire for power is his desire for cyborg transformation is his desire for becoming. Becoming is betrayal and makes one politically a rogue. Colonel Moon betrays race pride. Here Orientalism is rearticulated as postcolonialism in white face. Whereas the stereotype of the Oriental despot of old had no regard for the sanctity of an individual human life, Colonel Moon has no respect for the identity given to him in the properly organized

political arena (as his father does). Instead, he displays possession of a techno-soul, a susceptibility to becoming or technological transformation. Whereas evil sees technology in large size and as a way to gain total power, good sees technology in terms of gadgetry, always human-sized, clever and mildly humorous (exploding bubble gum), only useful when employed by a clever agent and only used to extricate himself from sticky situations, in self-defense.

Likewise, the nonhuman slips easily into the inhuman.¹⁰⁷ Love of technology, technicity, becoming itself, is a sign of one's lack of humanity. The process leaves no trace of machinery on the body of the altered man. It is flesh which is the mark of machine, the merging of "white" bodily codes with raw damaged "Asian" flesh, a wild fantasy of technology made legible by the cognitive socialized perception of racial identity. Rather than appearance of metallic materials and wiring, it is the general perception of racial difference which makes possible the cinematic actualization of the process of total racial/bodily alteration.

The character Zao, Colonel Moon's right hand man, provides an intermediary image. Bond breaks into the lab room as Zao is undergoing mutation. Zao's transformation is interrupted at a middle stage. He jumps up, bare-chested, face whitened (not yet Caucasianized), eyes a pale blue, no hair on his head or face, and rather glamorously studded with diamond on the right side of his face (a remnant of his initial violent encounter with Bond). This is a body without its troubling racial markers, yet masculine (and of course that is part of how the erasing of race is visualized here). Zao gives us an image of the technological process itself and even in medias-res there are no

¹⁰⁷ Kris Olds and Nigel Thrift, "Cultures on the Brink: Reengineering the Soul of Capitalism—on a Global Scale."

breakages in the skin, blood infusions, injections. There is only this bare image of a face deracinated by capital. The machine does not leave traces of its own materiality on the body, usually symbolized by chrome, but of global capital itself, here the diamonds. His face provides an image of the passage between identities provided by capital in a global frame.

Now let us turn to Bond himself. During the extended credit sequence, Bond is captured by the North Koreans, imprisoned for over a year and tortured in a highly stylized, eroticized fashion by a female North Korean agent (incidentally the only Asian female in the film), to the music of Madonna. The ever cool and impeccably dressed Bond becomes nearly unrecognizable. This man emerging from North Korea has long shaggy hair and beard, is dirty, emaciated, beaten, dressed in torn clothes, and hobbles, a little hunched over and cringing in reflexive fear. Who is this man? Next we see him in a sealed medical room, undergoing examination by sophisticated bio-scans, which reveal that he was infected with scorpion poison and revived with antidote, repeatedly taken to the verge of biological death and brought back. Miraculously, though, his *internal organs* remain unaffected (only his liver is damaged, which proves that this is indeed our man Bond, drinker of martinis). When Bond is visited by M., we learn that she is not happy to see him alive. In fact, his survival is the very reason for suspicion of his loyalty. Because of the possibility that he was leaking information under torture, the British Secret Service decided to buy his release by exchanging him for Zao, a price that M. and now Bond himself feel was too high to pay. Why didn't he take the poison as he was trained to do? Why didn't he die? When he "chose" to live, he betrayed his 007 identity and now that status has been officially revoked. In one sense, the agent Bond is now dead. The man

who remains is without official identity, stateless, a refugee of sorts, who goes to the Chinese agents in Shanghai to ask for help.

Bond has been reduced to the human level. Stripped of 007 status and not recognized by employer and nation, his political life only remains as individual feelings and commitment to saving lives and saving the world once again. This unaffected capacity to “do the right thing” is what proves his basic humanity. In a sense, it is Bond who experiences the crisis of identity absent in cyborg Moon/Graves. Bond demonstrates his undamaged access to the psychic ground from which to forge a human identity. Through a seamless, unquestioning ability to act from those human motivations, he is able to regain his social identity and political standing by the end of the film.

If Moon figures the loss of embodied identity through fantastic identification and capacity for assimilation (which renders him an Anti-American fanatic with no recognizable political ground, the other face of the unassimilable Asian immigrant in America), and Zao the technicity of becoming equal to capital itself, then Bond manifests the psychological ground and ability to act which make possible a resolution of the human and citizen even through guerilla warfare. The work of being-human is thus divided into the inhuman Moon, the nonhuman Zao and the human Bond. The fearsome uncontrollability and contagion of becoming has been somewhat dissipated through this structural division of types of beings, a racial fantasy. The political work of opposing evil for the sake of humanity is made possible by such divisions. Race certainly has much to do with how such divisions are made, but it is no longer a simple matter of ‘white hero and his others’ for anyone, including those attempting to articulate anti-imperialist

critiques. *Die Another Day* instead gives us a “domain of uncertain doubles and partial deaths.”¹⁰⁸

The question remains, if we are not to find our being in that exchange of glances which offers no resting point of wholesome mutual recognition but only a solidifying of hostile faces, then where should we look to understand what we are and why we continue to identify ourselves at all? If the activity of worrying about what we used to be and what we might become is itself the very force at the heart of projection and idealism, then what is it we should do with our analytic minds?

We might now ask, again, what is the meaning of global projection, of that brief moment when Cha’s heart was already flying toward the screen of the world? What was it he desired? What imagined pleasure drew him? Is it possible to relinquish the fascist “pleasure of being seen, of placing oneself in view of the all-seeing eye of the State” and yet hope to be seen?¹⁰⁹ Can one wish to love and be loved by World? In other words, is there a cultural global (rather than a cultural production that financializes the globe), or does that spaciousness still retain the vertigo, the agoraphobic response to a suspended time before reterritorialization of the globe as such will have taken place?

In what version of *Die Another Day* could Cha In-Pyo have played? A global projection not bound between the face-off of nations seems impossible today, yet this virtual possibility, this potential flashes before us for a moment through the informational milieu of the *Die Another Day* controversy.

The trope of the fold in *Die Another Day* thus shows us that the model of political affiliation articulated around the distinctions of colonial/anti-colonial, West/non-West,

¹⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 121.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Elsaesser, “Primary Identification and the Historical Subject: Fassbinder and Germany,” 545.

are themselves subject not only to ambiguity of cultural signs but more significantly the non-commensural yet intimately proximate duality and multiplicity of folding. Thus we see that the politics of resistance produced by Asian American discourse, framed within a minority American history, is neither augmented nor negated by global postcolonial political discourse.¹¹⁰ Rather, I would argue that the politics of Asian American cultural production, including *White Badge* and *Die Another Day*, demonstrate the difficulty and unavoidability of attempting to negotiate such a paradoxical situation involving “the hyphen and the interval.”

¹¹⁰ Peter X. Feng, *Screening Asian Americans*, 186.

THREE

 CUT

The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought that is life. Not that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life.

– Deleuze¹¹¹

In this chapter, I analyze novels by Lawrence Chua and Dai Sijie, *Gold by the Inch* (1999) and *Mr. Muo's Traveling Couch* (2005), in terms of what I will call the literary technique of the non-narrating cut, an adaptation of Gilles Deleuze's notion of the 'irrational cut' in cinema. Whereas the cut was first used to ensure the continuity of the film narrative, with montage the cut appears as an interstice between sets that are not continuous at all. The irrational cut does not imply the continuity of two sets but rather their discontinuity, their non-commensurability; the irrational cut points to an irrational that is "proper to thought," constitutes the "unthought of thought." Chua's and Dai's novels use textual cuts to get at what is ethnic about ethnicity but cannot appear in a subjective, autobiographical, narration. Autobiographical narration can be used not to present a different self, an ethnic self, but to explore self-differentiation, which is an essentially temporal process. Furthermore, thinking about ethnicity in relation to globalization involves the yoking and exchange of non-commensurables, which these texts perform through the trope of the cut. Narrative chronotopes such as juxtaposition or coincidence also work to bring together unrelated things, but they are nevertheless

¹¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 189.

inserted into a continuity guaranteed by the time of the narrating subject.¹¹² The textual cut, however, does not work through such chronotopes but rather by entering discontinuity and multiplicity into what otherwise could appear to be a coherent narrative subject. In Chua's and Dai's novels, the textual 'cuts' that splice together discursive incommensurables are not smoothed out by subjective narrative coherence but rather are used to foreground crises of the subject's ability to write as a putatively ethnic subject. In fact, it is in the very body and mind of the one who attempts to narrate, interpret, analyze, that the cut occurs. It is at the site of narratorial agency that the non-narrative cut draws its line, splicing apart *and* together, without suturing.

In Chua's and Dai's novels, the cut takes place in English. There are many cuts into the English language of their novels. The cut refigures translation and conversion in these novels such that the language, the interpretive methodology and narrative subjectivity in particular, are not as culturally whole as it might at first appear but marked by hairline fractures, non-narrating cuts.

What do we mean by the phrase "language of globalization"? The short answer would be English. But what are the implications of thinking of English as the language of globalization? We know that English accompanies the movement of transnational capital, establishing a managerial class, much like the interpreters in colonial administration, except that here English is no longer firmly rooted in Anglo-American culture and there is no clear cut distinction between natives and native-speakers. English is not white but it circulates with capital, with technology, across diverse sites with various types of

¹¹² See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*.

postcolonial or other relations to English.¹¹³

However, this still does not fully answer the question of what is a language of globalization. What is a language with global functions? What language produces globalization? (How does globalization produce language?) And here too we might say English, but once we consider a type of English that is a language of globalization, we need to be ready to accept that this English is and is not at all continuous with the history of the English language as we think of it from within the discipline of English literary studies in the U.S. This global English is fed not only by Anglo-American cultural traditions but also by both the processes of globalizing and the places that get globalized. In other words, English must be considered in the context of not only various cross-cultural relations but also cross-epistemological and cross-medial.

Here I would like to suggest that, along with English, we consider the language of theory. Specifically I'd like to look at certain dialects of Marx and Freud which function not as locally grown Western philosophies with a global reach, but rather as a set of rhetorical tactics that code the global not only as an analytic manipulation of the relation of local and global, particular and universal, but also as a multiplicity of affective relations. So the language of globalization might also be invoked in the sense of what analytic and rhetorical tactics are available for our use in the project to articulate rationales for globalization, insist on global becomings, as well as to experiment with what kinds of living might be occurring via global becomings that nevertheless seem to remain out of the purview of globalization proper. Marx and Freud as global analytics

¹¹³ See Suresh Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*; Alistair Pennycook, *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*; Christian Mair, ed. *The Politics of English as a World Language*.

might provide, like a rotting log, a suggestion of rooted structures now available in its decompositional state, to other types of production.

CUT ONE: Traveling Analyst

In Dai Sijie's novel, *Mr. Muo and the Traveling Couch*, we have a traveling couch and an itinerant analyst.¹¹⁴ What happens when the couch is wrenched out of Freud's office in Vienna or London and set into motion along certain global circuits, such as a young Chinese scholar's travels to Paris? Mr. Muo has received a competitive grant to study a dead alphabetic language once in use along the Silk Road (a reference to an earlier globalizing force, route, and language now dead). Muo spends ten years in Paris not studying that dead language but in (free) analysis and engaged in self-study of Freud, Lacan, and a little Foucault and Derrida (interesting ideas but it is Freud who is his master). Muo returns to China a decade later on a "mission of salvation," as he thinks of it, to release his beloved from prison. "Volcano of the Old Moon" as she is called has been imprisoned by Judge Di, who is known for his appetite for virgins. And Muo has set himself the task of releasing volcano by finding a virgin for Judge Di. Muo is on a quixotic quest, armed only with the language of Freud.

On this quest—and it's already odd, and oddly apropos, to think of an analyst as being on a quest—Muo's deployment of psychoanalysis and specifically dream interpretation is not doctrinaire, as he thinks, but tactical, situational, improvisational. In fact, he is in stiff competition with fortune-tellers, sorceresses, con-men, bureaucratic functionaries, and even Judge Di's sudden ability to come back from the dead in the

¹¹⁴ The original text was published in French by Gallimard with the title *Le Complexe de Di* in 2003. It also won the Prix Femina that year.

morgue. Interpretation, divination, lies, scams, and any other number of uses of the language of interpretation abound. This is Freud in the global marketplace. And the market is already over-saturated. The search for virgins is contrived and forced, as is the “opening” of new markets, new values.

The question for me is most definitely not whether psychoanalysis is or is not valid, useful, or true. Quite often we see Muo offer a very banal Oedipal reading to powerful figures, such as sorceresses, with the result of immediately vanquished their threat, as they become absorbed in self-reflection and self-analysis. Getting people into looking at themselves is quite an effective way of distracting them and making one’s own getaway. But again, this shows us that psychoanalysis is not the master decoder but one moment of impromptu decoding and recoding that serves a purpose within a larger unified schema of meaning-making or rather meaning-chasing.

Thus I would ask what is it that psychoanalysis is productive of, today, in various places, in connection to globalization? At first Muo makes a banner for himself and peddles his trade as interpreter of dreams. In order to secure a place for himself at an open marketplace, he interprets the dream of the woman who runs the place and by luck, or something, he ends up predicting something that comes to pass. She thus gives him a permit. This success, however, makes him more than ever like a fortune-teller. He is in stiff competition with fortune-tellers and must constantly account for why he is different from and better than them. However, he later then finds out that she had made up that dream in order to help him show his skill, because this old lady is in love with him! He says that made up dreams nevertheless function in the same revelatory way. At one point he dreams another man’s dream and solves the mystery of a murder—or perhaps gets an

innocent man thrown into jail after a forced confession.

We see that psychoanalysis is not the framework with which to see what is going on globally, but in looking at its journey, in looking at the traveling couch, we can see how global systems of analysis actually travel and circulate and adjust to function in diverse situations. We can also see that interpretive language is never clearly spatially laid out in relation to the structures and layers it purports to uncover (analyst, couch). Instead, it is itself deeply embedded in those layers such that it is impossible to say which is outside, inside, top, bottom, surface, depth.

In his first meeting with the French analyst, in which he speaks in Chinese, not yet knowing French, memories of the Cultural Revolution suddenly arise and put him in hysterical laughter, which the analyst does not understand. Throughout the book, memories of the Cultural Revolution arise here and there but are never remarked on. They form an undercurrent not picked up by Muo's interpretive attention.

His emphasis on dreams about ladders, about castration anxiety and impotence, are overexposed on the surface. His first customer in China is a crippled man who tells him a dream which Muo interprets as impotence. The man begins to beat him with his crutch for mocking an old crippled man's infirmity. The interpretation is literally a joke because it interprets what is only too visible and obvious. In another instance, he explains to someone that Freud revealed the truth. What truth? The truth of sex! The man laughs hysterically. Everyone in China seems to be able to see that the emperor is naked. Pointing that out has no particular force of intervention. The Cultural Revolution was itself a vast machinery of exposing which never needed any secrets to expose—the process of exposing itself produces the secret.

The quality of being all too exposed is also something that has to do with globalization. And the language of globalization is one that must address this exposure rather than work to expose. Dream interpretation includes within it techniques of analyzing words and the multiple origins of meanings, but interpretation itself cannot be subject to translation anymore than it can do without it.

This question about psychoanalysis is Muo's own. When he first reads Freud in China, he encounters Freud's description of a dream about a ladder, which gives him a shock of recognition. The shock gives this "four-eyes" the determination to defiantly turn on the lights after the curfew and read Freud's text out in the open and light. He wonders, however, "whether Freud had penetrated the meanderings of Muo's own brain to witness one of its recurrent spectacles, or indeed whether he wasn't by astonishing coincidence dreaming the very dreams that Freud had dreamt before him, in another place" (Dai 11). This is our question too. Does the text of Freud have the capacity to penetrate into other minds, very different minds, or is this an instance of a very literal similarity, a coincidence, that the same dream was simply dreamt in different places. In other words, is psychoanalysis inherently global? Or, how do we account for coincidence and similarities which are not included in a global schema? More directly to the point: Is the global to be understood as a form of universal? Or is the global a looser type of connectivity which is as much characterized by coincidence and merely morphological, literal, similarities as by any deep structure?

At one point in the text, Muo himself begins to doubt his master Freud. "Ever since setting foot in China, Muo, the most doctrinaire of disciples, has faced looming doubts about his psychoanalytic vocation" (Dai 84-5). Muo's deployment of Freud's

language (German, French, English) in China strikes him as more outlandish than truthful.

“He has allowed himself to wonder, Could it be that the loves of Volcano of the Old Moon, past or present or future, including myself are really nothing but substitutes for her father? And now, Why would Judge Di want to savour a slashed red melon, if he truly feared it might cost him his penis?” (Dai 85). The language of truth becomes a mockery of itself.

The text raises questions about the use of psychoanalysis in textual interpretation, the notion of the reader as an interpreter of a text. We might be tempted to see in Muo a figure of the semi-foreigner who is faced with a text that seems decipherable but only according to certain global schemas, such as psychoanalysis and not according to others. There has been an exchange: Freud for other kinds of decoding abilities. Muo realizes that “since leaving China he has lost the ability to make distinctions as he once could” (Dai 158). Previously he could have engaged in extensive interpretation simply by listening to the sounds of slippers traveling down the stairs: “what the slippers are made of (plastic? leather? rubber?), the nature of the wearer (man, woman, timid, violent, tender, stern), and sometimes even the person’s mood. (When someone was accepted as a Communist Party member, for instance, that person’s footwear always changed its tune, seeming for a long time afterward to mimic the strains of the Chinese national anthem.)” (Dai 158-59). The references to the materiality of the shoes, the sounds of the footsteps, suggest a quality of lived and affective knowledge that is not simply local, in an abstract sense, but of a different order. Muo who is quite a foot-fetishist himself, is here faced with the incomprehensible multiplicity of moving feet.

The traveling couch then seems to be presenting us with a discourse that produces globalization. This is a machine on the move. It asks us to look at what can be produced literally as values, markets. Discursive distribution in this novel also travels on economic distribution.

In Dai's novel, the cut works to bring together discourses, histories, cultures, not in order to articulate a connection among them (including postcolonial opposition and global analogy), but rather to question the possibility of such linkage and to open up an exploration of what it means to make such impossible links, or rather cuts. In the introduction to his book exploring the connection between sexuality and political economy within globalization, Dennis Altman suggests, "[o]ne of the striking aspects of the burgeoning literature on globalization ... is the extent to which authors draw on serendipity as much as scholarship for their examples."¹¹⁵ Serendipity and coincidence are different ways of describing the temporal cutting utilized in attempting to articulate the global. Serendipity and coincidence, the relations of analyst and analysand, merchant and customer, analysis/interpretation and fortune-telling, are cut together in oddly disjunctive ways. These are not analogous or parallel relations but mixed together in ways that do not form connective links; they cross paths and cut into each other via serendipitous or coincidental points of contact. They do not construct a comprehensive narrative of globalization so much as reveal just how asymmetrical and non-commensurable are the things—thoughts, ideas, persons, subject-positions—that can be exchanged in a global market.

¹¹⁵ Dennis Altman, *Global Sex*, xi.

CUT TWO: Circulating Marxist

In Lawrence Chua's novel *Gold By the Inch*, we see the other side of the cut, as the economic travels on psychic circuits. Economic relations, especially currency exchange, are re-formulated, recoded as psychological. The novel will explore how national currency is linked to national and sexual identities.¹¹⁶ The novel begins with a simple equation: "U.S. \$1 = 25 baht" (Chua 5). Is this equation the equivalence of a statement of identity? Could "=" and "is" predicate the same action? How do circulation and exchange implicate identity and subjectivity? Does U.S. \$1 = American I?

Chua poses the question of whether we can think ethnic life today outside of, or "before," the commodification of ethnicized bodies: "Was there life before the body became an equation?" (Chua 19). This is a different way of questioning authenticity as the standard for assessing narratives about ethnic subjects. It also alerts us to the fact that this narrative will not itself be taking us to a "before" time, which it finds difficult to imagine. There is no past in this text prior to the current global economy in which we measure relative values by "One U.S. dollar equals" (Chua 19).

Chua thinks through questions of identity by cutting together/apart the discourse on identity and the discourse on value. I say 'cutting' rather than 'bringing' in order to avoid precisely the naturalized movement implicit in the latter and to invoke the temporal relation of the former that can juxtapose—allow us to think together—non-commensurable things, here identity and value, or the discourse on ethnicity and the discourse on capital. As the narrator says, "In those days, I was almost obsessed with my value" (Chua 57). Not only does identity have a value (an exchange value, market value),

¹¹⁶ See Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, eds., *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure*; and Arnaldo Cruz-Malave and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations*.

but it undergoes processes of valorization in the movement of bodies (migration for labor and travel for leisure) and exchange of commodified identities (sex tourism targeting racialized sex worker and domestic partnership seeking a lover, or “decorative companion” among ethnicized immigrants).¹¹⁷

The second layer is about equity. Depending on how the word is used, it can mean cash value or justice. Anyone observing us from a distance might believe there was a certain amount of both involved in being his decorative companion. If nothing else, and I know this sounds mercenary, I got a lot of free plane tickets out of it. (Chua 55)

Travel in *Gold by the Inch* is the movement through which identity is valorized and, in this sense, identity behaves like capital, differentiating itself in circulation between original and surplus values (or original and modified/augmented identities). It is not that one’s identity keeps changing so much as that the value of one’s identity changes. This change is not an individual process of becoming but a constant fluctuation of points of view and differential positions. Chua seems to suggest that identity might circulate, as value does, and self-valorize from “original” value of self to an increased magnitude of self-worth.

Identity is not only a commodity but also something that circulates like capital and like capital has a life, an auto-subjective life. (Without this capacity of identity to circulate and self-valorize, we couldn’t produce the kinds of narratives we produce about the ethnic subject’s identity—origin, addition, multiplicity, etc.) Such an auto-subjectivity would complicate the telling of an ethnic subject’s autobiographical tale. Chu’s novel is interesting in that it does not only thematize the commodity-fetish of ethnic identity but additionally attempts to use narration as itself a type of movement in

¹¹⁷ “Chinese New Year thus takes on a typical dualistic Western face. Preserve the form of the old in the context-content of the new; this is what *decoration* means.” (Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, 102.)

which exchange and circulation can occur. Thus in *Gold by the Inch* the narrating subject cuts back and forth between “I” and “you.” Am “I” telling the story or are “you”? Thus, the telling of this autobiographical tale will not secure a unified subject. We might say here, following Deleuze that “‘I is another’ [‘Je est un autre’] has replaced Ego=Ego.”¹¹⁸

To say “back and forth,” however, is a bit misleading. In fact, both pronouns “I” and “you” seem to move through different bodies, consciousnesses, points of views, or subjectivities. The movements of the pronouns between “you” and “I” through these multiplicities generate what I would describe as a narration in circulation. This description is metaphoric but not only metaphoric. Certainly it is metaphoric in that it describes how a literary technique makes perceptible to the reader processes which are not themselves literally contained within textuality. As the “I” and “you” recur, it is ambiguous whether the repetition is also a subject’s return. This generally seems not to be the case. The uncertainty, if not outright impossibility, of return is directly connected with valorization. In the language of ethnic identity, the fact that one cannot return home signals the complexification, expansion, elaboration of identity that has occurred along one’s journey away from ‘home.’ Home is only an arbitrary point of comparison, an origin that points to surplus. However, the circulation of identity and subjectivity, which has real value (“I got a lot of free plane tickets out of it”), moves in part through cultural forms, such as literature. In this limited sense, the description of narrative circulation is not metaphoric. In the novel a pronoun functions as a variable that “performs cuts or takes points of view on a movement of particularization.”¹¹⁹ “I” and “you” might thus be thought of as “cuts, points of view, or differential positions.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 133.

Chua invites us to read *Gold by the Inch* through political economy.

In those days, I was almost obsessed with my value. If I could have asked strangers what they thought it was without sounding indelicate, I would have. I had just started school and was studying economics. I made it through the first year and then dropped out. I remember getting through Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* but really wanting to read his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Economists explain how production takes place in relations between classes of people. But they never explain how those relationships evolve in the first place. The Holy Qur'an says no man should bear the burden of another. Man can have only what he strives for. Maybe it is as simple as that: Don't write checks with your mouth that your ass can't cash. But I was never really a prostitute. No. I would never count the money left on top of my clothes. I was more of a worthy companion, someone who knew the prices and the categories had already been fixed. Someone who couldn't be bothered to haggle over spare change. (Chua 57)

The narrator studied economics before dropping out of school. He read *The Wealth of Nations* but wanted to read *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He wants to know how economics relates to ethics, the affective. He knows how "production takes place in relations between classes of people" but wants to know how those relationships first evolved. How do the social values, the social structures evolve along material lines? He then thinks about his own identity and the distinction between prostitute and "worthy companion." A prostitute would count the money received, would make sure that he has been paid his price. As a worthy companion, however, he doesn't count the money, doesn't haggle over his price. He doesn't just have price whose payment he must enforce; he has a distinct worth; he is a *worthy* companion. He knows that the prices and categories have already been fixed. His value is given by external determinants beyond his control. He is concerned with his value not the actual "spare change" he can get.

¹¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 368.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

If we then look at Marx, theorist of capital, might we see in the descriptions of the process of valorization of values something that will help us to understand Chua's narrator and narration? Marx makes a distinction between the circulation of commodities and the circulation of capital.

The simple circulation of commodities—selling in order to buy—is a means to a final goal which lies outside circulation, namely the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of needs. As against this, the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The movement of capital is therefore limitless.¹²¹

As the conscious bearer [*Träger*] of this movement, the possessor of money becomes a capitalist. His person, or rather his pocket, is the point from which the money starts, and to which it returns. The objective content of the circulation we have been discussing—the valorization of value—is his subjective purpose, and it is only in so far as the appropriation of ever more wealth in the abstract is the sole driving force behind his operations that he functions as a capitalist, i.e. as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will.¹²²

A prostitute puts a commodity—his body, pleasure, etc—into circulation, but a “worthy companion” also holds onto a kind of subjectivity that circulates, like capital, purely for the valorization of its value. He doesn't know his value. One always knows one's price, but one's value? His value has to do with his ethnic identity, his decorative value. This is a value in the subjective world, values of the subject. He is the angel, the beauty—poor, brown, pretty. “As decoration, I wasn't always able to articulate my value, but Jim knew it intrinsically” (Chua 57). What is that worth? It varies depending on location: New York, Paris, prison, Bangkok, Penang. On his return to Bangkok, he finds that his value has changed. A change in value is inevitably linked to a change in identity. As he travels, different locations and different types of movements (Malaysia to U.S., U.S. to Europe,

¹²¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, 253.

¹²² *Ibid*, 254.

Paris to Bangkok, Bangkok to Penang) will valorize his value, creating a surplus.

Specifically it is moving from Southeast Asia to France and back, that produces the self-valorization, whereas movement within Southeast Asia alone would not produce value on the same scale: “I couldn’t easily be called Thai or Chinese or Malaysian or American, but I certainly wasn’t French” (Chua 56).

For example, in Bangkok, he is now a returnee not a local. He is a buyer in the sex market not a seller. We might think of ethnic identity like capital. It is a social value that is personified and ends with consciousness and will. A person’s subjective purpose is the valorization of his value, gaining identity, recognition (a host of economic functions, i.e. equivalences, citizenship, love). Just as the capitalist is named after capital, which is his subjectivity; the ethnic person is named after ethnic identity, which is his subjective purpose.

The independent form, i.e. the monetary form, which the value of commodities assumes in simple circulation, does nothing but mediate the exchange of commodities, and it vanishes in the final result of the movement. On the other hand, in the circulation M-C-M both the money and the commodity function only as different modes of existence of value itself, the money as its general mode of existence, the commodity as its particular or, so to speak, disguised mode. It is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement; it thus becomes transformed into an automatic subject. If we pin down the specific forms of appearance assumed in turn by self-valorizing value in the course of its life, we reach the following elucidation: capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorizes itself independently. For the movement in the course of which it adds surplus-value is its own movement, its valorization is therefore self-valorization [*Selbstverwertung*]. By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself. It bring forth living offspring, or at least lays golden eggs.¹²³

¹²³ Ibid, 255.

Value is that paradoxical thing which is always changing but not lost. This model of identity in movement which requires movement for its own life process is akin to ethnic identity. Although what is surprising in this passage is that value has subjectivity, for us it is the odd discovery that the subject too is an *automatic subject* and has value, valorizes, in circulation.

Marx implicitly refers to the identity of value, a rhetorical form that gives value an identity, so that we can track its movement and note that it doesn't merely change but increases its value. This language employs the rhetoric of identity and subjectivity. Capital is not an object that is altered but a subject whose self/body/being is altered, by itself even. At least one consequence of this is that capital gains *life*—has offspring, lays golden eggs. The narrator's recounting of his life is a tale of valorization. By movement, circulation, he is able to increase his value. He valorizes his own value, his own self. His identity identifies itself.

[I]n the circulation M-C-M, value suddenly present itself as a self-moving substance which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are both mere forms. But there is more to come: instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it now enters into a private relationship with itself, as it were. It differentiates itself as original value from itself as surplus-value, just as God the Father differentiates himself from himself as God the Son, although both are of the same age and form, in fact one single person; for only by the surplus-value of £10 does the £100 originally advanced become capital, and as soon as this has happened, as soon as the son has been created and, through the son, the father, their difference vanishes again, and both become one, £110.¹²⁴

The ethnic subject is not only the sign of postcolonial history but enters into a relation with itself, an autobiographical, auto-subjective, relation perhaps, which allows us to see original and surplus. It is not that the original is real but that it is value, the identity of

¹²⁴ Ibid, 256.

value, how it knows what it is that stays the same, and what has been capitalized. Same and different, original and surface, comparable to past and present, biographical time of a life differentiates different times of his life as different values, original and surplus.

Thong and narrator too, in synchronicity, are as one person, so the narrator thinks. He tries to imagine a relation between likes that is not self-relation. But they are not the same at all; this is/is not non-equation of itself.

Market value equates itself with real value by means of its constant oscillations, never by means of an equation with real value as if the latter were a third party, but rather by means of constant non-equation of itself (as Hegel would say, not by way of abstract identity, but by constant negation of the negation, i.e. of itself as negation of real value).¹²⁵

Abstract identity—tradition, global citizen—is not what gives value, but identity crisis, the non-equation of itself and the surplus then that can be generated. This is how identity, subjectivation work.

The narrator goes to Penang, returns to his relatives there, to the descendents of the Straits Chinese. The trope of return to native soil is another form of disequilibrium and non-equivalence.

Is this dirt or soil you're supposed to kiss when you step down from the plane? Always the return. Going back. The scenes are the same. An unchanging unmoving street with the same greasy food vendors the same dripping palms the same monkey chained to the same spot on the same impossibly green lawn. Always the same litany of smells, tastes, feelings. The same recipes handed down from generation to generation. When you go home. And then the list of fragile specialities no one can import. The same. Nothing is the same. Nothing is the way you remember it. (Chua 45-6)

Return is a part of circulation, involves a process of valorization, a movement of travel and memory. "The same. Nothing is the same." Original, surplus.

¹²⁵ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 137.

They observe me. Smile at my awkwardness, my stumbling through the language. As if they are looking at something inhabited by more than one self. More and less than one. Me and you. In the mess but not of it. (Chua 52)

More than one, capitalized, valorized self. Also less than one, because, as we've seen, the surplus of identity undermines the experience of identity. In the mess but not of it, circulation is always in but not of.

I died when I was ten and that's when you were born. Confused. Hungry. Nostalgic. Crying for attention. That's how you came into the world when the plane took off, circled Subang International Airport, and then tore off into the clouds. There was no airport in Penang then. (Chua 52)

The you and I, one leaves, one enters, an exchange.

As we have seen, Lawrence Chua's *Gold by the Inch* begins with a simple equation: "U.S. \$1 = 25 baht." The equivalence of currencies is converted into the subjective equality of "You" and "I" as narrators who share and split the writing of the text. "You" and "I" begin the narrative, with "I" initially in charge of the role of narrator and taking the dominant position relative to knowledge and speech. "You think there are no seasons here, right? Just the heat. I'm here to tell you otherwise. Even after ten years, I can still tell the difference between the days" (Chua 6). It is not that "I" knows Bangkok—after all "I" admits to having been gone for ten years—but that "I" still knows how to feel and articulate differences that would go unnoticed by "you."

Then the appearance of "he": "He's a hustler. A hooker as opposed to a whore. You know the difference, right?" (Chua 7). The "I" bullies and teases "you," questions whether "you" knows how to distinguish a hooker from a whore, again boasting of "I's" superior ability to differentiate. "I" then continues to tell his story, insisting on confessing to "you":

Do you want to hear that we met at a disco and he left his john alone to come stand next to me. That later, after the introductions were done, we went back to my hotel room and brushed our lips against each other. That it was the purest kiss I can remember, transcendent of our roles that night. ...That the next day I gave him money, but he wouldn't accept it. (Chua 7)

The story that "I" begins telling by confessing to "you" is a story about the merging of "I" and "he," "him" and "me."

Then in the next of the series of mini chapters or fragments that compose this text, the narration begins again:

Let me try again. Luk, my brother, is working here and I'm visiting. You could say my brother is a signature: the Architect. A name appended at the corners of the buildings he plans. It's been a long time since I've been back to this part of the world. We call it home, even though I was born across the border, a full day's train ride away. I've come back at Luk's invitation. There are a few hundred dollars and two credit cards in my wallet, but mostly this is Luk's party. Anyway, he is working here, and he takes me to his favorite brothel. (Chua 8)

We are now given the only definite way of addressing the originary narrating subject through the indirect title "Luk's brother." Although it is impossible to identify a single stable narrator as subject pronoun, we can satisfy our own desire for stable reference by way of Luk, the "signature," the "Architect." It is actually not possible to refer to a "narrator" as a cohesive presence in the text, for in fact the narration is undertaken by "I" or "you" in turn, and the individual consciousness inhabiting "I" or "you" constantly shifts. We might nevertheless continue to refer to "the narrator," acknowledging that we are dealing with a multiplicity of subjectivities which may or may not be unified into "Luk's brother."

In the above quoted scene, the brothel manager shows Luk and the narrator a series of projected “slides of boys on the wall.”¹²⁶ Luk is comfortable in his role as connoisseur of bodies: “This one is nice, that one is nicer” (Chua 8). But the narrator feels differently: “All of this makes me uncomfortable in ways I’ve never thought about” (Chua 8). Luk selects one, “Olé,” a nickname for “a cheap candy,” and his brother, narrating as “I” at this point in the text, identifies with Olé rather than Luk.

I feel protective of him. He’s three years younger than I am, and he’s from the south like us. I even know the small town he names, a piece of dust on the southern railway line. I ask him why he’s not in school. And there I betray our fundamental difference. I betray how long I’ve been away. What a stupid question. I promise to spend the rest of my life here in repentance, but only if I can fall in love. (Chua 9)

Luk’s brother claims a fraternal protective feeling based on biographical similarities—three years apart in age, from the same southern region, similar small towns. The “fundamental difference” appears in the fact of the narrator posing a question about why Olé is not in school; he doesn’t know or has forgotten the differentiating factor of material conditions permitting or not permitting pursuit of education. The narrator then pledges lifetime penance for the crime of betraying his difference, for being different in a way that is already a betrayal, a difference that was created by his departure, and so the penance is to stay, “to spend the rest of my life here.” The penance is conditional; however, he will stay, “but only if I can fall in love.” Falling in love means that he is not returning, in stasis, but continuing to circulate, self-valorize.

Luk asks the narrator “Is there anyone you’re interested in?” (Chua 9). Luk’s question subtly turns his brother from “I” to “you” for the first time in the narration. The

¹²⁶ It is also worth noting that it was during the Vietnam War that Thailand’s prostitution and later sex tourism industry got its first push, as 700,000 American G.I.s took leave in Bangkok. See Dennis Altman, *Global Sex*, 11.

narrator suggests that he is interested in “him,” and “he” is subsequently named “Thong.” The “you” then begins to shift and continues to oscillate throughout the narration of the text.

I could lie here. Tell you how I earned every scar in this photo in an Armani suit and champagne haze. But why say ‘ravished’ when you can say ‘fucked up’? Anyway, I am rather fond of this shot. Besides the fact that I actually look kind of cute in this picture, what I like most about it is the feeling it gives you. You the voyeur. That you’re part of something you never had. (Chua 11)

“You” is specifically named through a generic category—“the voyeur.” “You” is looking at a photo that “I” is also looking at.

In the italicized passage that follows below, however, “you” becomes inhabited by a memory of a past belonging to an “I.” At the same time, “you” also seems to function in its conventional use in colloquial speech where it often stands in for the grammatically proper pronoun “one.” The colloquial “you” is an indistinct subject category that catches both “I” and “one.” On the one hand, “you” becomes the subject, standing in for the “I” rather than a direct address to the figure of a distant or absent addressee, or specifically to us the reader; on the other hand, the abstract addressee indicated by “you” is a general category including everybody, every “one.”

Before you leave the apartment for the last time. Before the taxi shuttles you across day-old snow to the airport. Before you step on the plane, you know you have left something behind. You feel it nagging at you even as the plane pushes up and nudges you into sleep. You sort through the things you have packed up in a cardboard box. Books. Clothes. A telephone. Gathering dust in a storage room. Then you remember. It’s him. You left him behind. Someone you thought you could never leave. You push the back of your head farther into the scratchy paper pillowcase behind you. Farther into uncertainty. Feel something warm. Light and terrible. But you still feel him. Inside you. You can still hear the messages he left on your machine the day you left. His voice, pleading first. Then angry. Agitated that he still wanted you back.
(Chua 11, italics in original)

In the airplane, the narrator is moving “farther into uncertainty.” “He” is “inside you.” “I” “you” and “him” all are cut together.

The narration then takes up the perspective of “he” and what “he” knows about “you.” “You” now seems to be more explicitly objectified rather than colloquially subjectified.

How could he know so much about you? There is no mistaking your profile glimpsed from the front table at the Milk Bar. This face held in a cradle made of uncalloused hands. Like a face you’ve seen hundreds of times. Brown and tired. No one will address you as anything but a returning son. That is, until you open your mouth. You wish your syntax was a slab of clay. Wet and blank. Ready to be engraved. But your voice already betrays ruin and impurities. A few casual encounters, the man cutting papayas on the street, the woman ladling soup over noodles, will look surprised when you pick over certain words in their speech that you can’t remember. (Chua 12)

After having been mis-identified as one of the nation’s young elite, a “returning son” who speaks with “arrived English,” the narrating voice here points out the betrayal of “your voice.” “You” is marked foreign when he opens his mouth to speak to random people he meets on the street in Thai, “their speech that you can’t remember.” The foreign voyeur, “you,” is not unrelated then to the foreignness that the narrator too has acquired through his travels.

Then a space in the text, bigger than the usual line spacing, a more visible gap, followed by three terse sentences that introduces “we” to the subject position and returns “you” to the distant addressee: “Oh, just one thing. We don’t say brothel here. We say bar” (Chua 12). “We” can be identified by diction, and in so far as “I” can still pick out the right words, he can articulate himself as part of a “we.” But the previous paragraph suggests that this is a “we” that is not as easily invoked in speech as in writing, in

English.

Then the narration returns to “I” and tells the story of “I’s” meeting with Thong. “You” becomes in this passage an imaginary address to Thong. We, the readers, who are always somewhat tempted to identify with the seemingly externally directed address of “you” in a first-person narration, become merged with the imaginary Thong. “I” and Thong stand together, holding hands in front of Thong’s manager.

At twenty-three—would you believe this has never happened to me before? I want to tell him a lot of things. I want to say: I’ve held that job before. Or something like it anyway. How do you think I came up with the plane fare? You think I come over here every year like some chinky dentist’s son? I worked hard to get back here. I want to tell him: This job will take you nowhere. But why kid ourselves when we’re living proof of a bigger truth. This job will take you everywhere.

At twenty-three—would you believe I’ve never been with anyone like him before and it feels like I’ve been with too many? I get restless, counting and remembering. What do I mean by that, like him? Like *me*.

At twenty-three—would you believe I’m paying him or, more accurately, Luk is paying him. For what? To hold my hand. To escort me around to our favorite bars and discos. To play with the revolving doors at Peppermint, to disappear for two minutes and come back with a rose for me. To tell me he loves me. To conspire on a clean mattress. All in one night. To kiss me, like we do here, barely touching his face to mine, inhaling deeply. (Chua 13-4)

The identification of the narrator with Thong, the identification of “I” with “him,” puts Thong in the position of “you.” No longer a distant you but a “you” that is also “me.” Thong stands with him as so much purchased flesh, yet the narrator instantly thinks that they are similar in having, or having had, the same “job,” as he puts it. In the encounter of buyer and seller, the narrator identifies as former seller with Thong now as current seller. That they *share* this job is an identification that can only occur in the context of a specific purchase taking place in the present, but the sharing can only occur in an alignment of past and present through the abstract categorization of “this job.” The narrator then

questions the equivalence between himself and Thong permitted by the job and contrasts it with his individual biographical history in which he has never been with anyone “like him.” The narrator quickly questions his own comparisons, “What do I mean by that, like him? Like *me*.” The question about equivalence arises out of “counting and remembering,” rhetorically linking the structure of memory with numerical equations. How does the metaphoric linkage of the narrator and Thong, “I” and “him,” “you” and “me,” connect to equations of memory and equations of labor/value? Whereas David Mura describes an encounter with the uncanny in his first moment in Tokyo, the faces that looked “like me,” that encloses him in a closed circuit, Chua’s “like me” is not an expression of similitude, the surface of the face, but their relative positions in the market exchange of fleshly values, their “jobs.”

Then another passage typographically set apart and narrating to or as “you” a detailed story about an encounter between a twelve year old boy and an older foreign man on a train. The narrative mode permitting the narrator to confess in an accusatory address to “you,” a direct but indefinite address, permits him to objectify the addressee while also putting the addressed object into the subject position. This second-person narrative turns what appears to be a private individual memory into an open point of identification and a mode of objectification of readers through identification. Identification is thus shown in the narrative rhetoric to be a process of objectification.

You were not born in a garden. But you replay the scenarios of creation and lost innocence over and over again. Even knowing that from where you came there wasn't far to fall. Somewhere on the way down, it is raining and you are twelve. You cut the last few periods of school and take the train home. ... He is in an unimaginative gray suit with chalk stripes. His hand is in his lap, and in the window you can see he is kneading his crotch. You turn to him and ask Can I help you? but deliver it perhaps a little too aggressively. ...

...Can't believe your luck, can you, mister? He reaches for your pants you push his hand with the wedding ring away. No. Just let me blow you. But the ammonia is getting to you. Let's go somewhere else and do this. Your place? he asks. You laugh. My mom's at home, are you crazy? You know this motel. Will he spring for a room? He thinks about it for a while. Sure. You go back to your separate seats...

...Two minutes before your stop you sit down next to him and say it. Sorry, you say. Sorry, wrong number. You get off the train and he's right behind you as the train pulls away. Leaving you both there on the platform. I'll give you twenty. I'll give you thirty. OK, fifty. No. No way. I said, No. He is standing incredulous at the station as you walk into shuttered storefronts and gray dust. Mister: he could be dead now for all you know. The last words on his lips were numbers. (Chua 14-5, italics in original)

At the beginning of the story, the twelve year old boy seems precociously aware of his agency as a seller. He draws along the older man through a seemingly cynical world weary seduction. But at the critical moment, he stops, he says “Sorry,” “Sorry, wrong number.” A wrong number, a mis-dialed number, a communicative address sent to the wrong number. The man responds by trying to revise the number, seeking to find the right number—is it twenty? thirty? fifty? The boy walks away, leaving “mister” mumbling numbers. “Mister” is the original “he.” The boy does not name his price, he gives only a “wrong number,” leaves undetermined the question of his value. And many years later, the narrator is plagued by uncertainty as to what his value actually is. The narrator knows that identity is value from a young age. In the story about a boy’s experience on a train with a foreign traveler, we get a scene not of explicit violation but his own precocious subjectivity as capitalist, possessor of capital, not a valuable object with a price. He doesn’t sell; he *negotiates* his exchange value.

Then a return to the main narrative of the text, standard indentation, “normal” type face.

Here's what I want you to do. This is the costume I want you to wear. This is what I'm into. My thing. You know. You are young, driven by poverty like every generation to do this. But you've fallen in love with me.

We have so much in common. (Chua 15)

Does the typeface indicate the return of our original narrator, or is "I" the imagined subjectivity of "him," "Mister"? Or perhaps both merge precisely in the taking up of the subject position of "I"—the one who buys boys. You—not the voyeur or reader but a younger and poverty-driven person. Thong, although he proved not to be so poverty-driven in the end? The narrator as a young child?

What throws a wrench into the identification of the narrator and Mister is the possibility of love between the narrator and Thong. Love is the word for a mutuality that escapes the market, frustrates exchange by naming a liking between likes, too similar to be exchanged for each other, and not directly substitutable for each other because they are positioned away from each other in the empty form of exchange, of the narrator buying Thong's company.

It never occurred to you before what friendship would be like with someone who was like you. Outside the law. Now you struggle to name it. You and Thong will always face each other without terms or convenient words. You face each other with nothing to assure you about the meaning of the movement that carries you across oceans and borders. That carries you toward each other. He and you have to invent a relationship that is still formless. Have to invent a friendship outside laws, rules, and habits.... There is not even a name. This kind of crime is not included in the term *khalwat*. This kind of building is not described by the word *home*. But an idea that is not formulated in a name can still exist. It finds expression in other forms. (Chua 106)

"You and Thong" and "He and you" are given existence and expression in their movement, despite the lack of words and concepts to "assure" its "meaning."

The narrator revels in the fact that Thong doesn't take money from him in their first encounter. But in a later one, the narrator is merely wishing that Thong will not take the money that he is offered and which he always makes sure to take.

I pack the bills into the hotel stationery lightly, scribble his name on the front. I leave it tucked into the English phrase book he's brought with him. I want him to leave it behind him, but he doesn't. (Chua 15)

“Oh, the money thing. Look at me. I may have left the game this year, but do I really look like I need to pay somebody?” (Chua 21). What does it mean to leave the game? Is there a line between buying and selling, and must one always be on one side or the other? What does it mean to “look like I need to pay somebody”? What does that look like? What kind of “I” needs to “pay somebody”?

The narrator dreams that he and Thong look like brothers. “We can pass for brothers” (Chua 27). The dream of fraternity, some sort of collectivity, through love, that can create bonds beyond the market place. Such fraternity between “perfect lovers” is imagined in the image of “identical clocks.” “Perfect lovers. Two identical clocks side by side ticking time in perfect harmony” (Chua 29).

The narrator loses himself, or simply “you” loses “yourself” in front of a stand of gold jewelry where gold is sold by the inch, and in this moment of loss of self, Thong returns. “It's while wandering past the stands full of jewelry that you lose yourself for a moment.... Gold by the inch. Thong's walking ahead of you, but returns when he sees you leaning respectfully over a box of gold rings” (Chua 35).

The narrator realizes that he and Thong are not alike after all. “I” can “realize” the full value of “you” in the moment when difference is re-established, when you is “nothing like me.” They remain unexchangeable.

You were sleeping when I finished washing up and closed the door to our room. You were sleeping naked, an even gold slash in the white sheets, your penis lying dormant like an ear or a nautilus between your legs. I was suddenly overcome with fear as I realized you, whom I'd thought my twin, were nothing like me. Our difference seemed so wide in that moment, something that would never be bridged. You would never love anyone, anything, so much as I loved you now. I fell back into the bed, too scared to hold you but too tired, or high, to care. The cool sheets reached up around my sides. I felt my body dissolve into a million tiny ants, and as I hoped they would climb inside your head, devour your dreams, and bring them back to me, they defied me, growing wings and scattering across the million different points of the compass. (Chua 37)

Their difference is wide, a distance impossible to bridge, "an even gold slash." It is Thong's body which has become the unbridgeable line, the line of equation and equivalence, rather than the mobile entity passing across that line. They are no longer twins, racial identification as brotherhood as twins, no longer. As "I" experiences a crisis of alienation, his body dissolves into "a million tiny ants," which at first seem to expand the range of his body, becoming multiple, mobile, but then "they" defy "me," refusing to return to the feeling of "I" and instead dispersing "across the million different points of the compass."

In their return, the narrator and Luk also merge as "you two," returning as architect and tourist.

Perhaps if you two didn't return as architect and tourist you'd be stuck down there. Shoveling cement over wet sand. Perhaps. You dream of moving back to live, but even as the thought cakes in your throat you know that living is not possible. The tin walls you were born in have become unbearable, their comfort something to endure. The price of every air-conditioned convenience is the treachery of consciousness. Each sheltering embrace is paid for with the greasy handshake of family investments.

You step carefully over cables and tools. Remember other schedules walking. Remember that the dry season coincides with the sex tourism season here, dumb brown trash pouring in from the hills to keep their families alive during the drought. (Chua 17-8)

Being “stuck down there,” a laborer working on a construction site, is identified as the alternative life he would have had if he had stayed in Thailand or Malaysia.

The “three of us” refers to Luk, the narrator and the foreman of the construction crew working on Luk’s building.

In any other city on the planet’s surface, the three of us can pass. Pass for the city’s infrastructure. It’s only our objection at being sent to the messenger room upon arrival that distinguishes *us* from *them*. It’s only our insistence on what we think is dignity that marks us apart. All around, workers who bear only the most superficial resemblance to us maneuver in the dull sun. If they are sweating, it has been absorbed long ago by the dust caking their masks and clothes. They laugh and speak freely among themselves, as if we can neither hear nor understand what is being discussed. And the truth is, none of us can fully grasp what is being exchanged in front of us. None of us has ever learned their dialect, even though we have instinctualized our disdain for its outback Lao drawl. We know they are speaking for us when they switch to Thai. It is an awkward, unsure, and faulty Thai, but it’s a language that still lives in their mouths. For us, it has hardened into a well-rehearsed parody, a near-desperate cry to append ourselves to a place that no longer exists. For us, it is a language that is as synthetic as this potential building. As synthetic as us, the “we” to whom the decade is dedicated. (Chua 25-6)

The synthetic “us,” the “we” “to whom the decade is dedicated” might be contrasted with “He and you,” outside the law. Finally we have “You and I,” possibly the narrator and Thong, possibly all the you’s and I’s who take first breath, turn into existence, come into being with “ashes of napalm in our mouths,” through war, through catastrophe. “You and I took our first breath with the ashes of napalm in our mouths” (Chua 30).

At the farthest geographic point of his journey, the narrator says, “I found you” (Chua 107). He has found a photograph of a Nyonya, who he claims as his grandmother. This is also the farthest back he can “return” in ethnic history. Nyonya refers to the Peranakan culture of the Straits Chinese, descendents of ethnic Chinese who immigrated to Malay areas beginning in the fifteenth century.

I was wrong after all. There are no stories here. Only the images left from the stories. The stains on the mattress of history. The flow was not stemmed by the flash of the photographer's shutter, yet you have stayed behind. Stayed behind to see that the borders of your body are falling into place. Biological being. Medical statistic. Psychosexual construction. Civil entity. Legal identity. Thing. Even as your body becomes legible, the illegible Nyonya that you are is vanishing at the seams of the image. Your culture is a relic of antiquity. The only thing that remains is tradition. A dance without meaning. Keep this photograph. The sum of your blood quantum. Siamese, Teoshew, Hokkien, Hakka, Acehnese, Tamil, Sinhalese, Portuguese. All those things inside you. You inside all those things. You. A matrix. Pregnant with inconsistencies and catastrophes, delusions and discoveries. Dreams of colliding worlds. (Chua 113)

“You” and “Nyonya” contain and are contained by the fullness of all that this identity might be—eight different languages and/or ethnicities. “All those things inside you” and “You inside all those things.” What *remains* is only a “relic” and a “dance without meaning.” But there is still “You. A matrix.”

FOUR

SWITCH

[T]he conatus of the mind, that is, its power to think, is equal to and simultaneous in nature with the conatus of the body, that is, its power to act.

The more perfection a thing has, the more active and the less passive it is. Conversely, the more active it is, the more perfect it is.

– Spinoza¹²⁷

The force of globalization often figures in ethnic studies discourse through the trope of the switch, or code switching, which explains the activity produced by notions such as split, hybrid, or hyphenated subjectivities, the identity-in-crisis. It is the trope of switching which makes possible the attribution of such binary modes of subjectivity. When concepts such as interpellation are directly brought to bear on issues of ethnicity, we get an emphasis on disidentification rather than identification, which is to say an intensive form of code switching, or ethnic switching. The multiplicity that we look for in the contact zone can only be negotiated by high-speed, nimble switching among codes which do not themselves aggregate, although they can virally infect each other. Identity is then not the integration of a subject but rather the nodal point of code switching. The switch does not link, associate, connect two things, but rather switches from one to the other such that only one actually exists at one time. Political embodiment for ‘transnational Asians’ is increasingly linked to modalities of code switching. The notion of an East-West divide, at least post-1989, is less a geopolitics than a geopolitically modulated code switching. The trope of switching is often also used to invoke the

¹²⁷ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, 120 and 221.

problem of multiple loyalties, national identities, and the complex navigation of ethnic tensions. Arjun Appadurai has referred to the U.S. as itself “no longer a closed space for the melting pot to work its magic” but instead “yet another diasporic switching point, to which people come to seek their fortunes but are no longer content to leave their homelands behind.”¹²⁸

SWITCH ON: *Vietnam’s Interval of Transition*

There is a transition in society in terms of how to think about the self today, a call for a shift.

Slowing down the films becomes a way for us to address the transitional moment in the film structures as well as larger changes in power, of political figures, of political ideology, and the political subject. The U.S.’s foreign policy of ‘bringing democracy to the people’ marks the transition space—for intervention—military intervention; it is metaphor . . . and more than a metaphor.

We see the installation as a transitional moment, when all these technologies of cataloguing are becoming obsolete. Because the transitional moment is expanded and frozen, it [produces] a suspension of our thinking about something—about Vietnam or the Vietnam War—and a rearranging of what we know . . . and that’s where a new political subjectivity can arise.

- H. Lan Thao Lam¹²⁹

We wanted to create a space of suspension and in that suspension to activate thought.

- Lana Lin¹³⁰

In a similar spirit perhaps, Lin + Lam offer up a multi-medial installation of the temporality of neither a war ending (resolution, reconciliation) nor a war traumatically perpetuating but a war as it turns into memory, history, pedagogy, archive, gossip, novel,

¹²⁸ Arjun Appadurai, “Patriotism and Its Futures,” 424.

¹²⁹ Transcription from interview with Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam on Nov. 22, 2006 in Washington Heights, NY.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

film, video, television, photography, art installation, critical essay. By looking at how relationships among different media are established in *Unidentified Vietnam*, we can see how Lin + Lam are playing with the temporality of ethnicity. These collaborative visual artists push us beyond the critiques of ethnographic time, which emphasize what is wrong with anthropological teleology, by pointing to the corrective of coevalness of so-called ethnographer and native.¹³¹ Lin + Lam show us that synchronicity is an inadequate temporal model for addressing the complexities of global movements and global temporalities. By bringing together different media and posing the question of obsolescence, outmodedness, and updating, Lin + Lam show that there are always multiple temporalities which are not exactly characterized by synchronous co-existence (although that is true to an extent) so much as by the *switching* of multiple media, of multiple temporalities.¹³² This treatment of media is in fact a way of addressing the question of the ethnic body. Lin + Lam seem to be offering a presentation of multi-medial switching that shows us the interval, the movement in suspension, of a missing subject, an emerging subject.

¹³¹ See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*. Anthropological studies tend to place all societies along a single evolutionary stream of time, such that these temporal differences are able to be mapped spatially around the globe (the West and the rest). Fabian says that what is ignored and denied by the allochronic tactics of anthropological discourse is the coevalness of the communication event itself; the coevalness of anthropologist and informant is left out of the anthropological text and discourse. For Fabian it is in the transition from ethnography to anthropology, in the writing that passes from one genre to another, that synchrony becomes diachrony, that the informant is made to speak from the past to the anthropologist sitting amongst readers in the future. As he puts it, the ethnographic appears to drop out of anthropology. Through this denial of coevalness, Fabian suggests that anthropology has not only shared moral and political complicity with colonialism but also cognitive complicity in its conceptualization and instrumental use of time.

¹³² Globalization is not about synchronicity—everywhere at the same time—so much as it is about asymmetries, disjunctions, and temporal dissonances, problems of scale and zoom (or what Appadurai calls a “scalar dynamic”). We might think of global temporalities in terms of global cultural flows (Appadurai), flexibility (Ong), networks (Hardt and Negri).

Unidentified Vietnam is a presentation of an archive of South Vietnamese propaganda films currently housed at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.¹³³ Entering the gallery, one is accosted by a signage stand—similar in appearance to the one located at the entryway of the Library of Congress—displaying a 1975 newspaper clipping whose headline reads: “South Vietnam Embassy Continues to Carry on in Diplomatic Limbo.”¹³⁴ This ‘beginning’ is a *reference* to a *citation*, a newspaper article about the limbo, the suspended life, of the South Vietnamese government during the transition of power following the end of the Vietnam War and the consequent transfer of an archive of South Vietnamese political films to the U.S. Library of Congress.¹³⁵ However, this introduction does not usher us into a space for viewing the films mentioned in the article, which remain absent from the installation. Rather, it is the ‘suspended life’ of the films that animates the proliferation of references constructed by the installation. The multi-media, or perhaps inter-media, presentation of ‘suspended life’ makes apparent the implicit connection between, on the one hand, an anthropological mode of temporalizing existence and difference in the “third world” during the approach of colonial or neo-imperial power throughout the twentieth century, and, on the other hand, the conceptualization of transition and suspension *as* the ontological status of these modes of life during subsequent, temporary, withdrawals of Western powers. In the installation, the time of the interval juxtaposes the governments and nation-states lying on either side of the transfer of power and archives at the end of the Vietnam War, a moment

¹³³ *Unidentified Vietnam* was installed at Gallery 456, Chinese-American Arts Council, in New York City from September 14 to October 12, 2006.

¹³⁴ William Delaney, *Washington Star Times*, May 7, 1975.

¹³⁵ “The State Department announced last week that although the United States will not recognize any Saigon government-in-exile, it will continue temporarily to afford diplomatic status to the embassy here for assistance in dealing with refugees.” William Delaney.

of transition which does not signal the end of international conflict but a shift of violence from the international to the ‘global.’

Coevalness as a method of comparison is the other side of the myth of national unity. Chow points out that “the term ‘comparative’ is often used in tandem or interchangeably with words such as ‘diverse,’ ‘global,’ ‘international,’ ‘transnational,’ ‘cross-cultural,’ ‘planetary,’ and the like, in ways that once again conjure the signature aspiration of ‘more than one,’ of going beyond restrictive national boundaries, that has been used to define ‘world literature.’”¹³⁶ Furthermore, it is not only in anthropology but the discourse of the intellectual of critical theory that an exterior to a particular thought is projected at a spatial distance:

Although it constitutes poststructuralism’s most fundamental intervention in European thought, therefore, the theorization of time’s non-coincidence with itself—and thus of the perpetuity of signification’s postponement of referentiality—tends to a) lose its persuasiveness at those points where the seemingly open-ended time of signification is juxtaposed with the invocation of specific ‘outside’ figures, and b) take on a substantially contrary set of connotations once we go beyond the parameters of contemporary Western Europe and North America.¹³⁷

Chow thus implies that self-referentiality has not gone far enough, as it were. The self-reflexive gesture of the poststructuralist theorist does not completely remove the anthropological technique of constructing an Other at the limit-threshold of theoretical enunciation. *Unidentified Vietnam* does not install the (missing) archive into a comparative set up among the different media. Rather, it plays with self-referentiality through the relations that appear among different media.

¹³⁶ Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, 72.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

The political critique contained in suspension, as it were, within the installation of *Unidentified Vietnam* is one that addresses the political implications of theorizing, or leaving untheorized, the actual time-space of transition—not merely as *fact* but as *life*.¹³⁸ *Unidentified Vietnam* seems both invested in and willing to push the borders of critiques of ethnography launched from within the discipline of anthropology itself. To this end, they address the kinds of issues that are raised as anthropology is able to take on a second life by leaving behind colonialism and turning toward globalization. As ethnographers focus explicitly on globalization, rather than implicitly on colonization, their ethnographic subject shifts from the racialized “native” to the ambiguous subject of biopolitics and/or new media.¹³⁹ *Unidentified Vietnam* considers the bodies for whom ideological training (figured by propaganda here) was and continues to be absent or deferred (in refugee camps with only a tenuous claim on any nation-state), bodies excluded from the archive, and which at the same time are objects of hyper-exposure.

When Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus propose a “re-functioning of ethnography” which would locate the institutions of global finance as a field of research, they point to the resulting indistinction of ethnographic researcher and banking

¹³⁸ See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. “Is everything really called into question, is everything suspended, does everything truly begin all over again, to the point where it can be said that the formerly colonized recovers existence, distances himself or herself from his/her previous state? This is a false question, but one that raises questions not only about the specific nature of the present period, but also about the very possibility of changing time. Since changing time is however not really possible, we must firmly place ourselves in another space to describe our age, the age and space of *raw life*.” In order to change time one must rely on some capacity to engender new subjectivity and in the suspension subjectivity must deal directly with what we can only refer to as *life*. Thus Mbembe says that the only way we can approximate changing time is by relocating ourselves to a vantage point from which to view the present as “the age and space of raw life.”

¹³⁹ See Ong and Collier, eds., *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*; Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, eds., *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*; and Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*.

counterpart (a revision of anthropologist and his other). What the ethnographer studies is ethnography itself, in the form of the para-ethnographic within banking institutions: “the *de facto* and self-conscious critical faculty that operates in any expert domain as a way of dealing with contradiction, exception, facts that are fugitive, and that suggest a social realm not in alignment with the representations generated by the application of the reigning statistical mode of analysis.”¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, they describe the “threat of seduction” where “the researcher nearly joins the community of subjects as ethical advisor or house anthropologist.”¹⁴¹ But, in fact, it seems that the very existence of the anthropologist was always uncertain once he left the third world for global finance: “Would one have gone into anthropology if one wanted to study such people or places?”¹⁴² This attempt to move toward a “re-functioning of ethnography” pushes us to consider *ethnologically* the agency of global capitalism.¹⁴³

The relation of the political and the private has its correlate in Lin + Lam’s *Unidentified Vietnam* not in the coexistence of different social stages but in the coexistence of different modes of visual media, different capacities noted historically, all becoming obsolete. The installation gives us an assemblage which combines technologies—projector, books, magnifying glass, video projection, television, photographs—all in a low-tech installation with a hand-crafted feel to it, something like a schoolroom even. The installation’s refusal to fascinate us with an image suggests an alternative pedagogical aim. The point here is *not* the viewer’s experience as a privileged

¹⁴⁰ Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography,” 235-52.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 236.

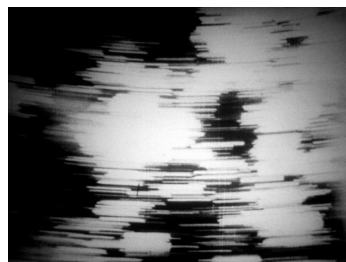
¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 236.

point of view, because in fact there is a stark scarcity of things-to-look-at. Technology is not the means of enhancing experience by giving us more to see or more to be affected by through vision. The intensity of the aesthetic experience here lies not in the human viewer so much as in the interaction of the media themselves. Human consciousness cannot bring together the elements of the installation into a synthetic experience of time. The viewer's synthetic understanding is not privileged; in fact, the viewer is left out, as it were, among the inter-media contamination, media interrupting and capturing one another. The human is in there too but not as a privileged point of view, just another body in the discourse of obsolescence.¹⁴⁴

The largest wall of the gallery features a series of twenty-four frames. These images are digitally captured still images taken from various “wipes” found in the 527 propaganda films in the Embassy of South Vietnam Collection. The twenty-four framed images index the twenty-four frames per second captured on 16mm film (the medium of the South Vietnamese propaganda films). Together these twenty-four frames thus compose spatially along the wall an interval of one second of film “wiping.”



Frame #2



Frame #5



Frame #24

Wipes are an outmoded technique of transitioning from one image to another by swishing across black and white. It is interesting to consider how we would “read” wipes today in

¹⁴⁴ See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, for a discussion of the human body as image.

the contemporary context of cuts, montage, video-editing, and digital archiving. We might read the cut back into the wipe in order to see what story about the past we are being told here.¹⁴⁵ In the digitally-rendered stills, which appear like photographs, the movement of wiping is frozen into images onto which spectators have projected all kinds of fantastic visions—ghosts, faces, maps, and the spinning globe are among some of the images ‘seen’ in these images in the manner of Rorschach blots, as exterior triggers for self-exposure and interpretation. From the point of view of the cut, the wipe is simply an old-fashioned visualization, or literal rendering, of the suturing that makes ideological narrative possible. The ideological content of these films can only be approached in this

¹⁴⁵ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*. “As Serge Daney says, what has brought the whole cinema of the movement-image into question are ‘the great political *mises-en-scene*, state propaganda turned *tableaux vivants*, the first handlings of masses of humans’, and their backdrop, the camps. This was the death-knell for the ambitions of ‘the old cinema’: not, or not only, the mediocrity and vulgarity of current production but rather Leni Riefenstahl, who was not mediocre. And the situation is still worse if we accept Virilio’s thesis: there has been no diversion or alienation in an art of the masses initially founded by the movement-image; on the contrary the movement-image was from the beginning linked to the organization of war, state propaganda, ordinary fascism, historically and essentially.”

The death of the movement-image is at the same time its renewed non-life as “ordinary fascism” in the state apparatus. The non-organic life of abstract cinema must contend with the non-life (living death) of propaganda and “ordinary fascism.” At this historical moment, when Deleuze observes the death of the movement-image, it seems that a certain potentiality of the movement-image in cinema to become an art of the masses not only *passes away*, it also *passes into* the “third world”: “the revolutionary passion has passed into third world cinema.” Deleuze seems to be suggesting that this moment of death is a point of bifurcation that divides the West from the “third world.” Thus, even in “small nations,” which share something with the “third world,” “the whole memory of the I comes into play in an *organic* crisis” (my emphasis). The “spiritual automaton” not only becomes the “fascist man,” it also has a double life as the “missing people,” a suspended life, a crisis of organic life. The “doubly colonized” third world cinema author struggles against ethnology and fiction in order to produce the truly political cinema, which contributes to “the invention of a people.” With the example of Jean Rouch, Deleuze says that “no one has done so much to put the West to flight, to flee himself, to break with a cinema of ethnology and say *Moi un Noir*, at a time when blacks play roles in American series or those of hip Parisians.” Third world cinema, in its “break with a cinema of ethnology,” putting to flight images of both colonizer and colonized, is in an ambiguous relation to the movement-image. Third world cinema may seem to show us the time of the present but it is not the naturalized, filled out space of the present in Europe—not Western organicism. Rather the present is *crisis*. It is a present that is put in a trance. This is a present that has no synchronous space. In the very break with a cinema of ethnology we see that third world cinema does not present the death of the movement-image but a different type of passage: the necessary flight of the West and the ‘I.’ The trance is, paradoxically, not a time of a collective’s enforced presence, but rather a type of transition, passage, becoming that constructs an assemblage that can produce collective utterances. The assemblage can allow for the collective utterance of “the ideology of the colonizer, the myths of the colonized and the discourse of the intellectual,” even though these parties can never be brought together in a synchronous organic gathering.

installation via these twenty-four framed images. However, we are not intended to gaze at those two series of images and, for example, notice the irony or violence of what the wipe allows to be joined, but simply to look at these abstractions themselves, these frozen bits of time.

A moving black and white swish, the wipe gives a retro dramatization of what would later be accomplished simply with a cut. We might see in the wipes a narrative being told by its pointing explicitly to its own abstraction as a type of motion, as if to suggest that once transition was thought of as essentially a movement. If transition is movement, then these still images of the wipes appear to suspend the movement of transition. Viewed as photography on its own terms, however, we see that the transfer is essentially not a movement but an abstraction. It is not the *movement* of transferring that is *stopped*: it is *abstraction* that *suspends* the world. This suspension is not the hiatus of a linked motion; rather it might be described as an interval, wherein converge different media, whose ‘motion’ is only perceptible through our anticipation of contact, connection, intersection, merging. In the story that is told by switching from film to digital image to photograph, we are dealing with medial transitions which are not actually movements, or rather these are movement without a consistent subject. (The switch always involves a change in subject.)

The *Library of Congress Cleaning Crew* video in Lin + Lam’s installation, re-works the notion of an “outside figure” who is juxtaposed with “the perpetuity of signification’s postponement of referentiality.” The series of images capturing fractional seconds of wipes line the first wall of the roughly square one-room gallery and is juxtaposed at the next wall with a video of mopping, which gives us a manual image of

wiping lying ‘behind’ the abstraction of wipes. The silent video is projected from a digital projector across the room. Over the entire surface of this second wall is a life-sized video of a man mopping the corridor of the Library of Congress; another man walking alongside him and periodically moving yellow roadblock signs out of the mopper’s forward line of movement. Occasionally white-collar employees walk across the hallway, their bodies forming gestures of slight contortion indicating discomfort: irritation, at the obstacle they must navigate around, and apology, at the obstacle that their own movement poses to the mopper. The mopper does not have direct access to the archive although he is at the heart of its institutional location; he is *in* the *in-between* of the hallway rather than outside. He both facilitates and blocks access to the rooms in which the archive is located.

Library of Congress Cleaning Crew is 4:44 minutes long and at the end of the segment seamlessly begins to play in reverse, looping forward and backward in a continuous stream. The labor of mopping up that follows the ‘end’ of a war is suspended by the endless switching of backward and forward direction of the video. The transition cannot in fact lead forward or backward to anything. The transition does not enable a transformation; it does not in itself contain anything that would create something new or erase anything old. It is a threshold that becomes impenetrable in the incessant movement of its suspension of action. In this sense, mopping belongs to the interstice. The actions of the mopper are reversible, that is they are legible whether he is moving forward or backward, mopping can move either way. The passers-by, on the other hand, have a single directionality that makes sense—forward. The chronological time of the passers-by become visible in contrast to the suspension of the mopper in a non-chronological time.

The moment of transition between forward and reverse directions is not a film cut but a function of video playback. This video function is not a mode of linkage but a switch in directionality, continuity through reverse motion and repetition. The video uses human movement as a way to show the anthropomorphic form within the theorization of “time’s non-coincidence with itself.”

Lin + Lam juxtapose the *Library of Congress Cleaning Crew* with the *Pupils of Democracy*, which constructs an assemblage of schoolroom technologies, along the third wall of the gallery. A 16mm film loop is projected from a Kodak Pageant 16mm film projector, with a looper attachment, onto a portable projection screen. One segment of the film shows a manual typewriter, zoomed onto the section of the machine where we can see keys striking the paper: “*How do you feel the American effort here is being conducted ...*” A film composition that makes use of the serial motions of a manual typewriter is relying on the moving image to construct a *manuscript*; however, the film composition itself is *not* a manuscript. Writing appears in the moving image of a typewriter, but writing on film is more than the synthesis of units of meaning or signs. In the *Library of Congress Cleaning Crew* the perpetual deferral of referentiality that is the technicity of writing was shown to be complicated by video functions, such as the looping of forward and reverse into a single stream. In this film, it is not that the typewriter appears as the ‘content’ of film but that between these different modes of composition opens a passage. Here we are shown how to type, how to write, *how to compose* the aforementioned question, rather than to read or respond to the sense of the question. Such questions concerning the American persistence in or withdrawal from Vietnam are presented as the construction of the mechanics of English composition. As

Hannah Arendt argues, “[e]ducation can play no part in politics”; compulsory education for adults is a form of unfreedom, a denial of political subjectivity, the exertion of “coercion without the use of force.”¹⁴⁶ In this context pedagogical aims are indistinguishable from those of propaganda. The temporal differentiation constructed through the assemblage of schoolroom apparatus highlights the continuity of primitivism and paternalism in the temporal differentiations required by the very notion of teaching democracy.

The act—or event—of reading is constructed in the sculptural assemblage of different media: the film projector sits atop a stack of books on a kindergarten table; and directly in front of the projector, lies an open paperback book, *The Ten Thousand Day War*, with a magnifying glass positioned above the exposed pages. The selection of text highlighted in an intense circle of magnified light is: “It is 105 degrees and rising,” the code for evacuation during the Vietnam War.¹⁴⁷ Depending on the spectator’s angle of vision, the selection of text magnified varies: “miniature atomic explosion,” “aircraft carrier – the *Hancock*, *Okinawa* – with contingents of combat Marines,” “remaining American.” The typewriter is typing as the light makes visible the printed word. If the light of the magnification on the text is a medium of reading/translation of what happened in Vietnam, if books are textual media for translating experience, if the politics of location is indexed by writing, then we see in the relation of the projected film and the sculpture that translation is not “*mere* passageway,” a “*nonexisting* medium.”¹⁴⁸ These

¹⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 177.

¹⁴⁷ “It is 105 degrees and rising . . .” was the code for the evacuation of all U.S. military and civilians from Vietnam. Broadcast on U.S. Armed Forces Radio, the “Operation Frequent Wind” code was repeated every 15 minutes. In the installation, Lin and Lam mimic this, with Bing Crosby heard from a speaker every 15 minutes.

books remind us that the light and transparency allowed by translation is also that of commodification. Chow tells us that “in the age of multimedia communication, transmissibility is that aspect of a work which, unlike the weight of philosophical depth and interiority, is literal, transparent, and thus capable of offering itself to a popular or naïve *handling*.”¹⁴⁹ The work of the hand, sculpture is the medium which presents us with this question of what it means to be a ‘pupil of democracy.’ In the suspension of political subjectivity via pedagogy in the assemblage of apparatuses in *Pupils of Democracy*, we see that the transmission among media produces “the passages that head not toward the ‘original’ that is the West or the East but toward survival in the postcolonial world.”¹⁵⁰

H. Lan Thao Lam’s re-enactments of the archival footage of South Vietnamese President, Ngo Dinh Diem, comprise sections of the film in *Pupils of Democracy* as well as in the video *Invisible Like Peace*, which is displayed on a flat screen television monitor on the fourth wall of the gallery. Lam’s performances are austere, psychologically minimal, composed only of intense details, bare gestures. She puts on a jacket with a few swift but unhurried moves, straightens the sleeves, smoothing them out with a few brushes of the hand. In some of the images of the first President of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, the face is cut out of the frame. In others, we see only the bust, poised, holding a copy of Graham Greene’s *Quiet American*. A literalization of identification by performing gestures, dressing up, getting into posture, that personalize. In-between him, Diem, and her, Lam, we see the individuation of the image of the President. The “First

¹⁴⁸ Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 201.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 199.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 202.

Lady,” Madame Nhu, on the other hand, is framed only from the neck up and Lam emphasizes the hair—the weight and bulk of it, the elegant sweep up, the elongation of the neck and the heightening of the effect of turning the head, of turning to look at one.¹⁵¹ We can see in Lam’s performances and the way that they are embedded within the video montage that this is *not* an autoethnographic performance. The performance does not include any self-referential gestures of Lam herself, rather she presents her body as a medium of presentation, a technology of visual presentation. In a sense it is the obsolescence of the body that appears on video. The video is composed of a montage of several types of images: brief excerpts of the propaganda films, wipes, archival footage of the President and the first lady, Lam’s reenactments of their celluloid images and empty screens showing quotations printed on paper. Video composition brings together material constructed in diverse media.

In the card catalogue, also on the fourth wall (across from the mopping video), there is no first person but there is a ghostly presence that must be accounted for by the ‘impropriety’ of the archive. Lin + Lam’s presentation of a card catalogue insists on pure referentiality that resists personalization. Their card catalogue is formally recognizable as a card catalogue but it violates all formal rules. The card catalogue is open, vulnerable to the ‘mishandling’ by spectators; the contents often repeat, making insensible any linear numbering of them. This index cannot insist on its order. The alphabeticization seems merely to poke fun at the arbitrariness of the indexical sub-categories, such as “Different Title, Same Movie,” and “Take One” (which *references* the potential for interactive

¹⁵¹ Madame Nhu was not actually the wife of President Diem, who remained unmarried. She was the wife of General Nhu, Diem’s brother, and was by most accounts the most powerful female political figure in South Vietnam at that time.

disorder of the index). What appears to be the most archaic of archival devices—the card catalogue—is in fact animated solely by the presence of personal selection predominant in digital archives of all kinds. The first-person function is exteriorized. The references given by the cards do not actually point us to sources of information, but to personal, sometimes gossipy, comments, individual references associating some aspect of the propaganda film to personal knowledge of the commenter. The commenters are called ‘readers’ by the cards (Reader #1, Reader #30, etc.) The references are themselves simply referential. What is interesting about the card catalogue, however, is not its making fun of the archive or even its critique of the first person’s arrogance, but rather its exteriorizing the function of the first person. The critique of ethnography is not conducted via the medium of “I” as in autoethnography, which ultimately fails in its critique because it obscures the fact that anthropology as a discipline, as a science, has always relied on the autobiographic for its facts. Instead we have a critique of the first person as archival process, a function soon to be replaced by computers.

There is a handmade quality to the installation. A man must walk out from behind the counter in the back of gallery to turn on the various machines. The Kodak Pageant projector has a switch which the viewer must flip. Depending on where one is standing in front of the mopping video, one risks having one’s own silhouette projected onto the screen as well. This puts the human, the personal, again at the limit of Lin + Lam’s project. However, this quality of the human hand is put in the context of obsolescence. The viewer’s embodied experience is *not privileged* in the installation.

“Once the coevalness of cultures is acknowledged,” Rey Chow states, the problem still remains: “cultural translation needs to be rethought as the co-temporal

exchange and contention between different social groups deploying different sign systems that may not be synthesizable to one particular model of language or representation.”¹⁵² Rather than cultural translation, Unidentified Vietnam thus gives us the passage between. Furthermore, the in-between of cultures must be understood, as Chow suggests, “beyond verbal and literary languages to include events of the media such as radio, film, television, video, pop music,”¹⁵³ or as Bruce Robbins puts it, “different modalities of situatedness-in-displacement.”¹⁵⁴

This presentation of inter-medial translations, along with the absence of the archive itself, suggests that we approach the ethnic subject differently. Whereas the archive is fragmented and missing for Asian Americans, what appears here to be a withholding suggests that we think about the other archives that are missing.¹⁵⁵ Additionally we might think about the archive less in terms of what it contains, what it can show and prove, than in terms of how it is accessed, handled, and subjectivizes us. Finally we are also led to consider what kind of ethnic subjectivation was intended by the propaganda films in the archive and how that contrasts with the way that processes of subjectivation and ethnicization are envisioned in Lin + Lam’s installation itself.¹⁵⁶

SWITCH OFF: *Hong Kong’s Dilation of Suspension*

¹⁵² Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 196-7.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Bruce Robbins, “Comparative Cosmopolitanisms,” 246-64.

¹⁵⁵ See Michel Foucault on the archive.

¹⁵⁶ Laura Kang, *Compositional Subjects*, 160.

Wong Kar-Wai's *2046* gives us in cinematic time the suspension and dilation of Hong Kong's political transition anticipated in the year 2046 and the paradox of the fifty years between 1997 and 2047 that are to be lived as both transitional and unchanged. The film is initially difficult to follow in terms of any narrative line because it constantly switches between times and genres—mainly between the writer in 1966-69 and the fictional characters in 2046-47. We also switch between rooms—2046 and 2047—which signal a switch in films (*In the Mood for Love* and *2046*) and genres (melodrama in the former film and screwball romantic comedy, melodrama and science fiction in the latter). Whereas in the James Bond film *Die Another Day*, discussed in chapter 2, the actors were switched in and out of the same characters, in *2046* the characters, personalities and genres switch in and out of the same actors.

The first reference for the code “2046” is the year 2046, the last year before Hong Kong will be (could be, might be) fully integrated into China. According to the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984, Hong Kong was to remain a “special administrative region,” its way of life remaining unchanged for at least 50 years after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997.¹⁵⁷ Hong Kong's distinction is not in its autonomy as a quasi-city-state but in the extension of its halfway state. The transfer of sovereignty between the UK and the PRC in 1997 simply marks a point between two different forms of quasi-autonomous status. (Was it ever...? Will it ever be...?) The transfer itself is extended in the paradox of the 50 years that are to be lived as both transitional and unchanged. Time in the film *2046*—we could say, perhaps, *2046 is time*—gives us this paradox of change and stasis, movement and stillness, transition and suspension.

¹⁵⁷ See Aihwa Ong's discussion of zoning technologies in East Asia, in *Neoliberalism as Exception*.

I am referring to this political history as the first *reference* for “2046,” because Wong Kar-Wai has said that this history was lurking in his mind at the time when he first began to think about the film.

When I began to think about the film four years ago it was linked to the situation of Hong Kong and effects of the return to China. At the time, China had promised not to make any changes for 50 years. But I didn't in any way want to introduce a political aspect to *2046*. The film is about a person who wants to change and about promises.¹⁵⁸

Wong says that he did not wish to “introduce a political aspect” to the film.¹⁵⁹ Even in its initial conception, the film already exists as something distinct, something to which a “political aspect” would have to be introduced.¹⁶⁰ The film and the politics from the start belong to different genres that would require active adhesion in order to be brought together. Instead, Wong says that the film is “about a person” of a particular sort and “about promises.” These general, or generic, topics certainly include people involved in negotiating the political situation of Hong Kong and the many international agreements which have codified such situations over at least the past hundred years; however, such “political aspects” are only relevant in so far as they fit into the generic categories.

I am interested in the idea suggested by Wong’s words (however unintentional) that the *thinking* is linked to the history, which will nonetheless not be introduced into the film. I am curious to pursue the perhaps odd question of what it would look like to have a linkage in thought between objects that are not actually introduced to each other. This mode of linkage without introduction seems to characterize the way many characters,

¹⁵⁸ Wong Kar-Wai, Press Conference at Cannes Film Festival, 5/21/2004.
http://www.festival-cannes.fr/films/fiche_film.php?langue=6002&id_film=4202747

¹⁵⁹ See Stephen Teo’s discussion of the “China syndrome” in Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*.

¹⁶⁰ Compare to *Happy Together*’s opening shot of two Hong Kong citizens’ travel document identifying “British nationality.” See Sheldon H. Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity*.

lovers, encounter each other. In *In the Mood for Love*, 2046 is the number of a room where Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung meet, write, and engage in some sort of an affair. It is the only space where Tony and Maggie are really shown together, in contrast to the narrow hallways, stairways, doorways, and rooms where they constantly pass each other, in close proximity, but never really together.

To return to the political aspect, it is interesting to consider that in the negotiations between the UK and the PRC, there was mention of the old “lease” that had functioned as a screen for colonial appropriation. The British lease of Hong Kong was up, so they now agreed, and an agreement formally announced that with the end of the lease the property on loan, Hong Kong, would be returned, as if China were merely landlord and the British tenants. This would make Hong Kong itself a place of transitory residence, an island hotel. Is there a link between this discourse and the “Oriental Hotel” which houses long-term temporary residents in the film *2046*? This is not about allegory explicitly in the sense of answering the question of what the film *is about*. Rather, these objects are linked, through thought.

The film seems to ride on the tracks of certain lines of thought. For example, in the 50 year interim, the system of “One Country, Two Systems” (Deng Xiaoping’s idea) was to be maintained. The way that Wong describes the relationship of *2046* to *In the Mood for Love*, or the way that the different storylines are and are not linked in the film *2046*, suggest some version of a “One Country, Two Systems” structure. *2046* is a film which exists in relation to the previously released but simultaneously shot film *In the Mood for Love*. Wong says that they were shot at the same time, made back to back, and he suggests that we not see the films as sequential but rather, as Wong puts it, “two

chapters of one film,” or “two films as one film.” The two chapters then can be seen as more radically different and what links them is not the continuity of narrative but the wholeness of a production and a mind that links them in thought.

You shouldn't see *2046* as a sequel to *In the Mood for Love*. It's very different [...] The character played by Tony Leung isn't the same. In fact I realized that the more I try to distance myself from my ideas the more I get closer to them. You have to deal with that; the past and memories always end up catching up with you. That's the message of the film.¹⁶¹

Same actor but not the same character. Same director but not the same story. The difference is in the distance and proximity, which approach each other, of the thinking and the film. *In the Mood for Love* catches up with *2046*, as it were.

The political aspect has another linkage to the film through the documentary footage of the political demonstrations and street riots that occurred in Hong Kong in 1966 and 1967: “it was the time of the riots.”¹⁶² These images appear at the moment of the film when Tony Leung leaves Singapore to return to Hong Kong in 1966. The “time of the riots” is the time of Leung’s journey between Singapore and Hong Kong, a transition and re-entry. It is also the year of the Cultural Revolution in China, which in part inspired political agitation in Hong Kong (and earlier in Macau). We see footage of the 1967 riots later in the film. A curfew has been imposed and Leung stays holed up in his room (number 2047) and writes a novel called “2046.” The black and white footage of the riots forms a visually striking contrast to the richly colored deep red, black, and green tones of the rest of the film against which it is juxtaposed.

¹⁶¹ Wong Kar-Wai, Press Conference at Cannes Film Festival, 5/21/2004.

¹⁶² Kwok-kan Tam argues that “the rise of a Hong Kong identity since the mid-1960s can be attributed to the riots in 1967” (Tam, “Post-Coloniality, Localism and the English Language in Hong Kong,” 119).

The film gives us intertitles with dates, which do not mark historically significant times and events but simply mark the recurring holiday of Christmas Eve: “24 Dec 67,” “24 Dec 68,” “24 Dec 69.” This cyclical presentation of time gives the recurring holiday party and Christmas festivity, noticeably devoid of political content or context, except that of course the celebration of Christmas in Hong Kong is certainly a colonial legacy. There is however an interesting coincidence of political dates. The British surrendered Hong Kong to Japan on December 25, 1941. Christmas Eve is thus linked to the first “ending” of British colonial control of Hong Kong and the first postcolonial transition of Hong Kong, which certainly did not lead to autonomy but Japanese occupation for three years and eight months, which is roughly similar to the duration of time covered by 2046. Additionally, the actual British surrender took place in a hotel—the Peninsula Hong Kong Hotel. This suggests the possibility of a link between that hotel and the Oriental Hotel in the film, which is owned by a man who harbors resentment toward the Japanese because “his family had suffered during the occupation” and thus angrily refuses to allow his daughter to marry her Japanese boyfriend, a frequent occupant at his hotel. What do we make of such coincidences? (What is the temporality of the coincidence? What is the politics of such a temporality?) The film offers us various codes, nodes for linkage, things *to think about* rather than the film itself *being about* them. (Thus we are also *not* compelled to think at all about anything unless we happen to begin to wonder why those black and white images? Why the mixing of genres?)

Switching between genres also raises further questions. What is the relation between the science fiction film we seem to be watching in the opening of the film and at various times throughout the film, and the narrative following Tony Leung from

Singapore to Hong Kong and his life there? Interestingly Wong's film begins with Chow's *novel* titled *2047*. But it is a *film* that is beginning and not a text. A translation of medium exterior to the film begins the film whose first frame gives us what looks like an abstract—not yet identifiable—image composed of three panels arranged horizontally. The middle section contains a large spiraling circle, which resembles a mechanical eye or lens of some sort against a striped background. The sections to the left and right are translucent blue with white writing, not quite decipherable but perhaps English, across them. Is this an image of the trans-medial art that seems to begin the film? Does it suggest that the film might be watched as itself a mode of trans-mediality?

The film mixes several genres, and variations of genres: science fiction (crime drama, melodrama and science fiction), drama (melodrama and drama), documentary; there are also genres of literature and film, and within literature are the different types of writing that Leung produces—journalism, pulp fiction, science fiction. In a film like this, when the documentary footage is mixed in, is it mixed into the drama, contained by it, introduced into it, or merely juxtaposed or cut in? It is not only the linearity of the narrative of Leung that is mixed up, the way that different genres are juxtaposed also creates a seriality that switches between genres without necessarily integrating them.

When the voice-over narration tells us that Leung left Singapore, we are looking at images of the train and urbanscape from the science fiction film: “I got back to Hong Kong at the end of 1966.” We might thus connect for a moment the science fiction world with Hong Kong, the desire to get to 2046 in the former with the desire for Hong Kong in the latter. Then we cut abruptly to footage of riots in Hong Kong: “It was the time of the riots.” Leung's Hong Kong is being linked to the political situation in Hong Kong via

time, their synchronicity. And yet this synchronicity is visualized in the film through the temporal and generic disjunct of switching from Singapore to science fiction to documentary footage. Through it all only the music follows a consistent thread. Then a brief shot of Leung's face: "I wasn't sure how long I'd be staying so I took a room in a small hotel in Wanchai," followed by a briefer shot of the Oriental Hotel signage. Then Leung begins to talk about writing and his own economic situation: "I wrote columns for newspapers. They paid HK\$10 per thousand words. It was pretty tough at first." Pause, music stronger. "As long as I could make ends meet it didn't matter what kind of stuff I wrote." The trope of "making ends meet" (in the English translation subtitles) takes precedence and rationalizes the writing of any "kind of stuff." The relative unimportance of content is contrasted to the financial necessity of writing. The phrase "it didn't matter what kind of stuff I wrote" also suggests the looseness and multiplicity of genre—"kind of stuff"—that film itself produces.

Then cut to shot of Leung on phone, voice very different from voice-over: "Diary of the Bazooka Hero ... a smash hit with tit lovers!" The same stirring music that started with the urbanscape still continues, crossing multiple genres, now in a club in Hong Kong. Leung's voice-over narration continues: "I soon got used to this sort of life. I became an expert ladies man. Lots of one-night stands. But nothing lasts forever anyway." He seems to just fall into "this sort of life" which is characterized by transience.

Intertitle "24-Dec-66." After the intertitle, the music fades out and changes, just barely audible in the background, almost as if it were playing somewhere in the club. When Leung runs into someone he knows, he asks her whether she is Lulu. She says: "I

was then. Not anymore.” “On Christmas Eve, 1966, I ran into a friend from Singapore in a nightclub. We’d been rather close. But that night she’d apparently forgotten me.” This second reference to the year 1966 takes us back for a moment to the past in Singapore which Lulu seems unable to remember—a lost memory. The riots are not mentioned directly again in this scene; the linkage was given once and left behind: from politics to economy to the economics of writing to the writing of any kind of stuff. Now we get the stuff.

The film returns to the riots once more later in the film: “On May 22, 1967 they imposed a curfew in Hong Kong.” The same music as in the previously-discussed sequence begins to play in this scene as well. We get an image of smoke against black background, which tells us that Leung is writing, while the voice-over tells us: “Homemade bombs caused panic. The economy stopped dead. I stopped going out. Some thought I was a reformed character. Actually I was writing. A story called 2046. All about men and women looking for love risking everything to get to a place called 2046.” In the middle of shots of the film version of that story 2046, we see an image of Maggie Cheung (lying on bed in Singapore in 1963). “Some didn’t take to the science fiction angle but all ‘2046’ meant to me was the number of a hotel room.” Then we see Maggie Cheung entering a room numbered 2046, wearing a sci-fi outfit, but the voice-over tells us: “I made up the whole thing.” Brief image of Gong Li, 1966. “But some of my own experiences found their way into it.” Music stops abruptly. A longer shot of Faye Wong cyborg smoking, very slowly, in silence, for thirty long seconds.

In the fictional *novel* titled *2046* that Leung writes, 2046 is a place where everyone is desperate to get to: “Let’s go to 2046.” We don’t know why. In the *novel*

2047, 2046 is a place one goes to recover lost memories. Recovery invokes the trope of turning back, returning. One loses a memory when the past ceases to be in the present, in one's thoughts, moods, when it ceases to affect one's actual living. In recovering such lost memories one seeks to have again (as if again) that feeling one can't quite remember except by feeling it again. Tony doesn't look for Su but that feeling he had with her in his relation with another Su. Coincidences, similarities, resemblances, recurring motifs can give us that feeling, and that loss, that memory which has no place. Writing works off of such mobile motifs, running through different times, showing up in different places. We see and hear brisk sequences of writing—the sound of scribbling, the sound of a motor, quick movement, quick cutting, movements slightly sped up. But we also see the pen poised above the paper, still to our view, but intensive, face still, unblinking, but alive, a tableau vivant.

It is when one leaves 2046 that the past catches up, creeps up on one. The journey away from 2046 is taken by one who is exhausted. In the end we see Bai Ling embark on her journey to Singapore. We hear her exhaustion in the question, "Why can't it be like it was?" The android's face is exhaustion itself. This has to do with the political impasse of thinking Hong Kong post-whatever. The desire for unchangingness is a form of exhaustion, a refusal to acknowledge the possibility of further possibilizing, a refusal of the capacity for thinking. And yet, in the case of Hong Kong, this desire, this exhaustion even, is linked to the political antagonism to British colonialism (which was one aspect of the 1967 riots) as well as to Chinese imperialistic tendencies in the guise of national re-integration and unification.

Nostalgia, lost memories await us in 2046, but it is also necessary to depart from 2046. It will be a long departure, extending across the passage of an endless train ride. To think of Hong Kong in relation to postcoloniality, to pose the question of how to get to what comes after is simultaneously to anticipate a backward turn toward China and to look forward to create the new. The backward and forward directionality are not absolute compass points (compass points themselves are not absolute for that matter) but rather primarily involve the switching from one to the other. The forward and backward gaze move in the single direction of the movement of the film itself. In fact turning back to China may require a looking forward to the future of what China will actually have become by 2047.

What kind of nostalgia—for British colonialism? To leave 2046 might also be going beyond the impasse of nostalgia and loss. Leaving 2046 is moving toward the after of postcolonialism rather than lingering in the postcolony, and the complicated and contradictory history it gives us. Leaving via the modality of switching across the non-relation of genres is, for living, a suspension, a bodily stillness, intense with shaking or vibration, affected by them, the speed and stillness of moving in, through, across the in-between visualized as a jumble of differentiations without communication or exchange, only occasional outbursts of violence on the body available nearby. How does one live in the switch—for one must unavoidably live there, live then. The dangers are ambiguity and exhaustion, dangerous because violence erupts, but also therefore valuable as force.

The temporality of suspension is figured in the body and face of the android. How do we account for such stillness and slowness in her body? How do we read these barely moving gestures and expressions? These are the questions that torment Takuya Kimura in

his relationship to the android Faye Wong. He wants to know whether she loves him. He asks her to leave with him. She never seems to respond. He never sees a response. Does she not respond, because she does not love him, or does she respond very very slowly so that he never catches it? We, the viewers, see affective expressions on her face and in her gestures in other scenes when she is not with Kimura. Are these delayed reactions? Is the delay caused by mechanical wearing down? Is it fatigue that is setting in, as the train manager suggests?

The difficulty of discerning the android's expressions is connected to the slowness of her expressive capacity, the disjunction of speeds, rather than the ambiguity of signs. Kimura cannot interpret her feelings because he can never fully encounter them. Co-presence is not enough to allow for communication and exchange to happen; the bodies must also share speeds. Coevalness thus does not mark a communication event here, a face to face meeting of interlocutors yielding meaning, as we would commonly expect. In *2046* we see shared presence without shared present time. When we see the tear come slowly out of her eye, is it a delayed reaction or simply an isolated expression elsewhere, in a different time, unlinked to Kimura and his feelings and his story? The slowness of the android's facial expressivity is not connected to the expressivity of the rest of her body. She can sometimes move other parts of her body quite quickly. When she puts up her fingers to form a hole for the man to speak into, for example, she moves her fingers swiftly to change the location of her fingers, the man moving more slowly to match her movements. This lag in speed between them is indicative of the overall temporal disjunction between them and the consequent difficulty of verbal communication. In their discussion of faciality, Deleuze and Guattari state: "The question

of the body is not one of part-objects but of differential speeds.”¹⁶³ “The gaze is but secondary in relation to the gazeless eyes, to the black hole of faciality. The mirror is but secondary in relation to the white wall of faciality.”¹⁶⁴

The android’s fatigue might in fact be exhaustion.

Being exhausted is much more than being tired. [...] The tired person no longer has any (subjective) possibility as his disposal; he therefore cannot realize the slightest (objective) possibility. But the latter remains, because one can never realize the whole of the possible; in fact, one even creates the possible to the extent that one realizes it. The tired person has merely exhausted the realization, whereas the exhausted person exhausts the whole of the possible. The tired person can no longer realize, but the exhausted person can no longer possibilize.¹⁶⁵

We might think of the android as “the pure abstract machine of a twilight state” in the suspension produced by 2046, a twilight of red and green.¹⁶⁶ The machinic becoming-woman is exhausted, leaving us becoming-what?

Many of the shots give us a still composition, where no action crosses the frame, only gestures of a body, mobile but not moving. Sometimes a body does move across a still frame, up or down a staircase or down a hallway. Again, this is less about action than the differential speeds of the body with the space, both still, and then one moving faster than the other. The room slowly moving onward in time; the body still, then accelerating. We also see a face move out of stillness, abruptly turning and walking. These accelerations of speed usually occur down a corridor which the camera faces at a 90 degree angle. We get speed without change in position, or only minimal change in

¹⁶³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 172.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 171.

¹⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 152.

¹⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 169.

position, along the same axis. This is what the science fiction genre allows Wong Kar-Wai to do with time and space.

The third time that we return to Singapore occurs without the riots, from within the story 2047. Leung and Faye Wong have begun to write together; intimacy grows up between them, feelings creep up on them, as Leung puts it. “She was always asking if there was anything at all that never changed.” What doesn’t change? Only 2046, the last unchanging day and also the brink that opens onto the possibility of all kinds of changes. Writing happens in 2047; Leung lives in the room 2047, but he is always peering at 2046. The next story he writes in response to Faye Wong’s question will be called *2047*—this is a story that will change or will affect change, it is a beginning.

We then seem to return to the beginning of the film with many of the same images and sequences from the opening science fiction story. This time, however, the story is told in Leung’s voice. “So I began imagining myself as a Japanese man on a train for 2046 falling for an android with delayed reaction.” Interestingly we are given variations not only of genres but iterations of 2047. One film, two stories; one set of lines, two voices. The first version was told in the voice of Kimura and ended with his uncertainty and inability to discern the feelings of the android. In the second version, the story is (re)told by Leung in Cantonese. By the end of his telling Kimura has left 2046, left the cyborg in the train, and left Hong Kong and Faye Wong to return to Japan; Faye Wong too has left Hong Kong to join him in Japan, and her father eventually also goes to Japan to attend her wedding. Relations between Hong Kong and Japan have been normalized.

Then it is Christmas again: “24 Dec 68.” Leung gives us his reflection on time and love: “Love is all a matter of timing.” “If I’d lived in another time or place my story

might have had a very different ending.” Faye Wong’s father conveys a message from his daughter to Leung saying that she has read *2047* and likes it but: “She found the ending too sad. She wonders if you can change it.” Is this a man who can change? She wondered what never changes, and she wonders what Leung can change. Can endings be changed? And it is the ending that he is not capable of writing. He cannot anymore “make ends meet.” Next we see Leung hunched over a table, pen poised to write, unmoving. Intertitle tells us “An hour later.” The next shot zooms in closer to the nib of the pen. “Ten Hours Later” and just his face in profile looking down, mouth covered by a hand holding a cigarette. “100 Hours Later” and same face in profile, no hand, mouth just barely moving, slightly trembling, as if almost talking to himself. Music starts and we are in Singapore for the third time. We do not know what year it is. Leung walks briskly down a street and calls for a taxi. It is nighttime and dark, but there is a red sign on the wall behind him. Then we cut to a shot of the interior of a taxi and it is black and white: “I’d also like the story to have a happy ending but I don’t know how to write it.” Then the camera angle turns and we see a close-up, from outside the taxi, of Maggie Cheung’s face. “Some years back, I had a happy ending in my grasp but I let it slip away.” These are shots from *In the Mood for Love*, in 1963. Then a final time, in Singapore, a physical journey in 1969. We move quickly and smoothly between these dates, also endlessly backward and forward between these limits. Transition is not only an unchanging suspension but also a restless pacing between times, the limits, thresholds of change.

We are now in a space between points of transition. Just as the android lived bodily in the between, here the *writing*, that is, the way we *move between genres*, is akin to the limit that exists “in the flow,” as Deleuze puts it:

The aporia lies in the inexhaustible series of all these exhausted beings. [...] The aporia will be solved if one considers that the limit of the series does not lie at the infinity of the terms but can be anywhere in the flow: between two terms, between two voices or the variations of a single voice—a point that is already reached well before one knows that the series is exhausted, and well before one learns that there is no longer any possibility or any story, and that there has not been one for a long time.¹⁶⁷

Back in Hong Kong, Leung meets Zhang Ziyi for the last time before she leaves for Singapore: “Why can’t it be like it was before?” Intertitles: “He didn’t turn back. It was as if he’d boarded a very long train heading for a drowsy future through the unfathomable night.” Then we see him in a taxi, black and white, leaning, but alone this time. We get the lines from the story 2046 again: “in 2046 nothing ever changes.” This fact is unverifiable because no one has ever come back. In Kimura’s version, there was another line: “Except me.” Here there is no more voice. Only Leung in a taxi. Then the opening image again but this time in black and white. The ending of the film mixes together the genres again, science fiction, melodrama, and documentary, but this time the mixing does not render distinct genres but merges them together.

The film itself exhibits a kind of proliferating abundance that centered in the media reception of the film leading up to and during the Cannes festival on the question of completion.

Wong has never sought to be graded for coloring inside the lines, and the movie's present, "final" state is a living, not-finished-only-abandoned product of notorious production delays, reshoots, reconstructions, recastings, rewrites, firings, shutdowns (including for the 2003 SARS breakout), re-edits, and festival boondoggles.¹⁶⁸

Wong Kar-wai says about the completion or final version of *2046*:

For me at the moment *2046* is finished. The film seen was my final vision.

¹⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 157.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Atkinson, “Heartbreak Hotel,” *Village Voice*, 8/2/2005. <http://www.villagevoice.com/film/0531,atkinson1,66460,20.html>

If not I wouldn't be here in Cannes. We did everything possible to finish it. For the last four years we've been working on the film; it's time to let it go. Obviously if you give me the means to continue the post-production for another three weeks then the film would be different. But today, Friday, May 21, my film is finished – but there will be lots of extra scenes on the DVD.¹⁶⁹

The indefinite extension of time in post-production might be considered in relation to the problematic of post-colonial nostalgia, memory, re-invention, departure, etc. Seeing the limit not in the beyond but in the between might be a way to avoid the exhaustion of going beyond.

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze talks about the movement-image and the time-image as two different ways that cinema has apprehended, made visible, time. Each mode corresponds to a different conceptualization of time as well. The mode of cinematic presentation and the idea of time go together. *2046* is interested in the temporality of approach, suspension, and transition. What the year 2046 means for living in the time of the approach to that year, in the time of the transition from one political system to another, in the suspension that is the living of that time, is the exhaustion and the finding of the between of inexhaustibility.

As a result, *2046*'s engagement with time could be described through the trope of temporal switching which is directly connected with different genres as well as gendered bodies. Within the love story of Tony Leung's relationship to various women, we get the sense that there is ever only one woman. He does not circulate among them with the promiscuous openness of a typical "ladies man," as he calls himself. In fact, he is only with one woman at a time, but the film constantly switches back and forth among them. Each woman belongs to a different time and place—Maggie Cheung in 1963, pre-riot

¹⁶⁹ Wong Kar-Wai, Press Conference at Cannes Film Festival, 5/21/2004.

Hong Kong; Gong Li in intermediary 1966 Singapore and Phnom Phen (and she is believed to be from Cambodia); Zhang Ziyi in 1967 Hong Kong, the time of the riots; and Faye Wong in the space of writing, the imaginary 2046. These women never meet each other; it is not a story about infidelity. As he says in the film, a man like himself has nothing but time. Leung is an empty or exhausted character whose incessant activity of switching among women and times is a representation of the living in the unchanging time of change. In her analysis of Yoko Ono, Leslie Bow argues that female sexuality and racial difference have been connected to seduction and betrayal, revealing the “homosocial nature of collective associations, including ethnic and national ties.”¹⁷⁰ In Wong’s film, I would argue that rather than racial difference, the micro-ethnic differences among ethnic-Chinese across Mainland China, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Singapore, Macau, as well as the differences in time-frame, which also exert an ethnicizing force (legacy of anthropological discourse), become articulated through the connection between gender and political affiliation. Thus, the trope of the switch is in *2046* a mode of visualizing the challenge of embodying the complexities of ethnic and national identities in a political mode. The film’s response to this challenge of not only narration but visual technology is manifested in the use of the trope of switching to represent the complications of political embodiment in Hong Kong.

¹⁷⁰ Leslie Bow, *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion*.

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