

Going Toward the Ghost:
The Poetics of Haunting in Contemporary Asian American Poetry

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Abstract

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This dissertation considers how social, historical, and political contexts “haunt” the work of Asian American poets. How does history (i.e. war, colonialism, and marginalization) impact the work of Asian American poets across time and space? How does language act as a haunting space of intervention and activism? I argue that haunting occurs formally as well as on the content level, using language and the page as a space to enact “ghostliness.” Rather than a psychoanalytic understanding of haunting, I define haunting in terms of invocation: a deliberate, powerful, and provocative move toward haunted places. The poets included are: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Myung Mi Kim, Sawako Nakayasu, Bhanu Kapil, Cathy Park Hong, and Barbara Jane Reyes. I insist that form and history cannot be occluded from our discussion of Asian American poetry and poetry as a larger whole; by highlighting “the ghost,” I seek to create sites of transparency, intervention, and activism in this critical field.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Toward a Poetics of Haunting

“surely I am able to write poems
celebrating grass”

– Lucille Clifton, from *Mercy*

Clifton’s untitled poem in *Mercy* (2004) opens with an uneasy assumption – the ease and simplicity of the pastoral poem. Immediately, “surely” unhinges her poem; something dangerously hums underneath Walt Whitman’s declaration of “I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.” This is not a poetics of lethargy, of observation, of pastoral awe. In *Mercy*, Clifton raises necessary questions: in an American landscape fraught with the legacy of the Middle Passage, slavery, and continued racial violence, how can she “celebrat[e] grass”? How can one “loafe” at ease, without loathing and lamenting what the American landscape represents? How can one write a poem without addressing such a haunted nation? In a 2012 interview, Clifton speaks about how she cannot write about trees and not see the history of lynching:

I was asked once to write about landscape and the beauty of the trees.
But I cannot—I will not—close part of my vision. I know what my history
has been and it is a human history. Every time I see a tree I know somebody
used to hang on that. I’m not going to make others comfortable and *not*
mention that... I’m supposed to chronicle what is so. And it would be nice
to forget history, but we do it at our peril... (*Mosaic*)

Here, Clifton asserts that language and form are inseparable from a poet’s personal and communal legacy. A tree cannot simply be a tree. She insists on seeing (“I will not – close

part of my vision”) and takes up this responsibility to record and make these ghosts of history visible. Indeed, we cannot un-see America’s brutal history of lynching. As she insists: “I’m supposed to chronicle what is so.” To return to her untitled poem in *Mercy*, she ends:

but whenever i begin
 “the trees wave their knotted branches
 and . . .” why
 is there under that poem always
 an other poem?

Clifton offers a clear message: there is too much danger in silence and surface understanding. This very question of a poem under “the trees wave their knotted branches” insists on her desire to raise that which is “under.” Nathaniel Mackey writes about this sense of reverberating “underness” in his preface to *Splay Anthem* (2002): “[The poem] invites echo, reverberation, overtone, undertone, resonance, and repetition” (Mackey xii). When “an aspect of ground [goes] under” (Mackey xi), the underworld is revealed through language, creating fraught resonances – evident in Clifton’s metacognitive moment. Indeed, for Clifton, there is “an other poem” rather than “another.” The title of Audre Lorde’s *Undersong: Chosen Poems Old and New* (1992) also echoes such fraught “underness.” In her poem “Conclusion,” she writes: “I was born Black and without illusion/and my vision/which differs from yours/is clear/although sometimes restricted” (Lorde 85). Lorde’s clear yet restricted vision, “which differs from yours” speaks to Clifton’s vision of trees vs. the tree of new beginnings, of American roots, of the pastoral.

Notably, this “under” poem is *always* present, as is the act of othering. Clifton’s tree inherently represents both absence and presence. This focus on the “underneath” recalls Barbara Guest’s “little ghost” in her essay “Wounded Joy” (2002). Guest writes of a ghost in the hidden architecture of a poem: “Do you ever notice as you write that no matter what

there is on the written page something appears to be in *back of everything that is said, a little ghost?*" (Guest 100) According to Guest, each poem includes a hiddenness—a strange presence with an almost inarticulate drive. Yet, to place pressure on Guest's concept, this little ghost for poets of color is neither "little" nor "a secondary form of speech" as she writes (100). This "ghost" in the "knotted branches" appears as a powerful specter of the present and the future—tied to the current ramifications of racial and social divides. Indeed, Evie Shockley discusses Clifton's *Mercy*, addressing the problematic separation of race from aesthetics. Shockley posits: "The insistence upon protecting poetry's aesthetic purity from the (racialized) taint of political issues and socio-historical contexts can be seen as a futile—if ideologically powerful—attempt to construct a binary opposition between inextricably related categories" (Shockley 728). Here, the danger of purifying trees from their violent history is palpable. Again, a tree cannot simply be a tree. The ghost *is* and *must be* significant, visible, and ever-present.

Clifton's assertion in *Mercy* offers an entry point into my investigation of haunting in Asian American poetry. While I focus on Asian American poetry, I also draw fertile connections across poets of color who wrestle with haunted landscapes and forms. Such connections occur across time and space, as haunting swerves away from a linear timeline. Echoes reverberate across texts published in the 21st and 20th century, demonstrating a sustained engagement with haunting. Indeed, emerging contemporary poets such as TJ Jarrett directly address haunted histories and futures. In Jarrett's book, *Ain't No Grave* (2013), the dead rise in a limbo world. As the title suggests, there is simply no grave for the dead. In an American landscape and seascape fraught with the legacy of the Middle Passage and continued racial violence, Jarrett brings forth the ghosts and the ghosts rise to speak. In "How to Speak to the Dead," she creates a moving account of conjuring voice. Her poem

participates in a ritual of bringing something back to speak. The poem operates as a set of instructions: “This is how it works: They talk. You listen” (Jarrett 12). Listening to the dead also creates a community of voices linked together through history and trauma. This chorus arises from numerous voices. Similarly, in the opening to Lawson Fusao Inada’s *Legends From Camp* (1992), which gathers the stories of the Japanese American internment during World War II, he suggests a ghostly community through the metaphor of geese circling:

Suddenly, I heard sounds overhead – a couple of geese were calling,
circling, and calling. They circled and called for several minutes before
getting underway, heading toward the mountains. And then they
were gone. They left, but didn’t leave- I could still see them, hear them,
overhead in the sky of my mind. (Inada 1)

In this passage, Inada senses geese around him, even though their physical presence is non-existent. These geese fly “overhead in the sky of [his] mind,” moving into the present and future of his sense of personhood through poetry. Notably, this passage is taken from an introduction to his poems, in which he speaks through and for others. These ghostly echoes – that which is gone but still present – return in a myriad of necessary and painful ways in Asian American poetry. Like Jarrett, Inada conjures voice, holding such voices literally in his hands: “There’s a remoteness to history, and to simply know the facts is not always satisfactory. There’s more to life than that. So you might say I’ve taken matters into my own hands ... taken the camp experience in my hands, stood in the sun, and held it up to the light” (3). Here, haunting through narration does not occur through facts, but through a sun-lit imagination. Haunting is physically felt (“taken the camp experience in my hands, stood in the sun”).

To spotlight these ghostly presences and “chronicle what is so,” my dissertation investigates how social, historical, and political contexts “haunt” the work of contemporary

Asian American poets. Through a series of interconnected chapters, I introduce a range of questions on race, writing, and reading. I engage the following questions in particular: how does history (particularly the history of war, colonialism, and marginalization) impact the work of Asian American poets across time and space? Does a sense of responsibility exist for these poets to “represent” and “witness”? If so, how do these poets articulate this responsibility and to what degree? How does language act as a haunting space of intervention and activism? *Going Toward the Ghost: The Poetics of Haunting in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* also theorizes haunting as an intensely personal and public phenomenon in the work of Asian American poets. Thinking through collective memories, what are the implications of experiencing someone else’s history? How can such narratives resonate on a personal level?

To begin, the landscape of Asian American poetry is imbued with a complicated history of war, colonialism, and marginalization across shores. Criticism and conversations on the poetry of witness and ghosts in contemporary cultural theory are helpful launching points. Ultimately, I aim to redefine “haunting” by reworking the interdisciplinary intersections of scholars such as Avery Gordon, Anne Anlin Chen, Marianne Hirsch, and Edouard Glissant. In this way, I create a new definition of haunting as a positive, productive, and transformative poetic theme and technique. I argue that calling upon the “ghosts” of history through content and form creates a transgressive act against hegemonic systems that inflict and instill trauma.

Oftentimes, texts that address history are considered works of “witness.” To “witness” is to see, hear, and know by personal presence. To witness also implies being a spectator, as if one could testify and give evidence of an event. As such, a strange concern over objectivity and subjectivity arises. How can we depend on a witness account? Does

dependability matter? Critical work on the poetry of witness offers helpful insight into the literature of haunting. Carolyn Forché, in “Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness” (1993) writes:

In fact, the poem might be our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence. As such, there is nothing for us to base the poem on, no independent account that will tell us whether or not we can see a given text as being "objectively" true. Poem as trace, poem as evidence. (Forché 1)

Here, poetry serves as evidence for that which has occurred, adding weight and voice to the “facts.” The responsibility of “the sole trace of an occurrence” is heavy; the witness holds great power in terms of their personal account. Yet, to return to my earlier question, what if a poet were to “witness” an occurrence second-hand? What if a significant gap exists, in terms of time and space, between that which occurred and that which the poem addresses? Here, haunting can offer an alternative or extension. I consider haunting as encompassing fabrication, the removed distance of the collective voice, and the re-creation of trauma through experiential form. These techniques will be further expounded upon in subsequent chapters (i.e. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *disense* embodying a collective voice in Chapter Two). These particular modes of haunting allow for the poet’s control and agency to arise (poem as evidence vs. poem as agency).

Extending outward from the poetry of witness, what is the ghost exactly? In *Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities* (2013), Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren introduce the ghost through a multitude of angles. Ghosts in both written and oral narratives appear “as anything from figments of the imagination, divine messengers, benign or exacting ancestors, and pesky otherworldly creatures populating particular loci to disturbing figures bent on exacting revenge, revealing hidden crimes, continuing a love affair or simply

searching for a way to pass on” (1). These various roles share one feature: the power of the ghost to affect the living. Yet, interestingly, the gap between “exacting revenge” and “figments of the imagination” is quite large. “Figments of the imagination” suggest more power for the conjurer; without the conjurer, the ghost would not rise to the surface. This act of imagination is not a matter of repression or being “haunted by the past.” In “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud writes of our “primitive fear of the dead,” (Freud 219) resulting in *unheimlich* or uncanny occurrences that haunt us. In this way, what should not be seen is laid out for all to see. For Freud, the haunted person lacks control; the ghost comes after you. To place pressure on this passivity, I turn toward the conjurer and “figments of the imagination” and ask: what could it mean to welcome and proactively create such haunting? Often situated in the repressed space of the past, how can haunting move into the present *and* the future?

To continue, Blanco and Peeren note “in an active, dynamic engagement, [studies in haunting] may reveal the insufficiency of the present moment, as well as the disconsolations and erasures of the past, and a tentative hopefulness for future resolutions” (16). By moving beyond a focus on the repression, Blanco and Peeren suggest that haunting reflects the current and future world around us. Indeed, haunting in terms of race, due to histories of institutionalized subjectivity (i.e. the slave trade, mass incarceration, immigration policies, etc.), moves beyond a general sense of ghostliness. Haunting is certainly not color-blind; again, a tree cannot simply be a tree. This particular haunting has future ramifications. To continue: “More relevant to the specific past, present, and future struggles for recognition, respect, and justice of those identified as non-masculine, non-heterosexual, and/or non-white” (20).

The sociologist Avery Gordon dives into the particularities of haunting and race in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008). She asserts: “the ghost demands your attention” (Gordon xvi). Through the ghost of history, Gordon explores how we come to understand modern forms of dispossession, exploitation, and repression, as well as their impacts on shared conditions of living. As a sociological text, *Ghostly Matters* uses literature alongside historical case studies as its methodology. Blanco and Peeren refer to such an approach as a “spectropolitics.” In other words, examining the ghost through sociology “address[es] how, in different parts of the world, particular subjects become prone to social erasure, marginalization, and precarity” (Blanco and Peeren 19). With her sociological lens, Gordon stretches across disciplines to focus mainly on novels and prose narratives in her argument. Gordon insists upon the intimate connection between social life and the text. Indeed, as Julian Wolfreys posits in “On Textual Haunting,” we uphold texts as markers of history: “Books appear to have a material presence without which anchoring that such materiality provides, our lives would assume a ghostly condition of impermanence” (Wolfreys 71). Yet, of course, texts are hardly concrete and material; texts also shift. He continues: “Texts are neither dead nor alive, yet they hover at the very limits between living and dying. The text thus partakes in its own haunting, it is traced by its own phantoms, and it is this condition which reading must confront” (Wolfreys 72). This fruitful space of confrontation is the site where Gordon explores sociological haunting. However, Gordon does not discuss poetry. Yet, poetry –with its multitude of lyrical and formal opportunities – intimately addresses the “haunting” impact of history and exploitation.

Moreover, as Gordon argues in the beginning of her book, haunting can make an individual a passive receiver. The ghost comes to you when it so desires. This kind of haunting suggests an uneasy, ghostly surveillance:

Haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security. (xvi)

Here, social systems generate haunting effects *upon* individuals, creating a daily reminder (“impacts felt in everyday life”) and acceptance of such oppressive histories that continue into the present and future. The idea of a “supposedly over and done with” history is particularly suspicious, as history is never a closed book, so to speak. Yet, despite Gordon’s focus on the power of social systems in terms of haunting, she does hint at proactivity in the act of provocation: “Haunting, unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done” (xvi). I extend Gordon’s sense of “something-to-be-done” and argue that the poet recognizes this call to action and provides a blueprint –albeit messy and ever-changing – for such sociopolitical responsibility.

To offer a different perspective on haunting, writing, and race, Ann Alin Chen’s *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2000) considers the process of grief experienced by writers of color. Chen illuminates the deep psychological impact of discrimination and argues that a “persistent racial grief” exists and is recognized and tested daily (Chen 21). Here, one is lost *and* losing. She argues for a reconsideration of “agency in relation to forms of racial grief, to broaden the term beyond the assumption of a pure sovereign subject to other manifestations, forms, tonalities, and gradations of governance” (15). In other words, acknowledging psychic injury is necessary to consider when discussing writers of color. Moreover, psychic injury includes different “forms, tonalities, and gradations of governance.” Chen defines racial melancholy as having “always existed for raced subjects as a *sign* of rejection and as a psychic *strategy* in response to that rejection” (20). For instance, in Clifton’s question as to why there is always “an other poem,” the speaker’s

outcry of “why” points to the pre-determined loss of control. Clifton offers a visible response to rejection from the literal body *and* the social body. Chen insists on the significance of the grieving process in responding to rejection, suggesting the impossibility of acceptance or “getting over it.” She writes: “Rather than prescribing how we as a nation might go about ‘getting over’ that history, it is useful to ask what it means, for social, political, and subjective beings *to grieve*” (7). In this way, we can see the return of Inada’s geese not as a means of uncanny return, but as a display of grief. The geese do not fly off into the distance freely, but return to reject the act of “getting over it.” Yet, embedded within Chen’s concept of racial melancholy is a return to a “haunted” mode of passivity. While there is a hint of power in “a psychic *strategy* in response,” there is also fear at the base of this coping mechanism. If racial grief is persistent, can we imagine another kind of response that engages the process of grief *and* control over or even pride concerning such grief?

Imagination and creation can provide alternative responses to racial melancholy. In *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsh discusses how images in particular help reconstruct memories. Her focus on visual elements speaks to multimedia elements of Asian American poetry texts, such as the use of photographs, documents, and charts in Inada’s *Legends From Camp* and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTEE* (which will be expounded upon in Chapter Two). For Hirsch, this mixing of genre and medium creates a strong narrative web: “Text and image, intricately entangled in a narrative web, work in collaboration to tell a complicated story of loss and longing” (*Family Frames* 4). In particular, she points to the key role that imagination plays in reconstructing memory. This reconstruction challenges evidence-based acts of witness. Hirsh’s definition of “postmemory” abandons an attempt at recollection (to return to Carolyn Forché’s understanding of witness poetry) and instead aims for creation:

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (*Family Frames* 22)

The generational difference allows for productive yet painful acts of the imagination to occur. Fraught with uncertainty, postmemory as an “imaginative investment and creation” reverberates on a deep level. As a mediated activity, postmemory offers an alternative or answer to the problem of witness being testimonial or personal. Indeed, postmemory emphasizes representation and creation instead of direct experience. As a response to the trauma of previous generations, postmemory is situated between personal and impersonal memory. This memory is “often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible” (“Surviving Images” 9). This encounter with images uses both impersonal and personal images in order to feel closer to past trauma. Interestingly, Hirsch points to history as a wound, which acts as both a noun and verb: “If [the images] cut and wound, do they enable memory, mourning, and working through?” (8) As the word “enable[s]” suggests productivity, my answer to Hirsch’s question is a resounding “yes.”

With this generational distance and imaginative power in mind, haunting then raises the “how” question. In other words, how do poets create fraught spaces of haunting power? What do these narratives actually look like? Many scholars, including Gordon, focus primarily on the content of haunting; ghosts literally appear as characters, as metaphors, as ideas. The issue of form and the reading experience is often left out of such discussions of literary haunting. Of course, for a reader to experience haunting, she must cross uncomfortable boundaries; it is one thing to *write about* haunting and another to *make the reader feel* haunted as they read. Wolfrey, for one, emphasizes that readers fear this act of

reading. He writes: “We want to bury the text, to entomb or encrypt it, in the name of tradition or heritage for example, and yet we cannot quite live with such *necrobibliography*” (72). In other words, the reader does not desire a reading experience that traumatizes. Yet, with Hirsch’s productive sense of generational distance in mind, why is the reader –often seen as distant from the text and writer –considered exempt from such a haunting experience? I will address this question with more detail in subsequent chapters, as the poets in my dissertation welcome the reader into the experience of haunting, reaching toward (not away from) that necrobibliographic space.

To fully bring forth the ghost, I argue that poets reconfigure form and language to allegorize the very act of haunting – mirroring loss, dispersal, and retrieval. Edouard Glissant, in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), points to the importance of form when engaging the ghosts of colonialism, which reverberates into the present and future. *Poetics of Relation* posits the necessity of formal fragmentation and non-linearization as a result of historical tragedy. Here, form is of utmost significance. Glissant writes of the Creole storyteller as a product of the “fecund tragedy” of the plantation (Glissant 68). As a result, the storyteller or *quimboiseur* is unable to narrate fully, clearly, and in a linear fashion. As I will expand on in future chapters, this *quimboiseur* echoes Cha’s *disease*, Cathy Park Hong’s *The Guide*, among others. To continue, Glissant writes of the *quimboiseur*’s difficult task of narration: “[W]e do not see [the story] stretch into our past (calmly carry us into the future) but implode in us in clumps, transported in fields of oblivion, where we must, with difficulty and pain, put it all back together” (45). In this light, a poetics of haunting is akin to an uneasy reckoning. Fragments of narrative “implode” and are dispersed far and wide, into unknown “fields of oblivion.” Writing then becomes the difficult act of retrieval or “put[ting] it all back together,” piece by piece. Walter Benjamin’s concept of the Angel of History, inspired by Paul Klee’s painting

Angelus Novus (1920), recognizes these “fields of oblivion” as well. The Angel of History turns toward a past filled with piling wreckage. From “Theses on the Philosophy of History”:

The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. (257)

For Benjamin, Glissant’s act of retrieval is futile, as progress does not allow for “mak[ing] whole what has been smashed.” However, in thinking through texts and poetry in particular, Glissant’s position on retrieval and bringing pieces back together is present and necessary. Fragmentation, white space, linguistic “errors,” multimedia work, transnational collages, etc. all point toward a formal attempt to not only “make whole what has been smashed” but also invite the reader to participate in that retrieval. This act of retrieval, through the reading experience, allows us to see the very cracks in our haunted world – our current sociopolitical sphere.

This formal attention sets the foundation for my reworked definition of haunting. Throughout, I argue for the necessity of understanding the ghostliness of form; “haunting” is not merely a matter of content (i.e. the literal ghosts in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*). My definition of a poetics of haunting is a retooled understanding of “haunting” from Gordon to Glissant. I redefine haunting as a poetics that utilizes *productive* and *transformative* techniques. Calling upon the “ghosts” of history through content and form in poetry creates a transgressive act against larger, hegemonic systems (which often value silence and erasure). Through extended engagement and close reading of particular collections of poetry, I argue that haunting occurs formally, using language and the page as a

space to enact haunting for the reader. In this redefinition, my goal is to turn passive associations of haunting (i.e. in which abusive system of power make themselves known) into that which is full of agency and narrative re-imagination. Instead of positing a psychoanalytic understanding of haunting as a return of the repressed, I define haunting in terms of invocation: a deliberate, powerful, and provocative move toward haunted places (“going to the ghost”).

Sharon Patricia Holland, in “Introduction: Raising the Dead,” begins to consider haunting as a productive activity as well. Holland focuses on Toni Morrison’s novels, particularly *Beloved*. She considers how Morrison’s novel confronts an audience that turns away from violent histories, alerting the American psyche of its apathy. She writes: “Although *Beloved* is a work of fiction, its ghostly presence merged with America’s worst nightmares of both past and self... *Beloved* confront[s] readers with a persistent sense of simultaneity until all fact, all knowledge about slavery, about history begins to exist as in-between...”(362). Here, ghostliness becomes a space of illumination and activism. Writers like Morrison are “raising the dead, allowing them to speak, and providing them with the agency of physical bodies in order to tell the story of a death-in-life” (364). Yet, like many scholars, Holland focuses primarily on novels and prose writing. Again, poetry falls between the gaps in scholarship on haunting. My dissertation insists that poetry, often overlooked, offers a fertile site of haunting, invocation, and participation.

Nathaniel Mackey writes about conjuring spirits in *Splay Anthem*, where the Kaluli sing to the spirits: “Kaluli poetics posits poetry and music as quintessentially elegiac but also restorative, not only lamenting violated connection but aiming to reestablish connection” (Mackey xvi). Here, poetry is “restorative,” with the goal of reconnecting, pushing against “violated connection.” A poetics of haunting also places the power of such restoration in the

hands of the singer and poet – the power to reshape language via innovative imagination and form.

Notably, I will be employing and exploring this definition of haunting within the field of Asian American poetry. Drawing on new and exciting work on haunting across disciplines and concentrations – particularly in African American literature (such as Marisa Parham’s *Haunting and Displacement in African American Literature and Culture* in 2009) – my work builds critical intersections in Asian American studies and 21st century American poetry and poetics, with a focus on Asian American women poets. Indeed, *Nests and Strangers: On Asian American Women Poets* (2015), a small edited volume, is currently the only collection of scholarly work on Asian American women poets; my dissertation is dedicated solely to the work of Asian American women poets, whose precarity and gendered experiences of haunting raise key questions about the matrilineal roles of silence, storytelling, and collective rituals of out-cry. Furthermore, through the creation of a multimodal, digital space in conjunction with my written dissertation, I hope to reach a broader community of practicing poets, people of color, historians, scholars, and community activists interested in the potentialities of a poetics of haunting.

As an area of study, there are numerous threads to explore in Asian American poetry, including race and form, multimodality, modernism, and the development of poetry communities. Since the 1980’s and 1990’s, the field of Asian American studies has expanded beyond fiction and non-fiction, shifting critical attention to poetry within the last decade. Book-length studies on Asian American poetry continues to grow. Timothy Yu’s *Race and the Avant-Garde* (2009) is particularly notable; in his book, Yu reads the Language poetry movement of the 1970s and 80s and Asian American poetry of the same years and explores

their positioning against mainstream American poetry. He reveals how strategies of formal experimentation are tied to social identity and community. Dorothy Wang's recent *Thinking Its Presence* (2013) takes up Yu's argument and extends it by insisting that aesthetic forms are inseparable from social, political, and historical contexts in terms of writing and reception. To echo Shockley's quotation earlier in this introduction, Wang asks: how does criticism occlude race in discussions of the American poetic tradition?

Additionally, investigations into modernism and Asian American poetry have been of interest – particularly Zhaoming Qian's *Orientalism and Modernism* (1995) and Josephine Park's *Apparitions of Asia* (2008). In *Apparitions of Asia*, Park reopens our understanding of Asian American poetry by looking toward the past. Over the last century, the repercussions of modernism's interest in the Orient have become tangible and felt in the work of Asian American poetry, as “an onerous burden and as an opportunity for literary experiment” (4). In this way, one could view modernism itself as one of the many specters of haunting in poetry. Currently, the field desires to expand our understanding of “Asian America” by exploring transpacific and diasporic connections. These scholars include Aihwa Ong, David Palumbo-Liu, Shu-mei Shih, and Yunte Huang. Chapter Three takes a closer look at transnational poetics in the context of haunting. The poets in this dissertation are highly transnational, as haunting occurs across multiple shores and nationalities.

Furthermore, within Asian American studies, scholarly articles and book chapters have featured prominent poets such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Marilyn Chin, John Yau, and Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge. As the field continues to grow, I will be engaging lesser-known poets, including poets who have begun publishing within the last decade including Cathy Park Hong and Sawako Nakayasu. Current scholarship has also begun to include poets who are often marginalized or “less established” within Asian American studies. For example,

Joseph Jeon's *Racial Things, Racial Forms* (2012) includes Yoko Ono in discussions about hate objects and objectification. Building upon the trend of "resurrection" in scholarship (a methodological play on "going to the ghost"), I plan to return to poets such as Cha and engage less-studied poets such as Barbara Jane Reyes to deepen connections across time. Each chapter in my dissertation focuses on two or more Asian American poets who grapple with haunting in different ways, such as redefining the language hierarchies that "haunt" the American poetry landscape.

My second chapter, "The Vulnerable and Open Field: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim," charts the formal elements of "haunting," notably fragmentation, the visual space of the page, the use of historical documents, and the long poem (vs. discrete poem). The texts that analyzed include Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE* (1982) and Myung Mi Kim's *Commons* (2002). Cha's use of a *diseuse* ("teller") will offer a helpful framework through which we understand distance and the ability to speak/tell the story of haunting. To tell the story necessitates pain, particularly when language cannot be separated from occupation and war. Such pain and vulnerability produces a culture of silence. For instance, in *Commons*, Kim's use of bracketed language (i.e. "[this is how I speak]") demonstrates the difficulty of literal utterance. Rather than write "about" this pain, both Cha and Kim recreate this experience of pain and vulnerability – which we, as readers, are subject to. By examining these two poets together and returning to Glissant, I contend that the multi-voiced speakers' collective process of retrieval holds their fragmented forms together, since fragmentation leads to the act of collection. By "retrieving" their respective histories and personal narratives, Cha and Kim control how we read a text, thus challenging "textbook" histories of the Korean War, colonialism, and U.S. immigration.

Also apparent in Cha and Kim's work with their address to the U.S. and Korea, my next chapter, "Transpacific and Transtemporal Haunting: Bhanu Kapil and Sawako Nakayasu," explores the invocation of the ghost as a transpacific and transtemporal phenomena. In this way, history haunts language across and through nation-states and time. I will explore Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal* (2009) and Sawako Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color: Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-Translations, and Originals* (2011) to grapple with transnationalism and the struggle to write about what one feels distanced from. Kapil's *Humanimal* envisions a haunted landscape of colonialism and Christian missionaries. *Humanimal* is based on the story of Kamala and Amala, two girls found living with wolves in Bengal, India in 1920. This chapter will continue to examine the relationship between history and form, as Kapil enacts transnationalism with an account of her India visit in 2004, as well as reworking source texts in *Humanimal* (the 1945 diary of an Indian missionary, Reverend Joseph Singh). Kapil envisions *Humanimal* as a border-crossing text, emphasizing embodied performance and somatic writing as a means toward invocation and narrative resonance. Nakayasu's *Mouth Eats Color* provokes and expands our parameters of tradition, nationhood, and translation. Translations turn and turn again in French, English, Chinese (notably in *kanji*, which uses Japanese syntax), Spanish, and Japanese, confounding language, genre, and time/space. Nakayasu's book is framed as a collaboration with Chika Sagawa, who is known as the first female modernist in Japan. Sagawa died in 1935 at the young age of 24. In *Mouth: Eats Color*, Nakayasu invokes Sagawa's ghost and does not distinguish who writes what (making Nakayasu's original work, Sagawa's original work, and Nakayasu's translations indistinguishable).

My fourth chapter, "Unsettling English: Barbara Jane Reyes and Cathy Park Hong," offers close examinations of Barbara Jane Reyes' *Poeta en San Francisco* (2005) and Cathy Park

Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* (2007). I argue that Reyes and Hong expose the scaffolding of postcolonial linguistic hierarchies, thus building a more expansive, less evaluative understanding of how and why we speak today. Here, standard English holds “haunting” power as an enforced system of knowledge and communication. Yet, these poets consider language as a *choice* – a transparent and performative treatise for transnationalism. *Poeta en San Francisco* imagines a multilingual field, mixing variations of Spanish, Tagalog, Baybayin, English, and an unnamable language to create plurality and simultaneity. In *Dance Dance Revolution*, Hong invents a language; the Guide leads the reader through the fantastical Desert, speaking a creole made up of over 300 languages and dialects. By undoing the specter of English down to the word level, Reyes and Hong reevaluate language as a deeply felt political act.

My fifth and concluding chapter, “Invocation Across Forms,” will consider how to inhabit and extend a poetics of haunting beyond the page. This chapter references my digital humanities project, which includes current, first-hand audio and video conversations, original poetry, photographs, and multimodal ephemera. The Asian American poets featured in this digital project include poets from my dissertation, as well as emerging poets who engage in their own imagination of a poetics of haunting. These poets include: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (in conversation with myself), Cathy Linh Che, Don Mee Choi, Christine Hou, Bhanu Kapil, Sally Wen Mao, Diana Khoi Nguyen, Monica Sok, and Pimone Triplett. The site also features my TEDx talk, “Going Toward the Ghost,” which analyzes my own poetry and poetics in relation to China’s Great Leap Forward. Indeed, my digital project seeks to expand and apply my central argument with real-life stakes. Publically available, this project continues the act of transparency, community engagement, and activism through current

media. As Blanco and Peeren argue, the impact of various media forms still need to be addressed, notably the influence of the internet (20).

Ultimately, my dissertation insists that form and history cannot be occluded in our discussion of Asian American poetry and contemporary poetry more generally. The stakes are simply too high. Indeed, as Cathy Park Hong argues in her essay “Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde” (2014), poetry cannot be “post-identity.” She writes: “We can never laugh it off, take it all in as one sick joke, and truly escape the taint of subjectivity and history.” Again, the ghost is ever-present; here, Hong raises discussions of race and poetry from its “underness.” By highlighting “the ghost,” I aim to create sites of transparency, intervention, and activism in the budding critical fields of Asian American studies and contemporary theories of haunting. To return to Clifton, we must go toward the ghosts: “I’m not going to make others comfortable and *not* mention that... And it would be nice to forget history, but we do it at our peril, as we have seen lately.” These following poets boldly call forth ghosts – welcoming discomfort – in order to re-make, re-shape, and re-claim necessary voices.

CHAPTER 2

The Vulnerable and Open Field:

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim

“And crumbling pause”

- Myung Mi Kim, from *Dura*

In the preface to Myung Mi Kim’s *Dura* (1998), Juliana Spahr considers Kim’s continual return to the unnaturalness of English: “*Dura* is all about reminding us that the ways that we talk about things do not belong to us or only to the U.S.” (xi). Indeed, language reflects a mutable and transnational landscape. Interestingly, she also notes that the ways we speak “do not belong to us.” Spahr’s point raises critical questions: who or what does language belong to? What occurs when language is taken away or denied? Who are the subjects in this equation (the “us”)? And how can one write about or write through such concerns?

In “Interpolation, Coherence, History: The Works of Myung Mi Kim,” Sarah Dowling argues that the subject in Kim’s work does not fully come into being: “her poems carefully trace an absent center: there is no “specific figure” in the poems who hears this loudness or speaks these languages” (11). Without a specific figure, Dowling posits that Kim’s subject is not fully formed. For Kim, addressing the denied subject via language – a collision of English and Korean – is about process or form: the *how*. In each of her five collections, albeit differently, Kim writes long poems full of fragmentation, space, and historical quotes/documents. Kim writes *Dura*, a book preoccupied with immigration, diaspora, and cultural breakdown, with what she calls a “crumbling pause” (*Dura* 9).

Narrative sense falls apart or crumbles, so to speak. In forming a poetics of haunting, I argue that we must closely examine formal techniques – such as fragmentation – in order to understand the social and historical contexts of the content. In other words, we must pay attention to a text’s “full dimensionality,” as Dorothy Wang argues. We must “[pay] close attention to the full dimensionality – formal and social – of the poetry of that segment of the American population considered most ‘nonnative’ to the productive of English-language poetry” (Wang 305). By spotlighting the process through which Asian American poets write, we – as readers – can better understand our experience of the text. How is history and memory presented to us? What poetic techniques direct us toward a particular emotive response?

This chapter, “The Vulnerable and Open Field: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim,” examines how these two poets construct a reading experience of open vulnerability. As I will argue, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim replicate an experience of vulnerability in the reader through their respective formal techniques such as fragmentation, white space, etc. While I look at related texts to further my argument, as with *Dura* above, I will primarily discuss two influential books: Cha’s *DICTEE* (1982) and Kim’s *Commons* (2002). By placing these two poets in conversation, I will consider how Kim honors and extends Cha’s formal experimentation. *With both Cha and Kim, I will investigate the impact of the following formal techniques in a poetics of haunting: 1) fragmentation, 2) the visual space of the page, 3) embedded historical documents, and 4) length or the long poem.* Along with deeply affecting the reader’s emotive experience of the text, their formal techniques allow for the poet’s agency to arise. Indeed, by guiding how we read a text, they challenge normative narrative and lyric approaches (i.e. the three-act story structure, the volta, etc.) and “textbook” histories of the Korean War, colonialism, and U.S. immigration.

To address the reader's haunted, emotive experience through these two texts, my understanding of vulnerability borrows Heidegger's concept of *Geworfenheit* or "thrownness." According to Heidegger, everyone is "thrown" into the world, and plunged amid frustrations, sufferings, demands, and social conventions that one does not choose. In *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger explains the resulting inescapable vulnerability of every subject:

Attunement discloses Da-sein not only in its thrownness and dependence on the world already disclosed with its being, it is itself the existential kind of being in which it is continually surrendered to the "world" and lets itself be concerned by it in such a way that it somehow evades its very self. (140)

In this definition, the self is fundamentally vulnerable; the self is "continually surrendered" as if in battle. Everyone is born into the world with this "thrownness." The subjects in Cha's and Kim's work – neither fully formed nor singular – are in this state of "thrownness" and therefore susceptible to physical and emotional harm. Their subjects' gendered and racialized precarity as women of color intensify such vulnerability. By using fragmentation, visual space, lifted documents, and the long form, they underscore this vulnerability for all to experience viscerally; the trauma of prior generations permeate their texts. As readers, we are also thrown into the text, without a "map" or rulebook. I argue that such vulnerability – controlled through the above formal techniques – negates dangerous silence. Indeed, vulnerability asks us to confront that which we are afraid of. We are open to the ghosts.

As a canonical text in Asian American studies, *DICTEE* invites continual scholarly reconsideration. There have been numerous articles and chapters on Cha's work in the early and late '90s and '00s – with various perspectives and thematic concerns. For instance, in "Memory and Anti-Documentary Desire," Anne Anlin Cheng examines Cha's "anti-

documentary desire.” Cheng argues that the text “undermines its own ‘filmic, documentary’ desires and suggests ways in which this ambivalence embodies an internal critique of documentation as the foundational logic of the memoir” (Cheng 120). In this way, she radicalizes the text’s “memoir” categorization. Refusing documentary work, which suggests a mode of witness, I extend Cheng’s approach and argue that a poetics of haunting seeks a more experiential approach (vs. an approach of historical documentation). Moreover, thinking deeply about the role of Cha as the author and the multifarious speaker, Sue J. Kim’s article, “Narrator, Author, Reader: Equivocation” closely examines the speaker’s distanced position. Kim posits that such distance – operating in a non-realistic mode – is usually seen as ironic, thus disrupting empathy. However, in *DICTEE*, “the communal imperatives that problematize a singular voice also complicate a total detachment, or separation between narrator and author” (J. Kim 165). Indeed, Kim raises a question about subjectivity: what is Cha’s relationship to the *disense*? This chapter will also explore such questions of empathy and authorial subjectivity.

Another significant scholar in the field, Timothy Yu, in *Race and the Avant-Garde*, argues that *DICTEE* goes beyond its label of ethnic literature: “*DICTEE* is a truly divided text. Cha insists that the book’s first half whose historical and biographical impulses we might ally with the Asian American- must be followed by the “experimental” and abstracting turn of the second half, in order to return to a “home” that can only be located in writing” (Yu 108). This focus on the experimental form is critical when considering *DICTEE*’s place in the Asian American literary canon. Indeed, while Asian American “impulses” may be apparent, as Yu notes, *DICTEE* expands beyond this categorization. Considering the transnational concerns of the book, Cha’s work moves well beyond a one-directional migration from Korea to the U.S. At once a postcolonial, avant-garde, and feminist text, Cha

weaves together various forms and genres: autobiography, poetry, fiction, political documents, letters, ideograms, and images. Throughout, Cha's preoccupation with the difficulty of language and articulation is evident. Problems raised by shifting language – between English, French, and Korean – connects to the consequences of transnational movement. This includes movement between Korea and the U.S., as well as displacement as a result of the Japanese occupation and the enforcement of Korea's Demilitarized Zone. During the Japanese occupation, the Korean language was forcibly suppressed from 1909-1945. With both linguistic and physical borders, Koreans became exiles in their own country. As evident in the title of her posthumous work, *Exile Temps Morts* (2009), Cha grappled with the theme of exile throughout her unfortunately short career. For Cha, exile represented a separation from her homeland – an imagined place where return is inherently deferred.

As we open *DICTEE*, we encounter an image of an uninhabitable landscape full of rubble. This photograph, framed by black space, appears before the title page. As such, it is separated from the archival space of publication dates. Positioned outside of the proper book, the image becomes a figure of exile. At once personal and impersonal, this image of a barren landscape encapsulates Cha's preoccupations with home, which is anything but a rooted, bounded, and identifiable space. Indeed, the image lacks captions or noticeable landmarks; this anonymous landscape could exist anywhere and at any time. Yet, this is not a landscape of silence. When we turn the page, we are met with another image (also lacking a caption). This grainy image features a wall with the following carved in Korean: "Mother, I miss you, I am hungry, I want to go home." It is after this plea – literally carved into permanence on a wall – that we reach the title page. *DICTEE* refers to *dictées*, or French dictation exercises utilized to test grammar. In capital letters, Cha's title shouts out as if a command.

These evocative images – unmarked by time – open like wounds. Later in the book, Cha writes: “Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound” (*DICTEE* 33). Throughout, we come to learn that there is no “now.” There is only the past, which flickers through the foggy boundaries of “screen screen door screen gate smoke” (127). The past is an “old wound,” which continues to shift, re-open, and fester. Cha’s question of resurrecting the past is notably a statement, highlighting its inability to be answered. “Why” is not as important as the act of opening the wound itself. Instead of why, Cha focuses on the question of how. How does one encounter exile, displacement, and “the old wound?” How does one call forth the ghosts?

To create an experience of vulnerability, Cha fragments her text. Akin to “throwing one” into the world, *DICTEE* is written in pieces, without transitions as bridges. Calling forth the muse, she writes: “Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us” (7). Writing against linearity, Cha asks the reader to move through the text without the safety of transitions or the structure of beginning, middle, and end. Of course, Cha is our guide, as she organizes these pieces mindfully. Depending on what languages we can read, we enter the text in different places. For instance, non-French speakers would skip over the paragraph beginning “Aller a la ligne” and move down to the English: “Open paragraph” (1). Or, non-Korean speakers would bypass the wall carving before the title page. In this way, our reading experience depends on our unique linguistic histories and contexts. Later, Cha’s *disense* or teller asks about her/our past: “what house clan tribe stock strain/what lineage extraction” (20). The line “From A Far” begins this particular passage, which can be read as an answer to the following questions. Here, normative order is once again challenged (A&Q instead of Q&A). With “From A Far,” Cha stresses immeasurable distance – between her and her lineage, between her and the reader, etc.

Certainly, fragmentation encompasses multiple ways of reading, as well as the half-lit page; Cha does not fault us for not knowing:

There. Later, uncertain, if it was
 the rain, the speech, memory.
 Re membered from dream.
 How it diminishes itself. How to Dim
 inish itself. As
 it dims. (69)

If we can not read French, we gloss over the right side of the page, which we assume is the French translation. In this stanza, we move quickly from a place (“There”) to a time (“Later”), as if these planes of existence are one in the same. Furthermore, we do not know where “there” is, but we appear there as if tossed into a pre-existing space. This dream space is an “uncertain” space, yet we move forward, propelled by the “How.” Cha directs us to focus on “how it diminishes itself.” Here, we can see language and rhetoric literally break down into pieces: “Re membered” and “Dim/inish.”

As seen above, language is fragmented down to the word, syllable, and letter. Such fragmentation changes our normative reading experience, breaking with expectations of what constitutes a “complete” sentence and grammatical correctness. This fragmentation on the word level creates a staccato rhythm; in music, a staccato note appears detached and sharp. In the above example, the “Re” appears staccato. By dismembering “re” from “remembered,” we turn our focus toward the meaning of the prefix “re” as “again and again” or the abbreviation “re:” as in “regarding, with reference to.” In addition, fragmented language reflects the act of dictation and the painful labor of speaking, particularly in a non-native tongue. This is most apparent when the *diseuse* speaks. Throughout, Cha’s fragmented language makes the reader feel truncated and uncomfortable in their vulnerability. L. Hyun

Yi Kang in *Writing Self, Writing Nation* speaks about the frustration of reading: “I found myself literally yelling at the book. It angered me that the text was not always accessible” (Yu 106). Yet, accessibility is not a concern of Cha’s work. Exile, by definition, lacks access. Each paragraph is a struggle to speak and communicate, evident in the combination of short, staccato sentences with long run-on sentences. For example:

I write. I write you. Daily. From here. If I am not writing, I am thinking about writing. I am composing. Recording movements. You are here I raise the voice. Particles bits of sound and noise gathered pick up lint, dust. They might scatter and become invisible. Speech morsels. Broken chips of stones. (50)

Language – down to the word level – does not move forward fluidly. Instead of “I write you daily from here,” Cha breaks down the lines, forcing the reader to start over (“re”) and feel the struggle of speaking again and again. Her purpose is evident in the content itself, which views language as “broken chips of stones.”

This struggle to speak asks us to consider the vulnerability of Cha’s subject, or the *disense*. The *disense* acts as a collective voice throughout the book. To return to the phrase “Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us,” the use of “even us” suggests vulnerability, as if Cha’s subject is subjugated or unworthy. The subject in *DICTEE* is notably fragmented, recalling Dowling’s argument about Kim’s unformed subject. Kang continues to speak of her frustration with *DICTEE*: “Most of all Cha herself remained elusive” (Yu 106). Yet, this elusiveness reflects the vulnerable subject. Cha’s *disense* ventriloquizes a multitude of voices. The *disense* is at once Cha, her mother, the Greek muses, and revolutionaries such as Yu Guan Soon. This raises the concept of the “Korean American telepath” as someone “genetically hypersusceptible to han, she is seized by visions of the Korean War and Japanese occupation” (Chu 100). Her body is sensitive; Cha’s use of a *disense* stresses the

difficulty of speaking and telling a story from a single “I” subject. Indeed, she is “seized” by such visions. As a re-imagining of Heidegger’s existentialism, Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* offers a helpful framework; Glissant writes of the Creole storyteller as a product of the “fecund tragedy” of the plantation (68). The *quimboiseur* is unable to tell a story in a linear fashion. Like that of the *quimboiseur*, Cha’s *disease* is the holder of a fragmented past. To tell the story necessitates pain, particularly when language cannot be separated from occupation and war, which produces a culture of silence. Through Cha’s fragmented language and *disease*, an absent presence arises. In a section which articulates the painful experience of entering America, she writes: “You leave you come back to the shell left empty all this time. To claim to reclaim, the space. Into the mouth the wound the entry is reverse and back” (57). *DICTEE* is at once a book of abundance (the ever-expanding wound) and insufficiency (the half-lit page).

Cha’s *disease* and *in media res* approach – located in the fluid past and present – leads to another question: what happens to the future in *DICTEE*? This problem of the future points to an “anti- teleological temporality” (Clifford 264) in which *DICTEE* can not exist in a linear, forward-moving space with a clear future. As she tells the story, the *disease* is at once “here” and “there” and “constantly shadowed by a past” (Clifford 264). Indeed, the wound of the past keeps the speaker from seeing the present and the future. The reader is made vulnerable and uncertain about what is to come. Benjamin’s Angel of History and pile of wreckage is applicable to the later half of the book when the speaker “stands as a ruin stands” (*DICTEE* 177). Yet, within these ruins, there exists a desire to “make whole what has been smashed” (Benjamin 257). This attempt to “make whole” can be seen in the last two pieces of the book where Cha repeats the word “lift” in palimpsestic variations: “Lift me up mom,” “Lift me up to the window,” “In vigilance of lifting,” and “Lift me to the window

to the picture” (*DICTEE* 179). Akin to lifting up the “broken chips of stones” (50), the *disense* attempts to bring the pieces together. Compared to earlier staccato sections, this section has sparse punctuation and is full of run-on sentences. The book closes with a portrait of women in traditional Korean hanboks (again, without a caption). Here, rather than an image of uninhabitable rubble, we see faces looking out at us into the future. This image extends onto the back cover of the book, as if continuing onward. While Cha’s vision of the future is still unsure, we sense that community – notably a community of women – holds the potential of the future in their hands/voices.

Indeed, as a multimedia text, Cha asks us to focus on the contrast between her visual and verbal texts. For example, two Chinese characters sprawl across two pages: “女” and “男,” translated into English as “woman” and “man” (this occurs after introducing Yu Guan Soon, a revolutionary). On one level, Cha’s decision to include Chinese characters rather than Korean (the Han’ja alphabet rather than the modern Han’gul alphabet) emphasizes a history of Chinese rule. On another level, placing the character for “woman” before “man” turns our attention toward gender hierarches. Notably, these large characters do not have page numbers at the bottom margin, as if they are “outside” the text. Indeed, such visual choices are many layered and complex. These reoccurring visual elements – photographs, charts, notebook pages, and large characters – aid the process by which the *disense* reconstructs a personal and collective past. There are images of unidentified landscapes and more specific images of Yu Guan Soon and Cha’s mother. Marianne Hirsch’s work on Holocaust photographs and “postmemory” is a particularly useful lens to examine Cha’s work with multimedia experimentation. According to Hirsch, postmemory is a powerful form of memory which connects to objects and images, focusing on representation and creation instead of direct experience (Hirsch 9). As a response to the trauma of previous

generations, postmemory is situated between personal and impersonal memory; this memory is “often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible” (9).

This encounter with images can be applied to Cha’s work, which uses both impersonal and personal images in order to facilitate intimacy and vulnerability with the reader. Hirsch also points to the wound, which she uses as a noun and a verb: “If [the images] cut and wound, do they enable memory, mourning, and working through?” (8) Cha’s answer to Hirsch’s question would be a resounding “yes.” Cha uses these images to wound and haunt the *disease*, thus beginning the process of re-opening history. The *disease* engages with the work of postmemory in her attempt to speak and narrate; yet, the *disease* also offers the potential of postmemory imagination for the reader – leaving us images to speak with on our own (as in the opening image of rubble, without caption).

Moreover, in Seo-Young Chu's illuminating text, “Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature,” she utilizes and extends Hirsch's concept and explores the potential of what she calls “postmemory han” - a form of grief that has no equivalent in the English language; indeed, as Chu notes, "All Koreans feel it" (97). To complicate this feeling, she continues: "Are the systems [of Han] literal or figurative? Do they originate in the body or are they psychosomatic?" The answers are unclear" (Chu 98). The Korean concept of “Han” is related to a sadness deriving from first-hand experiences of sorrow and loss; for Chu, postmemory han then affects later generations. In this way, second-generation Korean Americans confront losses they have never experienced through literature. Cha takes images and gives them meaning by surrounding them with text. For instance, she writes: “The memory is the entire. The longing in the face of the lost. Maintains the missing” (*DICTEE* 38). What follows this passage is an image of figures standing in a field (39). Three figures are blindfolded in white,

with their arms open. The rest of the figures, standing before the blindfolded, appear to be soldiers due to their uniforms. Readers sense impending violence in this image. This sense of danger is aided not only by the content of the image, but also by the white space surrounding the image, which appears on its own page. Cha takes this image of impending violence – which may or may not be connected to the Japanese occupation – and connects it to the above text about memory: “the longing in the face of the lost.” Here, vulnerability rests upon the literal disappearance of text to explain what they long for. Evoking intensified longing, this image offers a space for second-generation Korean Americans to dwell in the feelings of “postmemory han.”

To return to Chu, postmemory han insists on a feeling that is intimately felt, but not literally “provable.” In *Racial Things, Racial Forms: Objecthood in Avant-Garde Asian American Poetry* (2012), Joseph Jeon turns our attention to Cha’s larger collection of multimedia work and her refusal to explicate. Jeon argues that the whiteness of the page in her work complicates the category of objecthood. In other words, the object does not have to be there in order to exist. The visual space of the page is a felt experience that necessitates the reader’s confrontation and participation. It is never a space of absence. He writes: “...This visual poem [“Surplus Novel”], characteristically for Cha, invites the viewer to confront the materiality of artistic media and to divest its whiteness of associations with blankness” (26). Rather than absence, there is an absent presence. To add to Jeon’s argument, Cha’s piece “Faire Part” (1976) in her posthumous collection *Exilee and Temps Morts* (2009) showcases language fragments on envelopes. Here, Cha writes on that which is often discarded. Indeed, we want the intimacy of the letter, not the envelope. We assume that the letter within contains content, yet Cha shifts our attention to the visual space outside. Some of the envelope flaps in “Faire Part” are open, resembling houses. On one envelope, an “O” or

circle is revealed. Here, language particles are exposed; we see a circle of return; we hear “O” as in “open” or “oh” as a cry (*Exilee and Temps Morts* 178). Again, Cha does not offer a preface, caption, or artist statement to explain. The reader must tolerate uncertainty.

These above moments of visual opacity suggest that historical accounts are open and mutable. Interestingly, Cha also utilizes historical documents as moments of continual contrast. Historical documents create a different kind of vulnerability; they offer a tangible reminder of the actual atrocities that occurred. In other words, trauma and oppression is not simply a dream state of memory (“Remembered from dream”). In Monica Sok’s “Cambodia: A Poem,” which appears in *The New Republic*, she writes in the last stanza: “This is real life not a story!/Life! Life! We sleep/in bed at night/but do not dream, because life!” These lines demand, through exclamation, that we must not forget the realness of history. In *DICTEE*, Cha embeds a historical document after a passage discussing the *disease’s* fear of history reoccurring: “To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion” (33). Vulnerability lies within the contrast between those last few words (“will not repeat history in oblivion”) and what follows afterwards: a lifted document called “Petition From the Koreans of Hawaii To President Roosevelt” (34). The letter continues for three pages. The end of the letter reads: “The clause in the treaty between the United States and Korea gives us a claim upon the United States for assistance, and this is the time when we need it most. Very respectfully, Your obedient servants, (*Sgd.*) P.K. Yoon, Syngman Rhee” (36). The language in this letter is overtly submissive; Cha follows this lifted document with: “March 1, 1919. Everyone knows to carry inside themselves, the national flag. Everyone knows equally the punishment that follows this gesture” (37). With the pressure of this last line, “your obedient servants” reads as a mode of self-protection as well as irony. Formally, both

creative and factual histories are pressed up against each other in this moment, intermingling. We can think of Cha's vision of history and identity as a process of "becoming," as Stuart Hall puts forth (236). Moreover, *DICTEE* becomes a process of unbecoming. As a displaced exile stripped of a familiar culture, there is the ever-present danger of falling into a void. This vulnerability is evident via contrasts in fragmentation, textual media, history and the imagination, etc.

Furthermore, the reader's experience of thrownness and vulnerability depends on one's inability to retreat; one must experience the world that is presented. To protect one's self from thrownness, one must learn the applicable social conventions: "Everyone knows to carry inside themselves, the national flag" (*DICTEE* 37). This inability to retreat is reflected in *DICTEE*'s length and fluidity; indeed, the book does not contain discrete poems with titles. This lack of closure is deeply related to the wound that Cha returns to time and time again. Recall Cha's lines: "From the Past. History, the old wound" (33). As I will argue later with Kim, a poetics of haunting can not be resolved; the same questions and concerns arise in later collections. However, Cha was tragically murdered in 1982, just a few days after the initial publication of *DICTEE*. This last image of a group of Korean women emphasizes community as a means to hold together fragmented form. We want to know more about these women. Are these women part of Cha's family? Are they part of our family? Even though we get closer to familiarity (compared to the opening image of rubble), we are pulled away again by her lack of answers and the black space of the page that follows the image.

Yet, the *disense* does not give up her goal of putting the pieces of history together throughout. Glissant writes about this process of collection: "[w]e do not see it stretch into our past (calmly carry us into the future) but implode in us in clumps, transported in fields of oblivion, where we must, with difficulty and pain, put it all back together" (45). *In Cha's work,*

despite the “fields of oblivion” (recall her opening image of a desolate landscape), the storyteller must put all the pieces together—even if this means failure: “It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say... It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break” (*DICTEE* 3). Here, we can read “it” as history or the wound, which exists in the mouth. Despite the painful process, history “must break.” This breakage can be read in numerous ways: break open? Break apart? Or, more critically: break in order to see and to put back together?

Ultimately, *fragmentation and length necessitates collection*. *DICTEE* is certainly not a random collection of images, poems, and prose thrown together and/or apart. Rather, Cha takes great care in organizing these pieces, creating a palimpsest in which layers of history affect the reader deeply. By putting pieces together in a particular way, she creates resonances which would otherwise be nonexistent. In addition to fragmentation, her placement of images and text attempt to create invisible bridges and connections: “Into the mouth the wound... housed skin upon skin, membrane, vessel, waters, damns, ducts, canals, bridges” (*DICTEE* 57). This act of collection notably asks us to join Cha in the vulnerable, yet powerful process of “put[ting] it all back together” (Glissant 45). Perhaps this vulnerable participation on the part of the reader is exactly why *DICTEE* (productively) frustrates readers like Kang.

The title of Myung Mi Kim’s fourth collection, *Commons*, insists on the reader’s participation in its definition: “commons” as general, open, and public. One could read the title as a meeting space of open engagement, as if holding a discussion in a “commons” area. Yet, engaging a history of violence and migration is anything but easy or welcoming. Discomfort is integral to a poetics of haunting, which necessitates a painful, yet productive move toward haunted spaces of war. This discomfort impacts one’s decision to speak (to cry out, to demand justice) or not speak (to decide speaking is too painful) – particularly for women of color who have experienced intergenerational trauma. This raises key questions in

terms of language and visibility: when and how is one silent? When and how does one speak? Kim writes about this careful decision regarding silence and voice in *Commons*: “Speaking and placing the speaking. To speak from the place of the word is to speak forth. Such noise in the ditches – the mills and farms” (7). “Noise,” which suggests that one can not distinguish what is being said, arises from “the ditches.” Ditches are hidden and overlooked spaces, recalling war trenches. As Kim puts forth, this is where one “place[s] the speaking” – not at a public lectern. Moreover, this speaking occurs in three short fragments, recalling *DICTEE*’s staccato punctuation.

Yet, by not publicly speaking about war and trauma, its presence becomes more palpable. As Avery Gordon, in *Ghostly Matters*, writes: “A structure of feeling ‘articulates *presence*’ as the tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences” (200). That which appears empty is “noisy” and “seething.” This contradiction of “noisy silences” interests Kim greatly. In a 2011 interview with Divya Victor in *Jacket2*, Kim discusses the problem of surface narratives and suggests presence via absence:

But I wonder where it is too comfortable a position or comfortable line of thinking and comfortable line of critical activity, as opposed to things that are not settled and uncomfortable about that narrative. To make that narrative into a scrutable trajectory between the “givens” and the formal, compositional, and processual work — I’m curious about what this *achieves* and what this *excludes*. (1)

Here, Kim is skeptical of comfortable narratives, questioning what they exclude; indeed, she uses the word “comfortable” three times as if the word itself is overwhelmingly cloying. In this statement, Kim points our attention to “the formal, compositional, and processual work.” Akin to Cha’s *DICTEE*, process and form is brought to the forefront. *Commons* also utilizes fragmentation, visual space, lifted documents, and the long, serial form; her approach

extends Cha's formal techniques, adding nuances that expose the reader to an experience of war and migration on a daily, global level.

Kim's fragmentation in *Commons* centers on the fragment's individual integrity as well as its relationship to other fragments. In a 2008 interview with Lynn Keller in *Comparative Literature*, she considers her use of fragments: "For me the fragment is something already imbued with its own integrity - historical, material, acoustic, and so on. This coincides with my sense of the mobility and plasticity of language, bits of language coming together in ways that cannot be estimated, guessed at" (340). The "mobility and plasticity of language" allows for surprising juxtapositions. What arises, I argue, is a constellation of fragments – invisibly connected and mutable in their combinations. From the book's first section, "Exordium," we encounter three prose fragments per page without narrative linearity or order. Rather than progression, Kim asks us to focus on open permutations: "There's no progression toward an objective, but a sense that all the possible permutations have been felt" (Keller 341). Here, the word "felt" underscores the reader's affective experience – in this case, vulnerability via a constellation of fragments (i.e. permutations/constellations made of the same images/stars).

Within these prose fragments, Kim offers visceral imagery, engaging numerous senses that often result in a synesthetic experience. We see, hear, and feel at the same time. As Chu reminds us, through postmemory han, "what the children remember, moreover, is not generalized but vividly detailed and intimate" (Chu 102). These vivid images are simultaneously precise and obtuse due to their "integrity – historical, material, acoustic," as well as their (dis)connection to surrounding images. In "Exordium" (the beginning of a treatise), these images tend to occur at the end of a fragment as a moment of concentration and intensity. In one fragment, Kim writes: "The next day is astronomical distance and a

gnarled hand pulling up wild onion” (4). Across the page, she writes: “Fierce dogs have come over the sea” (5). These images – albeit separate – contain a sense of upheaval (“pulling up” and “have come over”), violence (“gnarled” and “fierce”), and wilderness (“wild onion” and “fierce dogs”). Questions arise as well: why is the hand gnarled and not the onion? How can dogs come over the sea? The relationship between these fragments suggest that something is not quite right, not quite *heimlich*. The strangeness of “a gnarled hand pulling up wild onion” is strengthened by the strangeness of subsequent images. Despite their individual emotive weight, these haunting fragments gather resonant power as we read *Commons*.

In the third section “Works,” Kim repeats fragments to make vulnerability and failure reverberate:

: I have nothing to say I have nothing to say Glorious name. (84)

Here, the gaps between “I have nothing to say” enact an absent presence. There is nothing to say, but the speaker desires to say something. In the space break, we want something to be said, for some sort of revelation to occur. The repetition of the fragment “I have nothing to say” echoes this defeat or failure to say. In this emptiness, the speaker must say something, even if this means repeating “I have nothing to say.” The addition of the fragment “Glorious name” acts as a significant moment of awareness; the subject is stripped of this “Glorious name” which represents a sense of self and place in the surrounding world. Furthermore, the colon before “I have nothing to say” suggests that this utterance acts as a definition, yet Kim does not place a term before the colon. The absence on both sides of this equation signals a loss of certainty and balance in the world, as exemplified by other

fragments on the page: “My strength/As they have hacked off/Generation which is...” (84). Notably, language is “hacked off,” leaving traces behind which tremble like an amputee’s ghost arm. Or, alternatively, we can read the colon as a heading of a business memo. In this case, the memo, which we assume to be urgent and important, reads: “I have nothing to say.” No one receives the memo and there is nothing communicated. Yet, within this emptiness, the desire for something more creates friction. The unformed subject, devoid of a name, desires to be more than a “pack animal” (84). To return to Dowling, “there is no specific figure in the poems who hears this loudness or speaks these languages” (11). The speaker says nothing to no one – and repeats this nothingness into presence.

In particular, the visual space of the page exemplifies an absent presence. While Kim does not use image-based sources in *Commons* like Cha, the field of the page deeply affects our reading experience. The spaces surrounding her fragments create a feeling of anxiety – of being isolated, unguarded, and exposed to the elements. It is important to note that Kim’s use of visual space is not white space, which often connotes emptiness and erasure (i.e. to “white-out”). Rather, her use of space allows for possibility and textual permutations. From Keller’s interview with Kim: “It sounds like I’m talking about absence, a writing in terms of what isn’t there, but this is an absence replete with possibility - not absence predicated by lack” (Keller 340). Here, what appears to be empty is “replete with possibility,” not “lack.” To return to my larger argument on a poetics of haunting, one is not passively haunted. Rather, there is agency in such absence; the text is brimming with meaning we can encounter. In this way, Kim’s space is more akin to what Orlando White calls “the throat of the paper” in his essay “Functional White: Crafting Space and Silence” on *The Poetry Foundation*. White gives space transformative power:

Designers of publications refer to the *white spaces* of the page as *functional*

white. Functional white guides the reader through a text; *white space* allows text to exist in a specific position on the page in relation to the background. And perhaps that background is the throat of paper, inhaling language and exhaling sound and silence. Like Inuit throat singers, when the page and poet are face-to-face, close enough for both their lips to meet, their breaths subsist off each other. And in an instant, that natural ornate experience blends person and page.

For White, these spaces (as the “throat of paper”) blend with language to create a unique reading experience – potentially different each time. The throat is notably a vulnerable part of the body; in *Commons*, visual space – a kind of vibrational “white noise” – makes the surrounding language appear exposed.

Such exposure, via visual space and fragmentation, is complex. In “The Rejection of Closure,” Lyn Hejinian writes of the crucial conflict between a closed and open text: “[There is] a conflict between a writer’s desire for boundedness, for containment and coherence, and a simultaneous desire for free, unhampered access to the world, along with the correspondingly open response to it” (618). This conflict creates useful tension and suspension in a poem. Of course, unlike Hejinian’s definition of an open text, opening “the old wound” (*DICTEE* 33) is certainly not about “free, unhampered access to the world.” Readers enter a fraught space rather than a “free” space. We can read such openness and fragmentation as vulnerability; indeed, we are alone. The small font of *Commons* places us in relation to the sizeable space breaks. This font size, which appears to be a nine, challenges the standard use of size 12. Language is dwarfed; the subject – albeit unformed – is made to feel small. The result: readers are claustrophobic and exposed at the same time.

Kim’s visual space forces us to feel the pressure of erasure and its resultant absent presence. After war, disease, and language loss, what are we left with? These spaces

emphasize what can and cannot be articulated during and after experiences of loss. For instance, from the section “Lamenta”:

[when my father died and left me nothing]

[this is how I speak] (37)

Kim’s brackets, which appear throughout *Commons*, exemplify an absent presence. In other words, if the subject could speak, this is what one would say. The authoritative tone of “[this is how I speak]” contrasts with the fragment’s gesture of silence. Indeed, there is no literal utterance. The utterance, bracketed, lives in an in-between space – a limbo.

Something fills the visual space between the first and second fragment, yet we are left to wonder *what*. We expect the fragment to continue due to its grammatical construction. We expect: “[when my father died and left me nothing, I...]” Instead, Kim gives us lengthy space – both nothing and everything. Returning to thrownness, readers must dwell in this absent presence.

By creating a space of absent presence, Kim also questions “textbook” histories of war, migration, and colonialism, which seek to explain the “facts” of events. Yet, history, when presented on the daily, visceral level, is hardly objective. What is left out of such “textbook” histories? What is there, but isn’t there? Who writes these “textbook” histories

and encyclopedia entries? Kim plays with the certainty of dates, facts, and laws: “Dates to impugn and divulge. The laws were written on twelve tablets of bronze which were fastened to the rostra” (3). Numbers throughout *Commons* (i.e. sections are numbered with 412, 415, 315 etc.) are not in numerical order, breaking objective logic. For Kim, this insistence on “facts” reflects imperialist impulses. From her interview with Divya Victor: “I listened to the intensity of the language of scientific inquiry or experiment or compulsion, “Let me do this! Let me find out!” as a way to understand expansionist consciousness and imperialist impulses.” This compulsion toward discovery and certainty rejects the need for an absent presence. By utilizing secondary sources and the framework of scientific objectivity, Kim highlights the contrast between that which is known and that which is unknown. For instance: “Levels of aggregation maybe extended in principle and without limit, multiple nested units between household and world” (85). Here, she places scientific, logic-based language (“levels of aggregation,” “extended in principle”) up against vast and unknowable variables (“between household and world”).

Moreover, in the “Vocalise” sections that reoccur throughout, Kim offers lifted texts. These texts begin with a quotation mark, but lack a closing quotation mark – again, enacting an absent presence. Readers feel vulnerable during these moments of citation, questioning the texts’ worth as legitimate evidence. For example: “the woman I had anatomized in the past year, or A.D. 1315, in the month of March had a uterus “twice as large as one whom I anatomized in the month of January in the same year” (24). This lifted document lacks context, a caption, and an immediate source. Yet, by including the language of fact and evidence, Kim is able to address the desire to contain and categorize – what she sees as a fundamental colonialist impulse.

Most notably, the effects of war, colonialism, and migration reverberate into the

present and future. The use of an absent presence necessities open potential, which leads to a text that does not and can not end. Like *DICTEE*, *Commons* lacks closure or a narrative dénouement. *Commons* “ends” with a discussion on the poem’s “circulatory spaces,” (111) suggesting that the text returns back to the beginning. The last line also asks for continual movement, written as a direction or treatise: “to mobilize the notion of our responsibility to one another in social space” (*Commons* 111). Here, Kim asks the reader to “mobilize” – to deeply consider our relationship with each other with vigilant power and pride. In doing so, the poem moves off the page and into the daily world (“social space”), as she leaves us with visual space.

On a larger level, the questions and concerns of *Commons* – both formally and content-wise – continue in her following collection, *Penury* (2009). In *Penury*, Kim addresses a landscape of poverty and how we reconstruct the basic human experience of “lack.” Continuing her work with fragmentation and absent presence, Kim focuses on the act of remembering through grief. Kim utilizes full pages of visual space in *Penury*, which allows for more openness and vulnerability; these empty pages also suggest the long periods of time one must endure in hunger (“penury” as in extreme poverty). For example, following a full page without words, Kim writes three lines. These lines are spaced out and set in the middle of the page:

I go to my father’s house

I wear a grief hat

I am told to put on coarse hemp and to proceed on my own (*Penury* 33)

Here, “grief hat” clearly describes the emotion, yet the image itself is unclear. We do not immediately see funeral garb; instead, we sense a wearing of darkness. This darkness also pushes backwards, causing the father’s house to become obscured in darkness. Then we make the leap to “I am told to put on coarse hemp,” which seems tangible, but is elusive again. These three lines appear as a list or a set of motions one must go through. Kim uses no punctuation, signaling the suspension of these motions. By the last line, the speaker proceeds alone. Another full page without words follows these three lines. The subject and the reader proceed into absolute openness, or the vastness of grief – echoing the space after “[when my father died and left me nothing]” (*Commons* 37).

I argue that *Commons* and *Penury* are a part of a larger poem, made up of her previous collections as well: *Under Flag* (1991), *The Bounty* (1996), and *Dura* (1999). In a similar vein, Nathaniel Mackey’s long poem, “Song of the Andoumboulou,” continues throughout his numerous books. In a 2015 interview with *The Iowa Review*, “The Song Sung in a Strange Land,” Mackey addresses length: “I’d like my writing to amount to a long, iterative, would-be expectorant song of the sort I’ve been suggesting” (Mossin). Likewise, Kim envisions her work as continual, as a haunting, “open continuum”: “This question of ‘a poem’ as a discrete, individual body, written as such - I mean with its occasion, matter, form all working, as one, compared to a sense of the poem as an open continuum, something that is presented through a process of accretion” (Keller 339). Each text adds to this “process of accretion,” which allows for constellations or permutations to appear across books. Zhou Xiaojing’s argument about *Dura* and serial form in “‘What Story What Story What Sound’: The Nomadic Poetics of Myung Mi Kim’s *Dura*” can be applied to her larger body of work: “Each part could be considered an ensemble of events, themes, and movements developed through echoes and resonances, concurrent interruptions and continuations, which mobilize

references and cross references into interplay, while unfolding subject matters embedded in them" (67). Indeed, each of Kim's fragments create "echoes and resonances" across collections, so that readers can connect images such as "expert shores toppling hunt/continue hunt Bull Dog help hunt" (*Penury* 39) to "Fierce dogs have come over the sea" (*Commons* 5). With the specific name of "Bull Dog," a M41 tank used during the Korean War, readers can return to "fierce dogs" in *Commons* with a different, more nuanced impression. As if in limbo, these images "haunt" successive work in surprising ways, refusing conclusion in each respective book.

Such cross connections create a "full dimensionality" (Wang 305) for the reader; reading *DICTEE* and *Commons* is productive in its vulnerability. Sarah Anne Cox reflects on her experience of *Commons* in "Building is a Process/Light is an Element":

The images are brutal, painful to read. Famine is weaved through everything, frogs pile up on the roadway, but it is in service of something larger. To determine and identify the cost of nation, of land, of survival, of hope one must lay all the pieces of the world on the table and attempt to name them. (101)

Cox points to the necessity of the form and content's brutality, as it is "in service of something larger." Indeed, there are stakes: the danger of erasure, the danger of detachment, etc. Returning to Glissant and Cha, one must put together the pieces of narrative, in whatever way possible. The "attempt to name" emphasizes the importance of process, or how we move through the text post-thrownness.

Speaking of Paul Celan's work, Cathy Park Hong in her essay "Against Witness" writes about the dangers of the commemorative poem. "As [Celan's] poetry became more idiosyncratic — his syntax more gnarled, his images more gnomic and mineralogical, his syllables more neologistic — Celan grew to loathe 'Death Fugue'." Hong underscores

Celan's refusal to have "Death Fugue" anthologized. In other words, within the ordered and organized space of the anthology, the process or "attempt" is lost. For Hong, such commemoration is problematic, as readers can not engage with and experience trauma fully:

Rather than an act of remembrance, the recitation of "Death Fugue" turned into a mantra to ward off difficult engagement with the past. But this is how it is when a poem becomes commemorative. It becomes all pious gesture and drained of meaning. When a poem becomes commemorative, it dies.

The commemorative poem is reduced to a "mantra" or stand-in for trauma (in Celan's case, the Holocaust). As Hong argues, the commemorative poem is "drained of meaning." Yet, in a poetics of haunting, rather than witness or commemoration, remembrance is alive and moving. The "old wound" (*DICTEE* 33) continues to open and fester. To return to Chu's concept of postmemory han, the act of stitching together memoir, historical documents, and photography, "evoke images and emotions that amalgamate [to form] imaginary 'memories' of han" (Chu 98). Rather than a "pious gesture," Cha's and Kim's work creates a haunting, emotive experience that changes each time one engages with the text. Such permutations, carefully scaffolded through form, challenge empty mantras, normative narratives, and "textbook" facts of history. The result? Deeply intimate, personal, and open texts we return to again and again.

CHAPTER 3

Transpacific and Transtemporal Haunting:

Bhanu Kapil and Sawako Nakayasu

“The living and the dead share an interest in the future.”

- M. NourbeSe Philip

In a 2011 interview with Katherine Sanders in *BOMB: Artists in Conversation*, Bhanu Kapil foregrounds the collective story, which includes both rupture and retrieval. Kapil extends Cha’s and Kim’s emotive experience of the text into the realm of the body. As such, the reader encounters the haunted text with a heightened sense of embodiment:

In the collective [story], the sensations, in repetition, form a kind of boundary or ridge. An accumulate. Is that a word? That then can be broken down into the elements of speech. Choral revenue. Vibration. The place at which colors convert into sound. I think of the unguents of the body, for example, that are shed onto the jungle floor (carpet) during an act of wartime or in-country (home) violence. The narrative of rupture, and how—through a collective gathering or ordering (a partial retrieval)—a performative ritual might allow for the recirculation of that: paper. That organ meat. Those blood-soaked materials or remnants of materials. I am, in particular, interested in acts of violence that happen deep within the larger or more public violence: roars, sighs, and almost inaudible exclamations. (*BOMB: Artists in Conversation*)

Speaking of her book *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers* (2001), Kapil insists that gathering “remnants of materials” is a visceral, bodily act. Paper itself transforms from clean white sheets to “that organ meat.” This gathering of language is formally “in repetition,” recalling

the practice of chanting as a means of spiritual ascendance. For this collection, Kapil travelled from 1992 to 1996 through England, India, and the U.S. to interview women of Indian descent. Anonymously, these women submitted a tape-recorded or written response to her questions. Kapil's questions moved from the interpretative to the more directive, addressing personal experiences of violence. For instance, questions moved from "How will you begin?" to "What are the consequences of silence?" In her preface, she explores the impact of this transnational project on her own identity: "As I traveled between the countries of my birth (England), ancestry (India), and residence (America), I answered the questions for myself again and again" (*The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*). As readers, we are increasingly aware of Kapil's sense of self and deep connection to her interviewees. As they answer her questions, she answers them as well –repeating, chanting, or changing her responses during the process of conversation. Interestingly, while Kapil seeks to make visible the "roars, sighs, and almost inaudible exclamations" of transnational Indian women, she also acknowledges the impossibility of a summative statement or collective argument. She celebrates this lack of a map or end point: "I didn't know where I was going" (*The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*). In a poetics of haunting, invocation occurs without hypothesis, resolution, or linear clarity –particularly in terms of place and time. As a result of this open-endedness, invocation invites metacognitive or reflective statements about the encounter and writing process itself.

Notably, Kapil envisions the collective story as a "performative ritual" (*BOMB*). Through language, invocation accumulates power and resonance through repetition and embodied performance. Her talks and texts are imbued with elements of physical performance and kinetic process, necessitating a reader's felt experience of structural violence, colonial conquest, and personal trauma. In 2011, at a poetics festival entitled "Both

Sides and the Center” held at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House, Kapil presented a piece entitled “Schizophrene [Remix].” The audience watches as she moves under a large sheet of malleable red fabric. Completely covered, her body constantly stretches, pushes, and struggles against the red cover. She is faceless and backlit. Centered on a thick platform, the moving figure resembles meat on a cutting board or a frantic red blood cell. A recording from Kapil reading *Schizophrene* (2011) – a book which interweaves themes of nationhood, her mother’s experience with Schizophrenia, and gendered violence – plays loudly in the room. In full, the performance lasts for one hour, raising questions of physical and mental endurance for both Kapil and her audience. Indeed, in a state of physical exhaustion, when happens to Kapil’s body? As an audience, when do we turn away from the initial shock of the piece? “Schizophrene [Remix]” asks a central question raised throughout Kapil’s body of work: at what point do we turn away from acts of violence and distress – even when they occur right in front of us?

As a multimedia artist, Kapil traverses narratives that challenge borders including the physical, national, and historical. Her work is transnational in time and space – linking together the narratives she actively seeks out. The borders of time – the past, present, and future – collapse. This chapter, “Transpacific and Transtemporal Haunting: Bhanu Kapil and Sawako Nakayasu,” explores the invocation of the ghost as a site of multiplicitous border crossing. I define invocation is a transpacific and transtemporal phenomenon – a constant plea or call across different languages, nations, and time periods. In particular, I will be examining Kapil’s *Humanimal* (2009) and Sawako Nakayasu’s *Mouth: Eats Color: Sagawa Chika Translations, Anti-Translations, and Originals* (2011). Through the story of two Bengali “wolf girls,” *Humanimal* resurrects and reimagines the haunted landscape of colonialism and Christian missionaries in the Indian diaspora. *Mouth: Eats Color* is framed as a collaboration

with Chika Sagawa (1911-1936), an early modernist poet in Japan. Through their respective anachronistic communions, *Humanimal* and *Mouth: Eats Color* seek to revive “lost” or marginalized historical and literary figures – notably women of color. This resurrection seeks to declare selfhood, significance, and connection in a multi-layered continuum of Asian American lineage. With such an intensified attention to history and memory, how can poetry impact our understanding of the present and future?

To begin, both texts emphasize the act of traveling through transnational and transpacific spaces; here, fluid borders and cultural experiences are valued over arbitrarily definitive boundaries. Transnational experiences consider how communities engage with each other, across space and history. In *Transnational Displacement*, scholar Yunte Huang traces what he calls the transpacific displacement of cultural meanings through 20th century America's imaging of Asia. In part, Huang defines transpacific displacement as “a historical process of textual migration of cultural meanings, meanings that include linguistic traits, poetics, philosophical ideas, myths, and stories” (3). This displacement is driven by “the writer’s desire to appropriate, capture, mimic, parody, or revise the Other’s signifying practices in an effort to describe the Other” (3). In one chapter, he offers a critique of culturally homogenizing tendencies exemplified in Maxine Hong Kingston's work and its reception; in another chapter, he questions American translations of contemporary Chinese poetry, which he views as new ethnographies that problematically maintain linguistic and cultural boundaries. For Huang, a writer aims to capture a cultural identity through linguistic patterns. Ultimately, the text becomes the “final frontier” (63) for anthropology, which suggests the text’s ability to reveal social, political, and cultural relationships. *Transpacific Displacement* “unpack[s] the layers and stages of linguistic meditation that are charged with intercultural politics and history” (185). This complex “linguistic mediation” can have both

problematic (i.e. colonial intervention) and productive consequences in terms of a text's content and form.

Albeit differently, both Kapil and Nakayasu are committed to transpacific fluidity as productive spaces – building layers of textual mediation as a means of diasporic connection. From current day Midnapore and to colonial Bengal, Kapil engages a text with varying levels of diasporic displacement and colonial mediation. In particular, Midnapore was a significant site for many Indian freedom movements, such as the Santal Revolt (1766-1767) and the Chuar Revolt (1799) during the British Raj. The resultant text is reimagined by multiple “authors” including: Kapil; Reverend Joseph Singh; the “wolf girls” Kamala and Amala; Denver anthropologist Robert Zingg who wrote *Wolf-Children and Feral Man*, a companion piece to Singh's journal; and Mona Lisa Productions, a film company that followed Kapil's journey to Midnapore in 2004. Transpacific movement is quite literal for Kapil; she travelled to the location sites noted in Singh's journal. As a key site in the “discovery” of the Kamala and Amala, Kapil frames her trip to Midnapore as a period of discovery, evident in the almost obsessive repetition of “found”:

Thus, in India, I found the graves... I found a ninety-eight-year-old woman
... I found a tree in which Kamala had been photographed... I found the room
the girls were kept in. I found the overgrown garden... I found the grandson
of Joseph Singh; it was he who placed the blurry photographs, which sections
of this work are written from, in my hands. (*Humanimal* x)

This transpacific search ends with intimate embodiment: “in my hands.” Speaking of the movement from the book to the body: “My body begins and ends with writing. My hand stopped at *Wolf-Children and Feral Men* by Robert Zingg” (*Tinge*). Through transpacific “totems,” Kapil desires to take the history and experiential energy of Midnapore with her, as she returns to Colorado toward the end of the book: “As the plane descended to Denver, I

took a dry leaf, a banana leaf with three raised seams, from its place in my book and crumpled it, crushed it really, onto my leg through my skirt” (65). Physical embodiment is a significant component to Kapil’s poetics practice; indeed, she crushes the banana leaf into her leg to create transpacific connection.

For Nakayasu, her text adds messy layers of transpacific translation – moving through (and breaking) linguistic and poetic traditions in the U.S., Japan, and beyond. The book ends with a line by Frances Chung, a Chinese American poet: “my dull mind is suddenly opened” (Nakayasu 79). Throughout, *Mouth: Eats Color* breaks authorial and translational borders – “open[ing]” the mind for multiple reading possibilities. To start, the subtitle *Translations, Anti-Translations, and Originals* plays with the reader’s expectations. How can all three concepts simultaneously exist? In “Darkness – Translation – Migration,” a meditative essay by poet and translator Don Mee Choi, she writes that “translation weaves, it weaves solidarity” in moments of sociopolitical darkness (Choi). By refusing translation through “anti-translations,” readers ask: what does it mean to reject solidarity and celebrate singularity at the same time? As I will later explore in Chapter Four, “Unsettling English: Barbara Jane Reyes and Cathy Park Hong,” Asian American poets such as Nakayasu challenge sociolinguistic hierarches. Indeed, Nakayasu’s subtitle refuses a singular or static direction – in terms of language or even authenticity. In both Kapil’s and Nakayasu’s texts, a new text arises through movement and exploration, questioning the authority of an “original” or “correct” base text. To return to Huang: “we travel from one text to another, from one version to another, to compile our own text or version, to create our own travelogue” (Huang 4).

Furthermore, in this chapter I argue that transtemporal movement – celebrating rather than disparaging anachronism – is central to a poetics of haunting. Transtemporal

movement transcends straightforward, linear timelines. In *Ghost-Watching American Modernity: Haunting, Landscape, and the Hemispheric Imagination*, scholar Maria del Pilar Blanco discusses “ghost-watching” as a way of paying particular attention to narratives under and within texts. “Ghost-watching” focuses on listening and responding closely to the existing and long-gone texts around us.

Ghost-watching is a particular way of reading perceptions of space within a given text. Let us begin defining this compound word by saying that, within the action of a literary or cinematic text, to ghost-watch implies a vigilant perception of the landscapes depicted within it, as they may reveal a different, and haunted, dimension. (Blanco 1)

In *Humanimal*, Kapil moves from being a passive “ghost-watcher” to actively seeking the ghost and its physical and spiritual impacts (i.e. travelling to sites within and around Midnapore). The experience of reading *Mouth: Eats Color* generates a “haunted dimension,” as readers are unable to pinpoint who is writing or translating (Nakayasu, Sagawa, Loy, Chung, etc.). As Blanco suggests, this act is careful and intentional – “a vigilant perception.” In the book’s end note, Nakayasu emphasizes the text’s “and/or” approach to textual space and time: “Unless otherwise specified, all poems, translations, and anti-translations are by Sawako Nakayasu and-or Chika Sagawa” (Nakayasu). Simultaneity and uncertainty are significant in a poetics of haunting. Blanco continues:

This dynamic version of haunting seeks to look at ghosts as representations not of occluded pasts, or buried secrets, but as manifestations of an increasing awareness of simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others living within unseen, diverse spaces in the progressively complicated political and cultural networks of hemispheric modernization. (Blanco 7)

In this way, haunting gains more complexity through transtemporal engagement – creating an experience of simultaneity in which the past, present, and future are fluid and often

indistinguishable. In particular, Blanco highlights the impact of seeing that which is often unseen. “Ghost-watching” raises the stakes of visibility for present and future worlds; it is an endeavor many Asian American poets insist upon – in part, to see themselves reflected as well. For, in this literary lineage, Kapil and Nakayasu also see themselves as future ghosts. As Kapil writes: “How do you break a space? No. Tell me a story in a different time, in a different place” (*Humanimal* 55). Here, the speaker refuses breakage and asks the reader for another haunted dimension, another future narrative. Haunting becomes an ever-vigilant continuum. To return to Seo-Young Chu’s work on postmemory han from Chapter Two:

Postmemory han is a paradox: the experience being remembered is at once virtual and real, secondhand and familiar, long ago and present... Science fiction is a representational medium uniquely conducive to thinking about and describing the contradictions and spatial-temporal discontinuities that make postmemory han so elusive. (Chu 99)

These “spatial-temporal discontinuities” allow for haunting to occur. Written as a “Project for Future Children,” *Humanimal* builds a speculative space for future physiologies and linked narratives to arise. Much of the book seeks to answer the following question: “Where is the future child?” (*Humanimal* 14).

Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1993) also offers a framework for transtemporal movement – moving away from wistful nostalgia and toward larger political and ideological ramifications. Derrida emphasizes the political potential of haunting, or what he calls a “spectropolitics.” While the precise definition of this term is difficult to pin down, spectropolitics does reveal the spectral nature of the political, where haunted spaces – affected by militarized and patriarchal capitalism – create sites of potential change and responsibility. Speaking of ghosts, inheritance, and future generations, Derrida acknowledges temporal complexity, which in turn raises the stakes of literary responsibility:

Without this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question 'where?' 'where tomorrow?' 'whither?' (xviii)

He continues, foregrounding obligation: “There is then *some spirit*. Spirits. And *one must* reckon with them" (xx). To return to Blanco, we must be vigilant and respectful of such ghosts – as we depend on them for a future. Speaking of Marx and anachronism: “Untimely, 'out of joint,' even and especially if it appears to come in due time, the spirit of the revolution is fantastic and anachronistic through and through" (Derrida 140). However, Derrida’s framework runs the risk of losing track of the locations or even histories that give ghosts their unique specificity and historical context. Spectropolitics envisions a more general ghostliness. Rather, the specificity of silenced narratives – particularly voices from women of color – must be named in order to “reckon with them” in the future. As seen in Chapter Two, Cha’s *DICTEE* invokes specific ghosts including Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon.

Moreover, in respect to transtemporal movement, anachronistic travel is oftentimes criticized; the term itself is frequently paired with language such as “flaws” and “errors.” Speaking of anachronism as an error, pedagogical texts tend to warn against the influence of presentism, or today’s current context. From “The Problem of Anachronism in History Teaching,” which examines social studies and history textbooks:

The anachronism of language and perspective refers to the usage of current concepts and perspectives to explain and elucidate the historical events and facts. This error is usually an outcome of presentism. Presentism is the reflection of the today’s needs, problems and perspectives on the history writing. (Öztürk 38)

In this way, anachronism works against a fact-based, linear understanding of history; this latter system of knowledge is prevalent in our school systems – which often serve as our foundation for learning practices. Such anxieties over “error,” presentism, and research are similarly raised in literary studies. For instance, Wing Tek Lum’s collection *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems* (2013) brings forth the forgotten stories of the Japanese occupation of Nanjing, China in 1937. Also known as the Rape of Nanjing, an estimated 40,000 to over 300,000 Chinese civilians and disarmed combatants were murdered over a period of six weeks. The collection, written in a documentary realism style, is based on specific recorded events and includes detailed research notes. Lum’s poems do not include his own voice or his own contemporary context; such lines are not crossed. At a conference panel entitled “Critical Perspectives on the Nanjing Massacre,” delivered at the University of Hawai’i, Lum speaks about the precarious temporal distance between himself and the stories of the massacre:

[There] are real difficulties in trying to write about an historical event that occurred 60 or 70 years prior, in another country, with primary source material in languages other than one’s own, and describing people dealing with conditions so utterly incomprehensible to a nice local boy who grew up in Hawai’i like myself. My project instead has been to try to speak for the dead, to serve as a proxy for those who cannot bear witness for themselves. (Lum)

Lum acknowledges an “incomprehensible” distance and does not seek to cross such a distance; rather, he wants to honor the past: “to serve as a proxy for those who cannot bear witness for themselves.” He becomes a passive vessel – a “proxy” – through which other voices speak. Lum stays close to the “accurate” space and time period of China during the 1930s. While Lum goes back in time to “witness” that which he can not see, he does not

allow his own voice – his presentism – to interfere with his persona poems. Presentism is presented as part of the “real difficulties” of writing about a historical time period.

On the other hand, Kapil and Nakayasu employ a radical time approach; both poets introduce and celebrate their selfhood in the “spatial-temporal discontinuities” (Chu 99) of the text. Nakayasu upholds such transtemporal movement in her endnotes, describing an ever-changing and ever-teeming beehive: “Whoever thinks this embroidered idea of unprotected order is okay will also gently admit that the carpet has bloomed profusely and the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Nakayasu). Here, invocation becomes a moment of “blooming” alteration. The past and the present affect each other equally; presentism is certainly encouraged. Nakayasu dwells in Lum’s “real difficulties.” For Kapil, the future is an amalgamation of the past and present. Kapil herself is part of this new text, as she addresses Kamala and Amala in the future, from the present, after investigating the past: “Future child, in the time you lived in, your arms always itched and flaked. To write this, the memoir of your body, I slip my arms into the sleeves of your shirt. I slip my arms into yours, to become four-limbed” (*Humanimal* 15). She crosses such boundaries with a deep sense of physicality, slipping into their clothing. Yet, she still remains herself; the “I” in the poem is still Kapil. Unlike Lum, both Kapil and Nakayasu enter the text as themselves. With this metacognitive awareness, the reader also feels welcome to enter the text as themselves – with their own felt experiences and presentism. Indeed, *Humanimal* opens with an empty block of white text, waiting to be filled. This stark, white space recalls Kapil’s later description of the church, the girls’ orphanage “home”: “Behind the graveyard was a church, intensely white in the pale pink day” (5).

Humanimal is presented as a “project” in its subtitle, suggesting a continual endeavor – consisting of a team, including the reader. Projection, both as a forecast and a presentation

of imagery on the screen/page, occurs throughout. *Humanimal* intertwines Kapil's experience traveling in Mindapore and the story of Kamala and Amala in Bengal, India in 1920. The term "humanimal" itself suggests cohabitation, co-mingling, and transmutation. The book raises questions about wilderness, ethical intervention, and postcolonial trauma. *Humanimal* aims to be a "memoir of [the] body," (15) which stands in stark contrast with literature about Kamala and Amala – from perspectives instilled with colonialist ideals, shock value, and curious exoticism. A 1927 report in *The American Journal of Psychology* includes a letter from Rev. Singh, addressing his experience with the "wolf girls." In this letter, he points out that European and Anglo-Indians shared "ghost stories" about the girls:

I heard of these children for the first time on August 26, 1920. The same 'ghost story' was repeated to me on September 24, 1920. The children were seen through a field glass by several people (Europeans and Anglo-Indians), from a distance of about one hundred yards, on the 9th and 10th of October, 1920. (Squires 314)

Singh makes a note to point out the ethnicities of the gaze – Europeans and Anglo-Indians, as if raising the story's credibility. Furthermore, the use of "ghost story" heightens the case's sensationalism, as does his physical description of the girls as "ghastly": "Three wolves were observed to come out of a tunnel-like passage from their den, closely followed by two cubs; then there appeared a human head covered with bushy hair, with a ghastly look about the face... the two children crawled on all fours" (Squires 314). Their appearance ("bushy hair") is paired with an attempt to read their emotional state: "ghastly." As readers of the Kamala and Amala story, we are meant to feel sympathy toward the girls. The "excavation," as Singh describes it, took place on October 17, 1920. Using the rhetoric of "discovery," Singh continues to treat his experience with the wolf girls with curiosity and at a "safe" distance of scientific removal.

Kapil removes this distance and moves in closer, aiming for the intimacy of a memoir. As a “memoir of your body” (15), the text addresses the experience of the body through its numerous, multi-layered visual elements. *Humanimal* opens with an epigraph from philosopher Alphonso Lingis: “They open up a body that is a lesion in the tissue of words and discourses and the network of powers.” Notably, the body (the text, the bodies of the girls themselves) is a “lesion” – a wound that speaks and communicates. Recalling Cha’s “History, the old wound” (*DICTEE* 33), Kapil turns our attention to the physical structure of the text, which mirrors the multilayered muscles, knots, and tissues of the girls’ animal, malleable limbs: “Her elbow as thick as a knot. I said it was cartilage – the body incubating a curved space, an animal self” (6). Like the term *humanimal*, the book presents itself as an interspecies hybrid – a malleable text that does not value a human life over an animal life, or image over language. Visual and physical elements are significant throughout *Humanimal* as readers encounter photographs, maps, and varying font choices; the result is a text full of texture.

On pages 20 and 21 in the section “Humanimal 2,” we are presented with a map of London. The central point on the map is Childs Hill, which features a prominent graveyard. Readers may be surprised to find a map of London rather than Midnapore, underscoring Kapil’s continual playfulness with transnationalism. Echoes of her transnational identity reverberate from an earlier passage, presented as unanswered questions: “Madam, are you France? Are you American? I think you are born in a different country. Am I not right?” (18) Superimposed on the map is an x-ray scan of scar tissue, inextricably linking place with the body. In small font along the left side of the page, Kapil includes the following passage:

Krishan, my father, was born in India in 1937, ten years after Kamala died. This is a photograph of scar tissue, to represent a deep cut in his leg from a street beating. What is a street? Here, the flesh is healed over, repaired by

natural processes, If the image, the excess rectangle, extends to the next page, mark it black. This scar doesn't fade; it doesn't melt, over time, into skin. (20)

In this moment, Kapil welcomes the intersections of different narratives – weaving in her father's story with the wolf girls. She connects her father, Krishan, with the girls via time and the bruised body. The map includes her father's scar tissue, notably from a “street beating” – an exterior, unnatural act of violence upon the body. Though she does not make the connections to Kamala and Amala explicit, we can certainly see themes of unwanted intervention arise. We see glimpses of such violence later in the book: “The doctor breaks Kamala's thumbs then wraps them in gauze” (50). Likewise, Kapil notes that her father's scar “doesn't fade; it doesn't melt, over time, into skin” (20). Here, the wound remains over time – similar to the elbow “thick as a knot” (6) as a result of prior manipulation.

Additionally, Kapil poses the question, “What is a street?” as if asking the reader to reconsider its central definition – a definition we take for granted in an industrialized and “named” world. Indeed: what would a street mean to Kamala and Amala? Later in *Humanimal*, Kapil writes about the futility of English as a system of meaning in an animal world: “They were home and then they got sick, unable to tolerate the food they were given. What is digestion” (46)? And again: “What is a protein? I don't know” (46). To return to the map of London, “the excess rectangle” of the map continues onto the next page; the additional coordinates of the map appear folded or pulled over on page 22. “Mark it black” (20) highlights our desire to see this continuation as an error and mistake; yet, as Kapil suggests, the page too is like a wound healing – an uncontrollable process. The page becomes a graft.

Humanimal's next significant visual text, which also expands over two full pages, is a photograph of Kamala and Amala on pages 44 and 45. In this photograph taken by Joseph

Singh in 1921, the two girls are asleep and naked in an open field. Their arms and legs wrap around each other in a protective stance. There is a strong sense of vulnerability in this image; indeed, the photograph was taken while the girls were sleeping – without their awareness or permission. Almost voyeuristic, the viewer is meant to feel uncomfortable. The silence of their bodies in this foregrounded shot – captured by the intervening power of Singh – creates a moment of powerful connection for the reader. Kalpana Seshadri's *HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language* addresses the racialized experience of dehumanization and the potential of silence in relation to the body. On the racialized body's capabilities:

Not the body that has been mutilated and rendered mute, thereby serving as a 'brute' index of subjugation, but the power of the body to show itself in its humAnimal possibility - in other words, the so-called animal body as a *means* that is *capable* of silence insofar as it is essentially shared as *life*.
(Seshadri 196)

Here, Seshadri offers two opposing perspectives of the silent humanimal body: 1) the body as passive and dehumanized through “brute” subjugation, and 2) the body as active and capable of silence as a mode of intimate communication and empathy as a “*life*.” These possibilities coexist in the photograph of Kamala and Amala naked and sleeping; their vulnerability simultaneously indicts Singh as the subjugator and extends shared intimacy toward Kapil and the reader. Seshadri raises key questions about perspective in relation to power and silence, especially when applied to a human and/or animal life: “What does it mean to discern silence as the power of language, rather than the language of power?” (ix) Silence holds the potential of agency; to return to Avery Gordon, Amala and Kamala dwell in the powerful and “tangled exchange of noisy silences” (Gordon 200).

As if imbuing the wolf girls with “the power of language” (Seshadri 196), Kapil writes about her experience upon viewing the photograph of the girls, replete with vivid imagery:

In the photograph, her flesh float next to her in the black and white air; it doesn't adhere. Her bones are delicate, slightly too long to be a human child's and coated finely, with wet fur. I know about the body because I held it in my hand. In the photograph. It was January. Joseph's great-granddaughter brought me a glass of water, but I didn't drink it because it wasn't boiled. It wasn't clean. (46)

The description of the photograph invites intimacy beyond its black and white construction; her language is visceral: “flesh float” and “coated finely, with wet fur.” Kapil describes the girls' thinness not as bodies affected by malnutrition and neglect, but as positively “delicate” and “finely” coated. Interestingly, Kapil insists that she “know[s] about the body because [she] held it in [her] hand.” Holding the photograph transports her to 1921, as if she herself has touched their delicate bodies. In *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch describes the powerful and imaginative encounter of photography for successive generations of Holocaust survivors: “intricately entangled in a narrative web, [images and text] work in collaboration to tell a complicated story of loss and longing” (*Family Frames* 4). What arises is a reconstructed memory – to the point of certainty: “I know” (*Humanimal* 46). Hirsch continues: “Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (*Family Frames* 22). *Humanimal* is highly invested in postmemory and imaginative creation. In this passage, Kapil swiftly moves from the photograph to her visit to the contemporary Singh home – traversing and collapsing time: “It was January. Joseph's great-granddaughter brought me a glass of water, but I didn't drink

it because it wasn't boiled. It wasn't clean" (*Humanimal* 46). In this literal and figurative recollection, Kapil suggests that the narrative of Kamla and Amala offered through the photograph is certainly not "clean" or static. Rather, memory is much more fluid. Notably, she calls Singh "Joseph" – a more personalized, intimate address.

To extend the impact of silence and postmemory, Kapil continues to revisit her encounter with the photograph in the sections that follow. Shortly thereafter, she envisions the girls' lives before the photograph was taken: "I saw two white ghosts, their hair hanging down in knots to their knees, drinking from the water with three wolves; another wolf, the mother, was hanging back from the bank. When she saw me, she growled and in an instant, the wolves and the two ghosts had disappeared into the trees" (47). In this encounter, the girls are described as neither animal nor human; they are ghostly figures in a world not entirely their own. As the photographer of the wolf girls, we can assume the speaker is Singh. Yet, if we read the speaker as Kapil, we gain a stronger understanding of postmemory as a mode of border crossing; in this case, the mother wolf growls at Kapil for staring at the photograph – for trying to intervene in the past. The mother and ghosts "[disappear] into the trees" as quickly as Kapil disappears into her present-day recollection of Singh's great-granddaughter.

Indeed, *Humanimal* continually thwarts our desire for a singular, known speaker. Throughout, names are used sparingly and the speaker is unknown. Mixed voices often occur in dreamscapes: "In the dream, I walk towards her and she stands up. She opens up her coat like two wings and I step into her cloth heart, her cleft of matted fur" (*Humanimal* 11). Who is the "I" and who is the "she"? Amala, Kapil, and/or Kapil? To return to *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, the openness of the pronoun "she" suggests the shared experience of women impacted by violence and trauma. In the article "They Were Girls:

Animality and Poetic Voice in Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal*," scholar Sarah Dowling draws a connection between the amalgamation of human and animal bodies with that of poetic voice, emphasizing the book's continual movement across time as well: "Kapil's manipulations of the gap between human and animal result in a poetic voice that swerves from the singular, humanistic voice of the lyric, crossing the species boundary to craft an embodied, multiple-voiced utterance" (Dowling 736). As Dowling writes, this "multiple-voiced utterance" is central to *Humanimal's* poetics of haunting; Kapil's voice crosses boundaries and fuses with the girls, Singh's, her father's, and even the documentary film crew. Such multiplicity increases as the text continues: "As the text proceeds, its speaking voices become increasingly melded, conjoining themselves through the embodied conditions of their own articulation" (Dowling 747).

In particular, the memory and voice of Kapil's father filters through, creating what she calls "a companion text" (*Humanimal* 50) in the book. The "multiple-voice utterance" of Krishan and the wolf girls return from the map of London on pages 20 and 21. Kapil combines the postmemory experiences of the 1921 Singh photograph with a photograph from her own childhood (which is described, but not visually depicted):

Only in the water were you and I a family: colorless, wavy, and child-centered. Invisible to the eyes of the other families. Do you remember? Embedded in the dark, silver cream of the Kodak paper, you're like a brown rectangle with a black dot for the mouth and two brown arms. I am a brown dot and one brown arm, obscured by iridescence; your singular, limbed progeny. (51)

She moves from a "Kodak" beach moment to a narrative imbued with lineage, held together by limbs ("one brown arm" and "your singular, limbed progeny"). On the next page, the story of the map and scar comes back. The photograph description reimagines

intergenerational trauma, revealing the multilayered factors that led to her father's death. "My father died young, in his fifties, though he doctor told me privately that his body was clearly ravaged by the debilitating effects of poverty, early malnutrition and the multiple musculo-skeletal traumas that he appeared to have sustained as a child" (53). The wolf girls' story arises a few pages later, now with violence and death at its core –no longer couched in the language of dreaming.

They dragged her from a dark room and put her in a sheet. They broke her legs then re-set them. Both children, the wolf girls, were given a fine yellow powder to clean their kidneys but their bodies, having adapted to animal ways of excreting meat, could not cope with this technology. Red worms came out of their bodies and the younger girl died. (55)

These violent depictions of the body –the breaking of legs, the red worms –raise troubling questions: what are the limits of cruelty, often masked as kindness? What does it mean to be "civilized" and who defines that term? Kapil draws connections here with her father's childhood experience of poverty and malnutrition, unveiling the haunting impacts of trauma she carries with her via her family and diasporic relationships: "There is a dark room deep in the Home. Many rooms are dark in India to kill the sun" (55).

As noted earlier in Kapil's performance of *Schizophrenie* at the MAK Center, *Humanimal* also manipulates physical boundaries, moving toward a practice of somatic writing in her speakers' "embodied conditions." In Thom Donovan's 2011 essay "Somatic Poetics" in *Jacket2*, he defines somatic poetics in part as the following: "The poem quivering off-page and on in this relation" and "the poem as that which makes visible the body as a place where cultural, political, social, moral, and economic forces converge and convolute becoming visible in their play" (Donovan). Somatic writing demands visibility and kinetic connection through the body – creating poetry that "quivers." Kapil's own poetics is

committed to the body and the pain of border crossing and hybridity. Speaking of Kapil's work, Donovan compares her writing process to Rolwing – a method of bodywork in which muscle tissue is broken down in order to reform it.

What, Kapil's work seems to beg, are the ethics of bodywork techniques such as Rolwing in relation to other medical and nonmedical procedures? Who gets to put the “monstrous” body “back together”? Who says what or who is monstrous? How do metaphors of the inhuman or liminally human affect how we encounter the human-animal other? (Donovan)

Along with larger questions about who holds the authority to name a “monster” or “humanimal,” Kapil's poetics break down the very muscle of the text – reforming each page, image, and word to push the boundaries of a text's capabilities. An experiential and synesthetic experience, reading and writing *Humanimal* makes one *feel* something – perhaps the pain of a phantom limb (feeling as if a missing limb is still attached). Before she offers the 1921 photograph of the girls, she writes about her physical connection to Amala via the image and text: “I looked into Amala's eyes in the photograph but she looked away and began to cry. She destroyed the paper” (43). Haunting moves across time and the page itself as she imagines making eye contact with Amala, reforming the potentiality of the image beyond photographic artifact. In this version, Amala responds to Kapil's attempt to connect, turning away from her.

Throughout, readers encounter the rituals of Kapil's somatic poetry, which emphasize physical touch as encounter, dedication, and “quivering” transtemporal movement from – 1921 to 2009 (and onward to the future). The text is full of somatic travelogue fragments; for instance: “I put my hand on her grave and waited, until I could feel the rhythm, faintly, of breathing. Of a cardiac output” (*Humanimal* 12). Through rituals of physical, textual, and visual embodiment, Kapil goes toward the ghosts in order to feel their

presence – their heartbeat and pulse. In this way, she takes on a shamanistic role, calling the wolf girls back to life: “until I could feel the rhythm, fainting, of breathing.” Writing this sentence itself creates a space for deep listening. As readers, we too “wait” and slow down with our mediator/shaman to reach out and connect to “a *life*” (Seshadri 196).

In particular, Kapil’s somatic rituals engage reenactment. To return to the metaphor of Roling bodywork techniques, she not only breaks muscle to reform it, but also attempts to “trick” the body into accepting a replacement (akin to grafting). During her time in India, she enters the spaces Amala and Kamala lived in, reenacting scenes from Singh’s diary account. She *becomes* the girls: “I found the tree and climbed it. Then I found the room where Amala died, and opened the door” (49). She climbs and opens the door to feel and see what Amala felt and saw. Notably, Kapil emphasizes the act of finding – “I found the tree” and “I found the room.” Vigilant curiosity is a significant process of her transtemporal, somatic connection. These moments of reenactment often transform Kapil into an animalistic self – to the point in which her own body rejects physical matter. She describes her experience of being offered water in the room where Amala died: “I drank it, holy water from the Ganges, and backed out into the garden, to spit” (50). Here, even the shaman is susceptible to earthly, bodily refusal. Mirroring Amala and Kalama’s refusal to eat human food, Kapil spits into the garden and refuses her own shaman role.

In *VIDA*’s interview with Kapil, “Voices of Bettering American Poetry 2015,” she pushes the definition of somatic writing beyond its conceptual state, arguing for its political impact as a means of social justice: “I identify with poets for who somatic writing is a political category” (*VIDA*). The racialized body, full of pain as a result of intergenerational trauma and colonial imposition, is honored through the practice of somatic writing. The last line of *Humanimal* describes a somatic exercise in order to connect with Amala and Kamala

across oceans of place and time. From another interview, she describes the importance of making forgotten narratives visible: “I am interested in the memories that are never received, never written down, or prevented, perhaps, at the instant that they form” (*Tinge*). To return to the moment when Kapil boards a plane to Colorado: “As the plane descended to Denver, I took a dry leaf, a banana leaf with three raised seams, from its place in my book and crumpled it, crushed it really, onto my leg through my skirt” (*Humanimal* 65). For Kapil, somatic writing is one mode of receiving, writing, and even preventing past and future trauma. The banana leaf, as a talisman from Midnapore, takes on political significance as she crushes it into her skirt. This somatic gesture celebrates the hybridity of the natural world (the banana leaf) with the human world (the skirt), as well as the forgotten narrative memories of women of color.

Visibility extends to the text’s heightened awareness of its ethnographic approach. Kapil is consistently metacognitive, referring to the process of writing and traveling itself. The narrative of travel is prominent: “I want to stay, but the filmmakers are stubbing out their cigarettes in the dirt. I didn’t know the jungle would be red” (11). The presentism of the research trip collides with her past and future imagination of the wolf girls. Her use of a travelogue form or diary entries operates as an act of intimacy. Readers connect with her daily experiences traveling with a documentary crew as well as the embodied dreamscape of the wolf girls. She describes writing while traveling: “In the aeroplane from London to Kolkata and in the jeep to Midnapure, I put my knib on the page and let motion wreck the line. My notes were a page of arrhythmias, a record of travel” (43). By making the process of note taking visible, Kapil heightens embodiment even further. Here, writing is akin to skipped heartbeats. The use of the word “knib” demonstrates transnational code-switching as a British colloquialism as well. Of course, reflective statements also reveal roadblocks or

the disingenuous values of reenactment in the project. She describes the film crew's obsession to get the scene 'right' aesthetically: "Walking through a jungle lit by blue paper. When they filmed the jungle they made pockets of soft blue light. 'Walk more slowly, like you're thinking. Again! One more time! Yes! Now... very naturally, very causally, look left, into the trees, as if you're looking for wolves'" (18). Here, Kapil suggests that reenactment without reflection can become problematic. There is no longer a spiritual connection across transtemporal borders; the director simply wants to get the shot 'right' for aesthetic purposes. The crew makes demands: "Again! One more time!" Rather, Kapil's somatic process emphasizes natural embodiment – as a deeply felt invocation for lost people and places. The opening of *Humanimal* brings the act of writing to the forefront – writing as a testament to memory, narrative, and the body breaking open: "because the glass broke, I wrote this" (1).

To return to *Humanimal*'s subtitle of "A Project for Future Children," Kapil is certainly invested in the future; her poetics seeks to move through and across time into a more hopeful future world. As a human-animal hybrid of narrative, documentary, travelogue, and film on the page, the book acknowledges and resists the deeply haunting impact of colonial rigidity. The text seeks to keep future children safe from harm: "This is a text to keep her safe and so I followed her into the jungle. Worms, flowers. I stayed awake all night and watched her while she slept, deflecting predators with my intensity, my pressure just before appearance" (62). Once again, we encounter multiple voices: the speaker is both Kapil and the mother wolf; *Humanimal* becomes a tangible tool for safety – for awareness, visibility, and accountability ("This is a text to keep her safe"). The text itself "stay[s] awake all night," dedicated to caring for future children, as the subtitle suggests. In "Not Your Mother's Diaspora: Voices of the Asian American Avant-Garde," Summi Kaipa and

Prageeta Sharma insist upon border crossing for future generations of Asian American artists, as a mode of resistance: “[The market for ethnic literature] becomes a significant political issue because it puts new writers, particularly writers of color, into a defensive role. They have to 'explain' their way into a legitimate place in American history and literature” (Kaipa and Sharma 28).

Refusing explanation through border crossing in terms of nationhood, time, the body, and textual space, Kapil’s work lives in the realm of speculative, futuristic poetry as well – which also celebrates transtemporal and transnational movement as an act of resistance. Notable speculative texts by writers of color include Cathy Park Hong’s *Dance Dance Revolution* (which will be explored in Chapter Four), Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues*, and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. Citing speculative texts such as Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* and Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*, Stephen Hong Sohn’s “Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future” argues that Asian American texts complicate and resist future Orientalism. He calls for “the continued importance of invoking race and its attendant encryptions to organize questions of marginality, oppression, and erased histories” (Sohn 19). Indeed, Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* features a humanimal narrator who shifts shape and form through time and space – at once fish, snake, and woman. Her novel moves through 19th century China and a futuristic Pacific Northwest. Lai, akin to Kapil, focuses on the potential of the humanimal body in particular: “By our strangeness we write our bodies into the future... by our difference we mark how ancient the alphabet of our bodies” (Lai 259). Language and the body (“the alphabet of the body”) collide in a transtemporal space, thus creating a strange, different, and multitudinous future. Interestingly, Alexie’s, Butler’s, Yamashita’s, and Lai’s work are framed as novels; as a text without genre definition, *Humanimal* also enables hybrid narratives to thrive in a future world. Its speculative nature

interrogates and contests colonially-informed legacies – reforming “erased histories” and engaging haunting into future worlds. Kapil asks where we can find the future child (*Humanimal* 14); the text answers back: everywhere at once.

A thoroughly transnational and transtemporal text, Nakayasu’s *Mouth: Eats Color* also provokes and expands our parameters of tradition, nationhood, and translation. Translations shift again and again in French, English, Spanish, Japanese, and what appears to be Chinese (using *kanji*, a system of Japanese using Chinese characters), confounding language, authorship, and time/space. *Mouth: Eats Color* is framed as a “collaboration” with Chika Sagawa, who was the first female modernist poet and translator in Japan. Sagawa died in 1935 at the age of 24. Nakayasu identifies with Sagawa’s boldness and rebelliousness during a time of great upheaval during Japan’s Showa period (the 1920s and 1930s). As Nakayasu writes in her introduction to *The Collected Poems of Chika Sagawa*, “Against her family’s wishes, she entered a girls’ high school, and then continued on to attain her license to teach English” (Sagawa i). Nakayasu invokes Sagawa’s ghost and does not distinguish who writes what; in this text, authorial authority is not a concern. As a result, *Mouth: Eats Color* seeks a “multiple-voiced utterance” to return to Kapil (Dowling 736). “Credit” is not given to each respective poet, creating a multitudinous chorus of poets, translators, and artists. Along with Sagawa, the collection calls forth other transnational poets who have passed away, including Frances Chung, a Chinese American poet from New York City. In this way, the book resurrects Asian American women writers who have died young, creating fluid, transtemporal sites of dedication, invocation, and influence.

In an interview with critic and poet Thomas Fink, Nakayasu discusses the book’s desire to connect to Sagawa –across multiple borders of place and time. She speaks about

her attempt to “embrace” Sagawa’s work, including Sagawa’s translations of Mina Loy and Harry Crosby:

I mean “embrace” sort of literally, as if I spread my arms out wide to encompass the various aspects of Sagawa and aspects of me-translating-Sagawa all at once. Which meant I was going to include the fact that Sagawa herself was a translator of Mina Loy and Harry Crosby (included in this book) as well as of James Joyce, Charles Reznikoff, and others. (Fink)

Through her intimate desire to “embrace” Sagawa in all her artistic facets, Nakayasu reaches out to a poet who mirrors her own fluid roles as a poet and translator. Indeed, in a 2016 interview with Nakayasu on *PEN America*, she describes translation as an intimate relationship rather than a task: “It seems that every translation I’ve undertaken involves a different process. With each book, I have a different relationship to the writing style, the historical and literary context, and to the author as a person” (*PEN America*). Her imagined relationship to Sagawa allows for travel to freely occur across time and space.

Transtemporal travel and intimate border crossing via translation is a transgressive act. As Michael Emmerich, a translator of Japanese, writes in “Beyond, Between: Translation, Ghosts, Metaphors”: “Translation is an act itself so foreign, you might say, that we feel compelled to domesticate it” (Emmerich 48). Nakayasu rejects this compulsion to “domesticate” or tame translation as one-directional and staid; through its textual flexibility, *Mouth: Eats Color* redefines translation and collaboration as a natural, fluid process – no longer “foreign.” Moreover, she raises key questions throughout about the sanctity of the “base” text: what does it mean to refer to a text or language as the “original”? Who defines what is original? What role does the poet-translator take on in this process of “embracing” another writer? To continue, Emmerich suggests that the translator dwells in the shifting convergence of different languages, focusing on the activity itself. He hopes for “a depiction

of translation not as a crossing over - not as something that takes place in an in-between state - but as an activity that a ghostly, disembodied translator does in the unstable, shifting confluence of the languages she lives within" (Emmerich 56). To continue, he describes translation work as a unique snowflake falling through time and history. Indeed, translation for Nakayasu is not a means of simply crossing over to understand Sagawa; however, she certainly does not exist as a "disembodied" translator – void of a voice and her own unique presentism. Translation is an activity – a "process" (*PEN America*) – yet it is also a matter of creation, visibility, and permanence. Instead of a unique snowflake which dissipates and falls in only one direction, *Mouth: Eats Color* seeks a translational world full of surreal, unexpected leaps – a world not of falling snowflakes but of raining flower petals, skeletons holding white flowers, and fish climbing cliffs (Nakayasu 64).

Through this wild process of writing and translating, sociolinguistic hierarches are challenged throughout, as entire poems remain untranslated. To return to *DICTEE* in Chapter Two, our experience of *Mouth: Eats Color* similarly depends on our own linguistic histories and contexts. As such, the text changes depending on the reader's linguistic knowledge. The opening poem "Promenade" mixes Japanese *kanji* and English; yet, even within the use of English, Nakayasu translates idioms, playing with cliché expectations. In the lines "seasons change their gloves," "the day clouds over," and "with nothing left to vow," readers hear "leaves" for "gloves," "is" for "clouds," and "show" for "vow" (7). Readers "translate" even in English. Poems entitled "Promenade" are threaded throughout; as a metaphor for translation, a promenade asks us to stroll freely through the book – without a particular direction or end-point in mind.

In this way, Nakayasu interrogates our ideas about translation as definitive and one-directional. Translation is "mixed up" and resembles multidirectional encounters with

language, narrative, and dialogue. She questions her own authority as an “author” throughout. Invocation breaks down an orderly sense of time, place, and language. Endnotes often serve clarify comments about a translator’s process; however, Nakayasu’s endnotes transgressively question her own translation capabilities and realities:

.....

Are “プロムナアド (Puromunaado 2)” and “プロムナアド (Puromunaado 4)” in Chinese or are they not.

Here, shirking translational authority and “expertise,” she asks the reader if the two poems were in Chinese or not. Here, she plays with our knowledge of *kanji*, which transnationally melds Japanese syntax with Chinese characters. Notably, she asks this question while also using a mixture of English, Japanese, and Spanish. These endnotes destabilize any sense of authority and clarity— a quality that readers of translation tend to desire and uphold.

In Emily Apter’s essay “Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction,” she speaks of translations as “unreliable transmitters of the original” (Apter 160) and criticizes texts which lack an original source as texts “in [their] most scandalous form” (Apter 171). Apter is uncertain of “a technology of literary replication that engineers textual afterlife without recourse to a genetic origin” (Apter 171). Without “credit” given to *Mouth: Eats Color*’s respective authors and translators, the book runs the risk of being seen as what scholar Gideon Toury calls a “psuedotranslation.” Toury defines this term as “texts which have been presented as translations with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having exist - hence no factual 'transfer operations' and translation relationships” (Toury 40). In this case, the focus is on a base or original source text. Refusing the coldness of “transfer operations,” *Mouth: Eats Color* can be criticized as a “fake” or psuedotranslation; yet, again, the text raises questions about who makes such hierarchical

judgments. The field of translation and composition is much more open. To return to Nakayasu's endnote: "the carpet has bloomed profusely." Indeed, translational and transnational mix-ups and shifts are celebrated throughout *Mouth: Eats Color*, pleurably so. For instance: "A trois o'clock" (Nakayasu 11) mixes French and English seamlessly. "Broken" translations are also utilized, creating a kind of spoken creole. Refusing grammar, Nakayasu does not seek to create a "clean" and readable translation. For example, the poem "Promenade (Puromunaado 6)" reads: "Swollen eyes are on cloud cover/Promise me no day" (24). The awkwardness of English syntax asks the reader to slow down and imagine a multitude of ways of speaking.

Furthermore, thinking deeply about multitudinous border crossing, the subject of transportation is prominent. Passengers, carpools, and trains abound. From "If We Empty Out All This Air Will It Finally Go Black": "Passenger: you./Passenger: myself./Passenger: non-solitary flame./All go galloping across the park" (12). This sense of travel is made strange (a passenger as a "non-solitary flame") and is depicted as a collective endeavor ("all go galloping across the park"). There is a sense of speed and joy in this gathering, as well as a humanimal implication ("galloping"). This fiery wildness is further evident in poems such as "Black Air": "The carpool takes a flame abroad and crosses the park" (17). Notably, there is a "carpool" or a gathering of passengers. These passengers are headed somewhere "abroad" together, moving quickly with a mass of transnational possibilities.

Mouth: Eats Color's unpredictable travel is reflected in its organization as well, defying our expectations of order and clarity. For instance, in the poem "We the Heathens," the writer (again, we are not given the author's name) discusses Orientalism and futuristic, alien worlds: "We would have no right to be shocked or upset, should some creature from another planet descent upon the earth, pluck our people off the ground and fry us up,

tearing away at our flesh with relish” (63). She writes at the bottom: “*continued on page 74.*” Yet, when we resume the poem on page 74, we are met with a completely new story, beginning with: “My friend Morton, a sweet and gentle man, is sitting quietly beside me with his uneaten hamburger” (74). Abrupt movements in the text’s organization are common. Like Kapil, Nakayasu also intersperses visual elements. Nakayasu does so to reveal the messy process of translation. For instance, the poem “Flanky Pongo (Urla) #8 by Steve Willard,” is presented in Spanish. An actual line is crossed out later toward the end of the poem: “contra extractor ~~colgadas en burlandose? moji~~” (67). The first half of the line “contra extractor” can be translated as “against extraction;” the words crossed out can not be translated into English. This transgressive “mistake” is visible and permanent for all to see – celebrating the layered process of writing, rewriting, translating, and not translating.

Similarly to Kapil in *Humanimal*, Nakayasu is also reflective about her process of translation (and anti-translation) and writing. John Yau, in “Language is Not Colorless,” engages Nakayasu’s hyperawareness of border crossing: “It is apparent to me that Nakasayu recognizes that she lives both inside and outside two languages (English and Japanese) and is never completely grounded in either one” and “she complicates any essentialist reading of lineage” (Yau). This refusal to support an essentialist text is evident in the text’s imagery: “In the distance, dusk cuts the tongue of the sun” (17). Tongues are continually cut, but in a mode of grotesque beauty – not pure horror. Indeed, we are in a world of sunsets and teeming hives. Nakayasu writes about her process via metaphor in the endnotes: “And woe is the silent silver bee who is unaware of these great difficulties and responsibilities” (Nakayasu). Here, she mocks the world in which translation holds great responsibility and authority – “woe is the silent silver bee.” Silence is deafening in an essentialist reading; rather, her book desires a new mode of language and translation: a “teeming” beehive

“constructed among themselves.” This buzzing is full of agency and collective power; the hive is constructed in whatever way she/they see fit.

For Nakayasu, this hive teems with the writers she decides to include and meld together in powerful roles – from Sagawa to Loy to Chung. Akin to “queens,” she upholds a lineage of forgotten women poets. Indeed, her invocation of Sagawa and Chung is not accidental – these poets and translators are her kin. Chung grew along the border of New York City’s Chinatown and Little Italy and died in 1990, at the age of 40. Chung’s poetics often depicted a sociohistorical picture of Chinatown from the late 1960s and 1980s, celebrating multilingual poetry – much like Nakayasu. For example, she begins in Spanish:

Yo vivo en el barrio chino
de Nueva York... I live in
New York’s Chinatown. Some
call it a ghetto, some call
it a slum, some call it home.
Little Italy or Northern
Chinatown, to my mind, the
boundaries have become fluid. (Chung 3)

These fluid boundaries – along with bold assertions of the speaker’s visibilities (“I live in”) – are central to Nakayasu’s and Kapil’s poetics as well. Walter K. Lew describes Chung’s forgotten work as a reflection of the transnational world around her, spotlighting silenced and marginalized communities:

The effect in much of Chung’s poetry is not prophetic (revelation of all to all), but the creation of deeper silences in which to safeguard personal or community thought, feeling, and relationships from the onslaught of real estate speculation, food pornography, exploitation by the garment industry, and the ideology of a nation at war against yet another Asian populace, the Vietnamese. (Lew 170)

Chung moves toward such silences in her own historical context of the Vietnam War, drawing connections across multiethnic communities and their collective and daily experiences of trauma. *Mouth: Eats Color*'s penultimate poem is a Chung poem, "Scenes Gathered From a Chinese-English Dictionary," which challenges dictionary-based, essentialist translation and narration. The end of the poem addresses the intermingled movement of writing and walking: "A stroke to the right in writing/take off slipper/my dull mind is suddenly opened" (79). By mixing one character stroke with the bodily act of taking off one slipper – notably partial acts– the mind "suddenly open[s]" anew.

Such approaches toward openness and vitality are prominent in Kapil's *Humanimal* and Nakayasu's *Mouth: Eats Color*. Calling upon literal and figurative ghosts, a poetics of haunting necessities interior questioning and reflection about the process of invocation. To return to Kapil, she raises the stakes of carrying a story into the future and its impact across future generations: "Nothing, and then, a couple of years later, I received a letter. Then more letters. Then emails. From women and girls, really, who had found the book and begun to answer the questions themselves" (*BOMB*). Indeed, a text has a life beyond the page, supporting shared conversations and sites of agency across the distance of place and time. Poet M. NourbeSe Philip writes that "the living and the dead share an interest in the future" and that "the bones of the undead *can* find a resting place within us" (Philip). This communion, despite the realities of past and present trauma, seeks peace: "a resting place."

Both texts also function as radical futuristic memoirs, with "forgotten" women at the narrative forefront. As if thinking of matriarchal lineage, the female shaman, the Korean Durga, the goddess Kali as the destroyer of evil, etc., Kapil insists on going toward our ghosts with spiritual attentiveness to radical border crossing. Speaking to women of color, she writes: "1. In what sense is creative writing a form of cultural and institutional revenge?"

2. Take pristine care of your blood” (*VIDA*). This “revenge” and “pristine care for your blood” can deeply impact future narratives and future bodies. From “Fear of Cold” in *Mouth: Eats Color*: “I quickly grow both sick and intensely anxious about the situation, all of which nervous energy serves to cause the blood cells in my body to vibrate rapidly until I am quite warm, and stay warm until the weather goes warm and I am saved from dying” (Nakayasu 69). Both texts incubate this ghostly, vibrational warmth – refusing death in ever-expanding past, present, and future worlds.

CHAPTER 4

Unsettling English:

Barbara Jane Reyes and Cathy Park Hong

“I refuse to translate
 I refuse to translate
 I refuse to translate
 I refuse to translate
 I refuse to translate”

- Don Mee Choi, from *Hardly War*

In the second grade, when I refused to talk in the classroom for yet another year, my teacher led me down the hall – away from the other students – and toward the “special” trailers. In the English as a Second Language trailer, I was told to sit next to a puzzle map of the United States. “Door,” my teacher said, pointing to the door. “Door, Jane.” And then: “Jane, you’ll finally learn English here. You don’t have to be afraid to talk anymore. And when you learn English, you can make all sorts of things happen!” Fluent in Chinese and English before I entered, I sat silently in the ESL trailer for two years. This was also where I began to lose my Cantonese language skills.

This personal experience is certainly not uncommon. For many, the English language represents a set of judgments and expectations. Gloria Anzaldúa, a scholar of Chicana studies, posits that identity – a multifaceted concept in itself – is inextricably tied to language in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987):

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language... I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice. Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue--my woman's voice, my

sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence. (252)

For Anzaldua, to deny languages spoken in school, at work, and at home, is painful (“if you want to really hurt me”). Moreover, through her discussion of shame, she refuses the belief that non-English languages are inferior. Indeed, multiple voices resist not only the singularity of “standard” English, but also speaking as a means of information; instead, Anzaldua offers a poet’s voice speaking in multiple tongues. This refusal of silence rather than acceptance of shame allows for ghosts to rise— from restoring lost historical narratives in languages beyond “standard” English to speaking so-called “dead” or extinct languages. Anzaldua’s passage also points to the fundamental significance of the intersections between language, race, gender, class, and sexuality.

This chapter grapples with larger questions about the haunting effects of language as a pervasive system of control. I will be focusing on two Asian American poets, Barbara Jane Reyes and Cathy Park Hong, who reimagine language hierarchies and seek to unsettle English as a mode of communication and expression. Questions in this chapter include: what are the consequences of language enforcement, language loss, and language confusion? How can language – as a system of power, surveillance, and oppression – haunt Asian American poets who utilize language in their daily craft? In terms of form, what occurs when Reyes and Hong revisit and re-envision their respective histories of language loss (i.e. multiple “native tongues,” “mother tongues,” and indigenous languages) and enforcement (i.e. fluency in “standard” English)? Furthermore, what alternatives arise when actively unsettling English’s linguistic power?

To begin, Kenyan novelist and scholar Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), insists that language is central to power: “Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the

entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (16). In this way, language acts as an influential medium (“carries”) for self-perception. We embed our values in language; language keeps us “rooted” to traditions (“body of values”) and histories. In other words, *how* we speak (such as word choice, tone, inflection, style) is tied deeply to cultural heritage and our global relationships. Who speaks like us? Who does not? How do we include and exclude communities via language? Both Reyes and Hong question such static answers and dichotomies.

In particular, Ngũgĩ’s work on language emphasizes the impact of colonialism. He argues that language is a central component of change and resistance in a system of oppression; to free the natives’ minds from the colonizer’s control, one must reject the imposed language (English) and adopt one’s native language. When addressing why Europeans questioned his use of the Gikuyu language in his work, Ngũgĩ writes:

It was almost as if, in choosing to write in Gikuyu, I was doing something abnormal. But Gikuyu is my mother tongue! The very fact that what common sense dictates in the literary practice of other cultures is being questioned in an African writer is a measure of how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities. (27)

Questioning and devaluing Gikuyu also points to fear – fear of not understanding, of not knowing what is being written. Underneath such questioning, which sees Gikuyu as “abnormal,” is the colonizer’s fear of change and loss of control. Furthermore, through this perceived difference, the dichotomy of English (normal) and non-English (abnormal) is upheld.

With the historical expansion of the British Empire, English is often considered a global or “universal” language – and this global default is often viewed with positivity. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, ESL courses are common in American classrooms

and beyond. These courses often operate under an “English-only” policy, where students learn to silence their respective languages (as if quitting multilingualism “cold turkey”) in a fully immersive English language environment. Placing English at the top of a language hierarchy, in the classroom and beyond, creates tangible consequences; indeed, a Google search for language barriers for Asian immigrants leads directly to barriers for health care. Rhetoric such as “non-native English speaker” engages hierarchies of superiority and difference (“non”), upholding a troublesome binary. Accents keep a non-native speaker from being considered fully “American” in this sense. To be a native speaker of English bears the mark of socio-economic distinction; the acquisition of English skills leads to more economic and cultural opportunities. As Braj B. Kachru writes in *The Alchemy of English* (1986):

Competence in English and the use of this language signify a transmutation: an added potential for material and social gain and advantage... In comparison with other languages of wider communication, knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science, and travel. In short, English provides linguistic power. (1)

As Kachru argues, “linguistic power” is reached through a “transmutation,” in which a significant change occurs. Kachru’s language suggests that English itself is larger than life – magical, even (“the fabled Aladdin’s lamp”); at its core, English (and the hierarchy of language) is rooted in myth. Yet, as Kachru reminds us, this myth creates powerful realities in terms of one’s socioeconomic status and access to global opportunities. It is also important to note that one’s level of English “competence” is harshly judged and questioned– even as a native speaker. Interestingly, resistance to English can often occur in English: “Indian leaders like Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) were struggling to create

consensus for a mutually acceptable native variety as the national language, but their message to the elite was expressed in English” (Kachru 8). With English as the accepted form of communication in “elite” circles, how can a multilingual site exist without the label of inferiority?

To delve further into English as a problematically advantageous tool, Robert Phillipson in *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992) defines English linguistic imperialism as retaining the structural and cultural inequalities between English and non-English languages (10). Linguistic imperialism, in which a language is forced upon those under occupation, is a demonstration of control – reiterating Kachru’s earlier point about linguistic power. This hegemony via language affects postcolonial sites from India to the Philippines. The pressure to learn a singular, “standard” English derives its power, in part, from reinforced myths of cultural difference and linguistic dichotomies. As scholar David Palumbo-Liu asserts in *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), historical events and myths reinforce the idea of a divided identity for Asian Americans. He argues that it is necessary to deconstruct notions of a divided identity that have characterized much of Asian American literature: “Asia/America resides in *transit*, as a point of reference on the horizon that is part of *both* a ‘minority’ identity and a ‘majority’ identity” (5). These myths of separation do not allow for transnational movement, including the movement of language and “tongues.” With slang, pidgin, and code meshing, the colonizer’s desired dichotomy of English and non-English speakers breaks down. For novelist Salman Rushdie, a third language arises; he calls Indian English a “post-colonial anomaly, the bastard child of the Empire” (x).

Moreover, Phillipson introduces the term “linguicism,” where linguistic imperialism aims to erase a language as a demonstration of power – leading to “dead” languages or extinct languages (55). Reyes addresses linguicism directly – resurrecting the “dead”

Baybayin language in a country where English prevails. In “Los Indios Bravos: The Filipino/American Lyric and the Cosmopoetics of Comparative Indigeneity,” Stephen Hong Sohn writes of Filipino American writers, particularly Luisa A. Igloria, as explicitly exploring the roots of pre-colonial, indigenous languages: “Filipino American poets have been probing the ways in which Filipino diasporic subjects might be contextualized within a larger frame that links them with various indigenous groups” (Sohn 547). As James Clifford asserts in *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (2013), indigenous movements contest the power of assimilationist nation-states, demanding autonomy or other forms of sovereignty. Such modes of sovereignty can include language as well. Reyes’s desire to understand the indigenous languages of the Philippines emphasizes the Philippines as a textured site of intense linguistic imperialism and transmutation. Indeed, while the Philippines became independent in 1946, English remains widely used; it has the largest population of English-speaking countries in the region (Crystal). As researcher Christopher J. Dawe argues in “Language Governmentality in Philippine Education Policy,” education standards play a significant role in the proliferation of English. For example, in 2013, three high school students from Saviour’s Christian Academy in Laoag City were expelled for violating the school’s English-only policy, noting “inappropriate conduct” in their report for speaking “the vernacular [Iloko] inside the campus” (Dawe 61). Such overt language discrimination, which implies that non-English languages are “inappropriate,” raises Ngũgĩ’s stakes further; indeed, what are the consequences of linguistic imperialism when Filipinos themselves reinforce English as the top of the language hierarchy?

This chapter takes a close look – down to the word, syllable, and sound level – at two key texts: Reyes’s *Poeta en San Francisco* (2005) and Hong’s *Dance Dance Revolution* (2007). I argue that these poets reveal and indict linguistic hierarchies, centered around “correct” and

“standard” English practices. By examining the significance of language as a system of knowledge building and breakage, Reyes and Hong thus question why and how we speak today. In doing so, I understand learning and using English as a haunting act –an enforced system of communication due to historical occupation and invasion. English – who speaks it, who doesn't – participates in a traumatic act of othering and demarcation within immigrant and transnational narratives. Albeit differently, both Reyes and Hong seek to unsettle English in their work. They consider language as a *choice* – a transparent and performative treatise for transnationalism. They go toward the ghost of language and break linguistic hierarchies down – syllable by shifting syllable.

To return to my emphasis on the reader's embodied experience of haunting in Chapter Two, Reyes and Hong challenge our assumptions of an “American” poetry by breaking down expectations of a singular, white “English” and a clear-cut bilingual text. By intermingling languages and refusing translation, these texts throw “stable” linguistic and social hierarchies into question, as well as reveal our dependency on ethnocentric and nationalistic conceptions of English. Reyes's *Poeta en San Francisco* creates a multilingual field, utilizing mixed variations of Spanish, Tagalog, Baybayin, English, and an unnamable language to create plurality and simultaneity. Notably, Reyes does not value one over the other; rather than “errors” in standardization, such variations hold positive, active power as a means of what she calls “re • orient[ing]” in the last half of the book. To build upon Reyes, *Dance Dance Revolution* pushes English language assumptions to another level by creating an entirely new language – a language readers cannot track. Through her speculative poetics, Hong breaks down linguistic hierarchies using the force of invention. In *Dance Dance Revolution*, the Guide leads the reader through the fantastical Desert, speaking an ever-changing language consisting of over 300 languages and dialects (Hong 19). Such heightened

“playfulness” in language can be seen as verging on the nonsensical or absurd. Yet, reading such texts as solely “playful” dangerously regulates language to surface-level aesthetics; rather, there is serious politicized play in such invention, pointing to the reader’s fear of intermingling language. Indeed, what happens if we take a text such as *Dance Dance Revolution* as real – as part of our current and future linguistic landscape? Reyes and Hong welcome answers of discomfort and instability to such questions– in whatever language we chose to use.

Certainly, language powerfully and intimately foregrounds both social and political hierarchies in Asian American texts. Speaking of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTEE* (1982), Timothy Yu in *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* (2009) writes that the colonizer “presents itself to the colonized through language” (Yu 131). To continue: “The colonizer, Cha argues, presents itself to the colonized through language. For all the force of its repressive apparatus, the imperial power’s most insidious presence is within the structures of language themselves” (131). In the passage Yu examines, Cha writes through the Japanese colonization of Korea (officially annexed in 1910 through the Japan-Korea Treaty until 1945 by the Treaty of Basic Relations between Japan and South Korea) and the immediate enforcement of the Japanese language. Yet, English also becomes important in *DICTEE* as a system of “insidious presence” and control. For Cha, power resides in the structures of language. By moving the colonial relationship into language and speech, it becomes embedded and more insidious. Yu examines how Cha’s language – which works as a tool against such hegemonic colonial relationships – moves toward abstraction, becoming “increasingly less narrative, less grounded, less identifiable in their character and location” (Yu 132). Such abstraction can be seen in *DICTEE*’s final fragments, such as “Tenth, a circle within a circle, a series of concentric circles” (Cha 175). Here, location

disappears into an abstract ring of circles (as opposed to the linear line of narrative). However, while Yu addresses Cha's destabilization of the English language through abstraction and unclear images, what can we gather from her use of interlingual language in *DICTEE*, down to the word or character level? What occurs when the material of language is placed in the forefront – not as abstraction or a “wall” one shall not pass through – but as pure creation? Through words such as “MAH-UHM” (45) – an undefinable Korean essence presented in phonetic English – Cha begins the task of unmooring sense making in language as well as narrative.

This task of unmooring – complicated in the work of Reyes and Hong – is notably challenging due to assumptions and expectations of what an “Asian American” text can and should offer readers. Min Hyong Song, in *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing as an Asian American* (2013), posits that reader expectations – which are, in turn, internalized – shape how Asian American writers negotiate their form, content, and language for themselves and for their readers. Of expectations, she writes:

To be ‘expected’ in this way [individuals recognize what is being said about them] is also at once already to be made into a subject, something that happens to one before one is even born, and to receive an invitation to occupy this position, which suggests one has the option to decline. In short, expectations seem more capable than stereotypes to make conceptual space for change because expectations raise the potential for their own inaccuracy. (Song 44)

Here, expectations create a kind of problematic and paradoxical bound-freedom: one comes with expectations already applied, with the idea that this expectation can change. Yet, such “space for change” is indeed “conceptual” and tangibly difficult. Expectations are notably clingy; we anticipate fulfillment and usefulness of such expectations, particularly when it

comes to language. Indeed, how do we address our expectations that an Asian American text will be in English, offer phonetic spellings of Asian languages, and translate clearly? While focusing primarily on prose fiction, Song does include a chapter on Hong's book, in which she argues that *Dance Dance Revolution* creates a "weird English," to use Evelyn Ch'ien's term, which breaks down expectations of writing wistfully about history (Song 207). Yet, rather than go into depth about the act of "weirding," Song connects historical expectations of *Dance Dance Revolution* (that the book deprives history of the ability to give meaning for the present) to the Japanese American internment.

To focus more specifically on the expectations of English language use, poet Nathaniel Mackey in *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing* (1993) questions language as a matter of expected accessibility in terms of our reading experience. He argues that "writers from socially marginalized groups [tell] their stories while calling such conventions into question, [and] tell their stories *by* calling such conventions into question" (*Discrepant Engagement* 19). In this case, discrepancy from expectations – including a standard, American, white English – is a core concern of poets of color. Mackey envisions such discrepancy as an opportunity for dialogue and destabilization of static categories: "[Discrepant engagement] worries resolute identity and demarcation, resolute boundary lines, resolute definition, obeying a vibrational rather than a corpuscular sense of being" (20). This "vibrational" sense of being lends itself well to the word level, creating a visible and productive space for language transformation. This discrepant engagement, "to make the act of categorization creak," (*Discrepant Engagement* 21) demands to be heard in Mackey's own creative work. The focus is on "vibrational" language rather than fully formed, "correct" and "corpuscular" English: "Stra," "semisaid," "semisung" (*Splay Anthem* 21).

Reyes's *Poeta en San Francisco* immediately calls such "resolute boundary lines" into question; the title itself intermingles language: enough to simultaneously understand ("San Francisco") and disorient ("Poeta en") the reader. The collection opens with unease, addressing the reader's expectations with transparency. The first poem is entitled "[state of emergency]." Reyes destabilizes the text as a "safe space" upfront, beginning with confrontation and the anomaly of being in a "state of emergency." As a kind of metanarrative, she sets up the her goals and expectations:

To honor movement in crescendos of text, combing through ashes for fragments of human bone, studying maps drawn for the absurdity of navigation – what may be so edgy about this state of emergency is my lack of apology for what I am bound to do. (11)

Here, Palumbo-Liu's idea of residing "in transit" is echoed in Reyes's desire and insistence to "honor movement" through language. Navigation or directional boundaries is considered "absurd." Before she does what she is "bound to do," she refuses to apologize. She places the reader in the hot seat of expectations by calling out ethnocentric, ethno-nationalist, and racialized expectations of American citizenship. Reyes proposes that her readers will see her language and the text as a state of emergency; interestingly, she assures the reader of this state in a calm and careful tone.

Through literal red pages, readers continue into this proposed state of emergency into a section entitled "orient" – a title which plays on both familiarity and the Orient (i.e. the unfamiliar "East"). Despite the lack of translation and italicization, language in this section is familiar in the sense that there is a recognizable distinction between Spanish and English: "en esta ciudad we have forgotten how to speak" (19). Yet, language shifts toward the unfamiliar when English begins to slur into slang – notably without italicization, which often marks difference:

en esta ciudad, where homeless ‘nam vets
 wave old glory and pots for spare change;
 she grows weary of the daily routine:

fuckinjagobacktochina!
 allthemfuckingooknamesoundthesame! (21)

The untranslated repetition of “en esta ciudad” in Spanish meets English slang (“nam”), meets slurred slurs (“fuckinjagobacktochina”). The poem continues with untranslated Tagalog a few lines later: “wala kang pag-asa pag darating ang araw ng pahayag” (21). Early on, the text disrupts English and offers an almost forceful multiplicity of language, mirroring the subject of violence and violation during wartime: “they want to touch her, on their greasy lips, maganda ka mahal kita magkano ka” (21). In this case, Reyes mocks American soldiers’ mockery of the Tagalog language, which translates to “Very pretty much I love you” – a kind of pidgin Tagalog. Yet, again, Reyes does not translate this in the actual text. As such, she further undermines linguistic hierarchies, refusing the concept of needing to know and understand in “standard” English. The reader’s level of language knowledge – in a text full with linguistic multiplicities and play – is often half-lit and disregarded. In a 2010 interview with Matthew Shenoda in *MELUS*, Reyes speaks about how her multilingual background impacts her poetics:

I had the fortune of being brought up in a multilingual family and marrying into a multilingual family, in which code-switching is really the primary language, over Tagalog, over English, over Ilocano, over Spanish. Tagalog has its own history of incorporating into it Spanish and later on, English. I have tried finding pre-Hispanicized/deep Tagalog words to use instead of their contemporary Spanish counterparts, but there is the risk of simply not being understood even by fluent Tagalog speakers. (Jones and Leonard 136)

Throughout the interview, Reyes stresses the centrality of shifting language (“code-switching is really the primary language”) as well as the positivity of incorporating multiple languages (“I had the fortune”). Notably, Reyes upholds the value of ever-shifting tongues; multilingualism and code meshing are often seen as negative or as “bastardization” – to return to Rushdie’s comment on Indian English.

Even at the risk of not being understood by readers with various language backgrounds, Reyes continues to disorient language as a continual mode of unsettling. Challenging the reader even further, “dis • orient” opens with a dictionary entry missing its word. Instead, the poem begins with the pronunciation, type, and definition: “(nu, nyu)/adj./as in, *make it*” (43). Reyes playfully obscures the word this definition references, asking the reader in its definition to “make it.” Of course, readers can hear the word “new,” recalling Ezra Pound’s mantra “make it new.” To make the reference even more clear, Reyes adds: “what pound appropriation of the ancient oriental” (43). Her opening – engaging questions of language appropriation – alludes to Pound’s and Ernest Fenollosa’s Orientalist interests in Japanese and Chinese texts. Indeed, in his introduction to Pound’s selected poems, T.S. Eliot proclaims: “Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time.” Josephine Park, in *Apparitions of Asia* (2008), writes in her introduction of the “afterimage” (3) and “resilient structure” (14) of American Orientalism. Over the last century, the repercussions of Modernism’s interest in the Orient have become tangible and felt in the work of Asian American poetry as “an onerous burden and as an opportunity for literary experiment” (Park 4). In the false dictionary entry and “what pound appropriation of the ancient oriental,” (43) Reyes goes toward the ghost of Orientalism and pokes fun at its mere existence, both as a moment of literary experimentation and linguistic resistance.

Baybayin – without English qualifiers – follows (96). This moment of uninterrupted Baybayin reverses Phillipson’s concept of linguisticism, with the “dead” or extinct language coming back to life – in full force. Yet, of course, such resurrection occurs as a result of Reyes’s desire to return to the ghost of an indigenous language – despite the difficulties of scholarly research, including the physical quality of surviving Baybayin texts (the University of Santo Tomas in Manila holds the largest collection of ancient Baybayin alphabet texts).

Furthermore, to echo the bold, metanarrative opening of the book, *Poeta en San Francisco* ends with a commentary on destabilizing language by refusing translation during our reading experience:

(he asks me to translate.) (the tongue of an angry man.) (he tells me, i don’t know how i feel about this.) (any of this?) (i want to grab his shoulders and shake.) (jesus, feel something.) (he walks away.) (he can’t hear me.) (he smiles.) (107)

Again, Reyes is transparent in her poetics, pointing directly at the reader’s desperate and angry desire for translation and readability. Disorientation has lead this man, her reader, to declare “(I don’t know how I feel about this.),” as if knowledge and certainty (rather than feeling) is first and foremost. When he is unable to feel anything, even when Reyes shakes him (this moment recalls Mackey’s “vibrational” sense of being), he simply ignores her. This refusal to engage – made visible in “smiles” – is terrifying. Additionally, the use of parentheticals hides this conversation between the reader and the writer, marginalizing her insistence on active change. As an epilogue, this raises key questions: how many of her readers are willing to create more expansive and less evaluative understandings of language? And how many are walking away, “smiling”?

To return to her interview in *MELUS*, Reyes speaks about the necessity of engaging creative language, particularly as a means of change and subversion: “I don’t have a problem

with subverting, inventing, or adapting language to suit my needs... All too often, the creative use and invention of language here is easily met with dismissal precisely because it does not employ 'proper' English" (Jones and Leonard 137). As she points out later, Carlos Bulosan (1913- 1956) utilizes "proper" English and high diction throughout his work, including poems of resistance like "If You Want To Know What We Are." She recognizes poets like Bulosan who seek change via the use of the oppressor's language as ethos; however, she desires something more radical and natural – an "invention of language." This invention is not the kind of invention Eliot speaks of with Pound's "translations." Rather, this is an invention of language that refuses binaries and adapts "to suit [her] needs," as identity too is constantly changing. Reyes continues to unsettle English and unveils hegemonic language systems in her subsequent collections, including *Divata* (2010). Indeed, the poet Nick Carbo writes, on the back-cover of *Divata* (2010), that Reyes "injects Filipino words like calamansi, kastoy, and pananghoy into the sinew of American poetry with panache and fearless abandon." With her "fearless abandon," refusal to apologize "for what [she is] bound to do" (Reyes 11) and not "having a problem with subverting, inventing, or adapting language" (Jones and Leonard 137), Reyes rejects a language hierarchy. Thinking back to "how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities" (Ngũgĩ 27), Reyes's work boldly aims to resituate Filipino realities then and now.

In particular, when addressing the creative use and usefulness of language, Reyes indicates the importance of Hawaiian pidgin poetry in American poetry and poetics (Jones and Leonard 137). Lee A. Tonouchi, a Hawaiian poet who writes in pidgin, discusses the expectations of "proper" English, particularly in school:

When I wuz in high school, my faddah always told me, 'Lee, you should become one writer. Cuz den you can jus stay home, no need commute to

work, no need fight da traffic.' I toll 'em, 'I cannot come one writer, cuz I dunno how for write.' Cuz at dat time da only role models I had in school wuz Shakespeare and Faulkner and I knew I could nevah write li' dat.

(*Honolulu Magazine*)

Throughout his education, the Englishes of Shakespeare and Faulkner were valued (as “role models”) over Hawaiian pidgin – a language Tonouchi felt was only to be spoken at home. Yet, in a mode of resistance, poets like Tonouchi and R. Zamora Linmark utilize Hawaiian pidgin in their respective books and interviews. Rather than a “bastardized” English, Tonouchi asserts that Hawaiian pidgin is its own distinct language, with clear ties to culture, homeland, and preservation –signifying a strong, localized identity. In this way, Tonouchi enacts Clifford’s concept of roots and routes in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997). Tonouchi, through Hawaiian pidgin, aims to create “roots” in culture and identity. Yet, unlike the fixed “roots” of home, Clifford identifies “routes” as ever-moving in-between spaces which promote becoming over being. Clifford writes: “Everyone [is] more or less permanently in transit... Not so much ‘Where are you from?’ as ‘Where are you between?’”(Clifford 37). With *Dance Dance Revolution*, Hong pushes the use of pidgin languages further to suggest Clifford’s ever-shifting routes of language (unlike Tonouchi’s concept of Hawaiian pidgin as indicative of roots).

Indeed, thinking forward to what a destabilized hierarchy of language could look like, *Dance Dance Revolution* addresses language through a transnational, “route” based lens. In “What’s American About American Poetry?” poet Kazim Ali speaks about American poetics as a matter of resistance, border crossing, and imagination: “This country resists itself, has always resisted itself; what it claims to be chafes away against its reality” (Ali 278). Also an Asian American poet, Ali points toward a more fluid understanding of language and plural Englishes (notably, not described as “slang” or pidgin): “Indian English, I can tell you, is a

separate language, both spoken and written, from American English. It has different words, different intonations and pronunciations, different accepted sentence order, different syntax” (283). Rather than passive “leftover” postcolonial language, such invented nuances in language can be seen as an act of resistance. In *Transpacific Displacement*, Yunte Huang speaks about the ever-moving proliferation of texts: “We all travel in the world of texts” (Huang 3) and “what I call transpacific displacement is a historical process of textual migration of cultural meanings, meanings that include linguistic traits, poetics, philosophical ideas, myths, stories and so on” (3).

In this “world of texts,” which values multiplicity and migration, Hong takes readability and assumptions about writing in “standard” English to the level of futuristic invention. To return to *DICTEE*, Cha writes: “To speak makes you sad. Yearning” (Cha 46). *Dance Dance Revolution* takes Cha’s loss of language and turns melancholic “yearning” into active creation – as if asking language to earn its worth and value. The book begins with a chronology, immediately placing the reader in a reimagined haunting space, as the names of unfamiliar places such as “New Town” and “the Desert” are up against familiar markers such as “Kwangju, South Korea” (17). Hong’s use of a chronology and foreword situate the reader in the language of anthropology, making our ethnographic impulse hyper-transparent. Indeed, phrases such as “as an example” (19) create an approach based on presenting evidence – that is, fantastical evidence.

Interestingly, recalling the “absurdity of navigation” (Reyes 11), Hong literally offers the reader a navigator (known as the Guide) with her chronology and foreword, hyperbolizing such absurdity. In the foreword, we learn that the citizens of the Desert – an expansive space in which winds change location – use a creole language, as “new faces pour in and civilian accents morph so quickly that their accents betray who they talked to that day

rather than their cultural roots” (Hong 19). Conversation - rather than cultural roots – alters language, subverting the idea that language is stable and fixed. Such conversation engages a fluid concept of immigration, as “new faces pour in” – unstoppable. As a result, one must adapt, alter, and shift continually. This between-ness lends itself well to the Desert’s rapidly moving linguistic landscape, with language always “morph[ing].” This transitory mode has the potential to collapse hierarchies and questions of authenticity. In the Desert, “fluency is also a matter of opinion” (19) rather than argument or fact. Fluency as an opinion breaks down the binary of “native speaker” and “non-native speaker.” Moreover, the Historian offers the possibility of the “glitch,” suggesting the impossibility of “correctness” in the Desert: “I must also admit that some of [the Guide’s] stories may be inexact due to technical glitches” (20). The anxiety of “getting it right” dissipates. Soon thereafter, the Guide introduces herself with a multitude of names, encompassing all of the following: “Chun Sujin, lest name first, first name lest. Allatime known es Ballhead, Jangnim, o zoologist Henrietta wit falsetto slang. But you, you just’call me guide” (22). The concept of a “correct” name, in any given language, is thrown to the wind. Self-proclaimed as the Guide, readers must be willing to follow and trust in glitches.

When engaging word games, Wittgenstein suggests that language is something inhabited rather than acquired. From *Philosophical Investigations* (1953): “Someone coming into a strange country will sometimes learn the language of the inhabitants from ostensive definitions that they give him; and he will often have to *guess* the meaning of these definitions; and will guess sometimes right, sometimes wrong” (#32). For Wittgenstein, this experience of guesswork creates complex word games. In *Dance Dance Revolution*, the language in use is guesswork itself, without the judgment of “right” or “wrong.” In this way, the “official” language of the Desert is the language of word games. Moreover, as the Guide

suggests, such “guesswork” or “play” is not quite an accident one experiences, but a choice (a joyful choice) one makes in a contingent and fluid linguistic landscape. From “Roles”: “I speak sum Han-guk y Finnish, good bit o Latin/y Spanish... sum toto Desert Creole en evachanging dipdong/’pendable on mine mood” (25). Here, the Guide’s “eveachanging dipdong” changes depending on her mood, making language a choice rather than a given; moreover, this multilingual choice is expressed in a positive, even proud tone: “good bit o.” The Guide continues to define herself without definition: “T’mma double migrant” (26). She yells into a room to hear a pleasurable echo of herself: “stars ideation en dome, me vocal twills in dome, listen –/ HULLO... hullo... hullo...” (33). As we follow the Guide, who delights in language, Hong points to poetry as a response to a transnational world – a world in which language becomes a mutable choice. To return to Huang, he writes in *Transpacific Imaginations*: “We travel from one text to another, from one version to another, to compile our own text or version, to create our own travelogue” (Huang 4). This “travelogue” reflects the Historian’s account of the Desert environment, which is orchestrated not only by the Guide, but the “new faces pour[ing] in” (Hong 19) around the Guide and the Historian.

Notably, *Dance Dance Revolution* exemplifies Huang’s concept of textual migration through historical narration, which occurs in a non-linear fashion. When listening to the Guide’s memories of war, readers find it difficult to place her accounts by clock and calendar. Without a timeline, Hong asks us instead to consider how personal war experiences can migrate across time and space; in this case, the affect of war (how do you feel?) is more important than the recorded details of war (which war was this?):

He took Jess to war windows tho widows too dry woeing tears
for Eros. He like mine grandfadder yessed y yessed, nodded
til no lift him fest up. In his deadbead... sayim to me,
Ttallim, you say no, no, no, you say only no. (43)

The Guide's memory of her grandfather, a "Yes-man," reinforces the necessity to say "no" to the authority of war and hegemonic language. As readers experience this intimate memory, the Historian adds a footnote to the poem, offering us a date: "The guide's grandfather was one of the better known *chinalpa* or pro-Japanese collaborators during Japan's colonization of Korea (1910-1945)" (44). Dated, explained, and translated into "clear" speech, the Historian appeases the reader's desire for stability and hierarchical modes of knowledge (as communicating information). These footnotes act as reminders of our discomfort listening solely to the Guide's speech. Yet, as if critiquing her own system of control, the footnotes in the latter half of the book move away from explaining the Guide and toward the Historian's own subjective memory. From the last footnote in "Years in the Ginseng Colony": "Once, I traveled to South Korea and visited the gulag that has now been converted to, ironically, a slaughterhouse" (112).

Throughout, Hong raises a key question: why do we hold onto "standards" or rules – including linguistic correctness, "appropriate" anthropological field notes, historical accuracy, etc.? In our world, outside of the fantastical Desert landscape, speaking anything beyond "standard" English often leads to questions of intellect and worth (rather than resistance and transgression). Rhetoric such as "broken English" arises – again, suggesting abnormality and "wrongness." The Guide addresses such expectations of intellect and language in the poem "Refinery of Voices and Vices":

I's sum o all I's rued, sum o me accents
 y twill mine worn, travels mine tilled, deaths mine endured,
 Sah I's left y Sah you've brung beck,
 'e's allatime dead to me, 'e's yours yours,
 caesuras slicing mine dialect,
 Dim measure me skill, I say stop measuring my skull. (119)

The title of the poem itself emphasizes the pressure to “refine” voices and vices, as if voices and vices are one in the same. The Guide proclaims that her identity is formed by accents: “sum o me accents.” Yet, even the Guide notes the impact of outside expectations – including expectations from the Historian. The formal expectations of language (particularly poetry) violently “slice[s]” her prized accents and dialects: “caesuras slicing mine dialect.” The Guide resists any judgment placed upon her way of speaking, notably in terms of her intellect: “dim measure me skill, I say stop measuring my skull.” Here, reiterating her first statement, she speaks in the Historian’s tongue for emphasis: “I say stop measuring my skull.” In this moment, the Guide makes a point to show the Historian that she, too, can speak “standard” English, but chooses not to. These linguistic expectations and judgments keep coming back, to the Guide’s chagrin. She speaks directly to the Historian’s insistence on using and bringing back “standard” English: “you’ve brung beck,/‘e’s allatime dead.” For the Guide and those in the Desert, English is “allatime dead.” Here, the Guide seemingly asks: why does the Historian insist on using English? The last poem of the book is in the Historian’s voice, where she writes about her father. From “Excerpt from the Historian’s Memoir”: “The civil war died down but there were still his patients with pains from their phantom limbs. There was still the occasional unrest” (120). “Standard” English in the Desert is akin to a phantom limb, causing discomfort despite its open, multilingual environment. Even in a futuristic utopia of language, Hong points to the haunting impact of English as a pervasive system of control.

To return to Song’s work on *Dance Dance Revolution*, she writes of the text as a place of restless, uneasy fantasy. The Desert is “a place of playing signifiers and artifice, giv[ing] way to something that defies signification all together –the heavy cost in terms of lives and wasted resources and human suffering – that such fantasy accumulates like so much trash at

its unheeded margins” (208). Song suggests a kind of unnerving accumulation – “so much trash.” However, rather than view the book’s artifice as a warning, Hong invites the reader to see her fantasy world as a kind of recycling and recreation –to see what can come of a pile of language. At the book’s core is an agenda for dispersal; Hong’s language of invention engages the tensions located within fraught questions of globalization. Poets such as Harryette Mullen also play with language in this way, as in the poems “Blah-Blah” and “Jinglejangle” from *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (2002). Mullen moves through an abecedarian of sound, following her ear rather than sense making via “standard” English definitions. From “Blah-Blah”: “Ack-ack, aye-aye./Baa baa, Baba, Bambam, Bebe, Berber, Bibi, blah-blah, Bobo, bonbon” (Mullen 12). Throughout, Mullen breaks down the English dictionary, a text obsessed with categories and hierarchies. By regaining the pleasurable freedom of language, categories of “appropriate” language break down. Hong picks up Mullen’s sound-pleasure and extends it into a narrative journey – challenging assumptions of a white, “standard” English for 120 pages. As we stay with the Historian and the Guide, we become accustomed to and take pleasure in the Guide’s ever-changing language; we do not “walk away” from it.

Dance Dance Revolution’s emphasis on shifting landscapes also embodies Hong’s poetics and daily practice, as she discusses on Poets.org in 2011:

I always believed that poetry is capable of being anything and prefer to keep that question open-ended. It’s more that my ideas have changed about what poetry should *do*. When I was younger, I used to be more idealistic about poetry’s function in society—that political action and intervention were possible via restructuring of language. But now, I think maybe it’s enough that poetry can nourish individual consciousness or, to put it another way, maybe it’s enough that poetry’s primary purpose is to make people feel things. Then I change my mind. (Poets.org)

Here, Hong acknowledges that *Dance Dance Revolution*, as well as *Translating Mo'um* (2002), were envisioned as political interventions “via restructuring of language.” Suspect of her own choices as a poet, she then shifts her poetics toward “makin[ing] people feel things.” By changing her mind frequently as a poet, Hong embodies the Guide’s desire to uphold an “evachanging dipdong/’pendable on mine mood” (25). Moreover, as a framework, Hong’s speculative poetics plays a significant role in resisting a realist account of a language hierarchy. Anne Donadey considers the choice of speculative fiction by women of color: “Going beyond the mimetic, realist aspect of the traditional novel, [Butler's *Kindred* and Djebbar's *La femme sans sepulture*] problematize the question of representation and truth from the standpoint of marginalized groups (black and Algerian women)” (Donadey 66). Instead of being derivative, *Dance Dance Revolution* and *Poeta en San Francisco* create a new text – reworking English not only now, but also in an ideal future. Both these texts offer what can be seen as an Asian American counterpublic, to borrow from Michael Warner’s concept. In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Warner writes: “Counterpublics are, by definition, formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and this context of domination inevitably entails distortion” (Warner 63). In conflict with the “norm” of English, both texts form an alternative mode of speaking and reading; Reyes and Hong distort English and any linguistic clarity for that matter.

Indeed, by disrupting the hierarchy of the English language, both poets begin the necessary process of imagining a more fluid, more transnational understanding of language. The end of *Poeta en San Francisco* asks: “do you know what it is to witness an unraveling?” (Reyes 107) After reading such work, what arises is that very sense of having witnessed language unravel. Unsettling English asks readers to consider the future of language. Reading such work cannot be distilled into a matter of endurance, as a blurb from Hong’s book

would suggest. From *Publishers Weekly*: “hard to excerpt, hard to decode, it’s even harder to forget.” In its difficulty, *Dance Dance Revolution* questions our desire to decode, as well as our fascination with the Desert world. Returning to Mackey, stories are told “by calling such conventions into question” (*Discrepant Engagement* 19). Hong and Reyes tell their stories by making such conventions and language hierarchies transparent; in other words, they go toward the conventions in order to break them. In John Yau’s piece on Hong’s poetics, “At Play in the Fields of Language,” he speaks about hierarchy, power, and transparency: “Hong recognizes that language is a ‘caste system’ that goes from the ‘fully limbed’ (those in control) to the ‘fully limbless’ (those at the mercy of others)” (Yau). In *Engine Empire* (2012), Hong continues to tease out language in the domain of empire. New, compound words such as “hisshurled” are strewn throughout this collection, so that the engine of language becomes the language of ingenuity and re • orientation, to use Reyes’s term.

Today, Asian American texts continue to destabilize and challenge “standard” English and the possibility of separate bilingualism. The act of “undoing” English continues to be relevant as the linguistic experiences of migration, transnationalism, and dislocation deeply impact a poetics of haunting –notably through a mixed media poetics. In 2002, the Vietnamese American Coalition at the University of California Irvine wrote “I LOVE YOUR ACCENT” and “I WANT A THICKER ACCENT” on 8 1/2 x 11-inch sheets. These sheets were posted all over campus, stressing language as an issue imbued with problematic expectations of worth and intellect: “Explaining that people often say that they find French and British accents attractive, [the VAC] questioned why English spoken with Asian accents is not perceived similarly (Hoang 156).” To want a thicker accent also refuses accessibility and linguistic expectations. In addition, work such as Don Mee Choi’s *Hardly War* (2016) refutes oppressive versions of history, national identity, and militarism. *Hardly*

War utilizes artifacts from Choi's father, a professional photographer during the Korean and Vietnam wars. With her father's images and experiences, she combines poetry, image, and opera scores to challenge our sense of "language" as a means of communicating an emotive experience. Indeed, Choi repeatedly refuses to translate. In this piece, Choi presents us with one of the most iconic images of the Korean War, juxtaposing human life with the ever-threatening presence of war in the background. In Korean, Choi repeats that the South Korean national flower, the mungughwa, (무궁화), is blooming – as bombs too are "blooming." Choi already expects the reader's desire to understand and forcefully refuses translation; indeed, there is no clarity or "reason" for war and trauma. An insistent mantra to both the reader and the writer, she repeats the phrase "I will not translate" five times. In "Race=Nation," Choi writes: "Even after several decades of living outside of South Korea, this is the house I still return to. It is my psychic and linguistic base, a site of perpetual farewell and return, a site of my political act – translation and writing" (3). Here, Choi returns to her "linguistic base," which is clearly a political act. In a poetics of haunting, she returns to the experiences and resonances of the Korean War as a means of control and resistance; for Choi, there must be a transparent move to "disobey history" via language (4).

Breaking from the conventions of English is certainly a risk one takes as a poet of color; echoing Ngũgĩ's experience with Gikuyu, linguistic play and deviation from a "standard" English is often met with criticism, questions, and skepticism. This is most clearly seen in Marjorie Perloff's review of John Yau's *Forbidden Entries* (1996), which appeared in *The Boston Review*. In this review, she questions Yau's inability to keep his Chinese Americanness "to himself," as he had for the first decades of his career. Speaking about his earlier book *Sometimes* (1979), Perloff writes: "More important: there was no indication, at this stage of Yau's career, that the poet is in fact Chinese-American." She goes

on to speak about Yau following in the footsteps of his mentor, John Ashbery. Perloff's criticism lies particularly with Yau's racialized word play: "Indeed, the more overt representations of racial oppression in *Forbidden Entries* are, to my mind, the volume's least successful poems." Here, Perloff problematically argues that these "overt representations of racial oppression" were only "clever puns and specific images." Such a reading valorizes aesthetics and play for play's sake, ignoring the complex systems of language resistance Yau engages with. As Choi insists, such language play and experimentation is a political site (Choi 3). While others might have a "problem" with such subversion, Reyes does not; indeed, as she reminds us, "All too often, the creative use and invention of language here is easily met with dismissal precisely because it does not employ 'proper' English" (Jones and Leonard 137). Such criticism, notably from white writers, reminds us of dangerous "norm" of a "non-racialized" and "standard" English text. As Asian American poets continue to challenge social and linguistic hierarches – the tenacious ghosts of postcolonialism and white supremacy – readers are asked to reconsider the ever-evolving languages of our global world and lose our "tuning fork[s]" (Hong 19).

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion:

Invocation Across Forms

“If I described to you the actual torture techniques, the actual killings,
how can I call that poetry? How am I healing my community and myself?

– Monica Sok, from thepoeticsofhaunting.com

A gallery show entitled “Constructs” at the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, Washington, featured six Asian American women artists. The show explored intersections of memory, lineage, and resistance through installation art. The show was on display from May 15, 2015 to April 17, 2016. In one particular piece entitled “Her House... Tahanan... Her Room,” Filipina American artist Terry Acebo Davis recreates her mother’s respective homes in the Philippines and the U.S., melding both spaces together to form one intimate, transnational “home.” This deeply personal installation is a tribute piece to her mother, who suffers from dementia. Visitors are welcomed into her mother’s home (“tahanan” in Tagalog), which is full of fresh flowers, childhood photographs, tea sets, games, etc. The space even smells floral, like jasmine. Upon entering, there are several pairs of shoes along the mat, inviting us to also take off our shoes and make ourselves comfortable. We are invited to sit on the bed or the rug; photographs of her mother as a young woman are thoughtfully organized above the bedframe. If we pick up the phone, we can hear traditional songs from the Philippines and American jazz playing softly, transporting us across multiple oceans and borders of time. Here, in Davis’s piece, we enter

as complete strangers, yet leave with a strange familiarity. The piece invites us to recall our own mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc. Sensory details (from the smell of flowers to the music playing in the phone) create a simultaneously personal and public space – a haunting space imbued with great loss and transformative resonance.

Notably, as participants, we need to interact with the space in order for haunting to occur; the music in the phone would otherwise not be heard. In *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*, critic Margo Machida writes about the participatory impact of installations as spaces imbued with self-reflection: “[Installation] was a medium that many Asian American artists dealing with self and community definition used to address histories of social rupture, ethnic and racial subjugation, and the embedded bias and silence surrounding those events and experiences that had been ignored or suppressed” (Machida 189). As an interactive piece, “Her House... Tahanan... Her Room” not only addresses histories of colonialism in the Philippines – evident in the food in the room, such as Spam – but also values our personal emotional connections. Likewise, Machida discusses art as expressive capital:

[Strategic acts of visual representation] can provide a previously neglected people with a powerful claim to place in a society where their images are not the norm... Visual art likewise furnishes *expressive capital*, a form of capital that adds greatly to a society’s repertoire of collective responses to its moment and place in the world. (Machida 6)

Here, expressive capital values collaboration and “collective responses,” necessitating equal active engagement from both the artist/poet and the viewer/reader.

In extending the potential of a poetics of haunting, how can multimodal and performance-based works, such as the installation by Davis, create productive and powerful spaces for Asian American poets? This concluding chapter, “Invocation Across Forms,”

participates in a poetics of haunting beyond the page. A significant part of my dissertation includes my work in the digital humanities, which seeks to address and apply my argument – haunting as a positive, productive, and transformative poetic framework – to the work of leading and emerging contemporary Asian American poets. My online project was completed and launched in October, 2016 and was designed to replicate the dynamic experience of “haunting” through its user paths and diverse poetic ephemera. The home page of the website includes an image map using Minh Ngyuen’s illustration, which features drawings of Amala and Kamala (the wolf girls in *Humanimal*), Anna May Wong (a Hollywood actress popular in the 1920s), Chika Sagawa, and Baybayin script. If you hover over a part of the illustration, a phrase will arise (i.e. “Dear comet”), leading you to the poet’s corresponding page. As such, users are free to explore and make their own paths via the home page. The digital project includes primary audio and video conversations, original poetry, photographs, music, and other multimodal ephemera. These evocative first-hand accounts, akin to an oral history archive, offer a more direct, public, and nuanced understanding of “haunting” as an ongoing poetics. The goal of my digital project is to inspire women of color to reclaim their own forgotten or silenced histories. The website seeks real-life stakes, community engagement, and metacognitive reflection. The poets included in the project include: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (and myself), Cathy Linh Che, Don Mee Choi, Christine Hou, Bhanu Kapil, Sally Wen Mao, Diana Khoi Nguyen, Monica Sok, and Pimone Triplett.

My digital project is in conversation with multiple websites interested in ongoing conversations on race and poetics. Indeed, Claudia Rankine curated the forum “Open Letter on Race and The Imagination” to gather open responses from over 30 poets on race. Additionally, Brandon Shimoda curated a poetry and art folio via *The Volta* on the impact of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In a 2011 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues for innovative digital dissertations not as “companion” pieces to traditional monographs, but as chapters in their own right. She argues for innovation in the field and supports the “risky” potential of digital chapters: “Junior scholars with truly innovative projects need to do the risky thing. But they need to know that someone's got their backs, and that their senior colleagues will learn to evaluate new kinds of work on its own merits and will insist upon the value of such innovation for the field and for the institution” (Fitzpatrick). In part, much of this concluding chapter necessitates exploration of my digital humanities website, which can be visited here: www.poeticsofhaunting.com.

To recall my central argument, rather than a psychoanalytic definition of haunting as a return of the repressed, I define haunting as invocation: a deliberate and provocative move toward haunted places. Such movement toward haunted places is not without discomfort and vulnerability. Monica Sok, an emerging Cambodian American poet, includes an image of a cassette tape on her page which reads: “News Pol Pot Death, Monica birthday 8 y/o and both side family.” While trying to find family photographs for the project, Sok discovered this tape. She describes the experience as strange and unsettling, in light of the distance between the Killing Fields and growing up in rural Pennsylvania:

This is what I think of when I think of feeling haunted. When we watched this video, we saw the earliest news of Pol Pot's passing when Wolf Blitzer was a White House correspondent reporting on this, another news anchor with the headline ‘Taking a Closer Look at Evil,’ or ‘One of the Most Evil Men in the World has Died Today.’ Then it cuts to black and white static ... and then people are singing happy birthday to me at my grandma's house in Harrisburg, PA. It's so strange, and I'm still processing it.

As Sok notes, she is “still processing” the tape’s uneasy juxtaposition, which she continues to welcome in her own work. Indeed, as she declares in her poem “Cambodia,” such haunting narratives and voices are real, not romanticized: “This is real life not a story!/Life! Life! We sleep/in bed at night/but do not dream, because life!” (Sok) This insistent declaration of life and its “realness” reminds us that the impacts of colonialism, war, trauma, and migration are indeed tangible and deeply felt many generations later. On the website, Vietnamese American poet Cathy Linh Che explores her parents’ roles in the film *Apocalypse Now*; Don Mee Choi addresses the Gwangju uprising through poetry and songs of protest; Sally Wen Meo resurrects Hollywood actress Anna May Wong into the speculative future via a time machine; Diana Khoi Nguyen seeks out the intergenerational impact of the Vietnam War on her younger brother’s suicide; Pimone Triplett explores being mixed race and the impact of student uprisings in Thailand; and much more.

Additionally, part of my digital project includes my own invocation of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, who was tragically murdered when she was 31. In September, 2016, at the age of 31, I visited the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive to view Cha’s archival work, which is highly interdisciplinary and spans film, performance, poetry, book arts, and more. As discussed in Chapter Two, Cha’s work often engages the difficulty of speaking, particularly the loss of one’s mother tongue. For instance, in her video recording *Mouth to Mouth* (1975), the viewer is surrounded by white noise and a grainy image of a speaker trying to mouth Korean vowels. In my response to Cha, I recorded myself speaking what I call “baby” Cantonese:

Cha’s film *Mouth to Mouth* reveals a mouth opening and closing, attempting to speak. You hear radio snow, the constant roar of the ocean. At the same time, you can hear what sounds like a swarm of flies. Thinking deeply about the difficulty of language and its ability to overwhelm, I recorded

myself speaking Cantonese. In this clip, I use words from my childhood – the few words I know by heart. I didn't mean to speak in a whisper, but the shame was overwhelming. Language as risk, as courage, as fear, as offering.

While recording, I did not write out the poem in English beforehand; rather, I simply spoke, allowing the shame of language loss to overwhelm me. Re-listening to the piece, when I meant to say “My name is,” I accidentally said “Help!” Indeed, I did not recognize this mistake until a Cantonese speaker told me I kept repeating “Help!” in the sound recording. Yet, rather than avoid the ghost of my lost language, I went toward it – “in a whisper.”

As reflected in the above digital project, my dissertation focuses primarily on Asian American women. While I did not seek to only include Asian American women, I realized that innovative work in the field tends to be written and performed by women. What role does gender play in a poetics of haunting? To return to Seo-Young Chu's “Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature,” she offers a possibility via the traditional role of the female telepath: “postmemory han [is] the transference of han *in utero* from Korean mother to Korean American daughter” (Chu 105). As a move toward the ghost, a poetics of haunting is seemingly imbued with matrilineal lineage. Asian American literature has been a male-dominated field particularly during the 1970's and 1980's, most notably with the seminal publication of *Aiiieeee!*, a 1972 anthology of Asian American writers edited by men (Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong). *Nests and Strangers: On Asian American Women Poets* (2015) offers an engagement with Asian American women poets such as Nellie Wong, Myung Mi Kim, Meimei Berssenbrugge, and Bhanu Kapil, particularly with a focus on objectification and the body; however, there are only four essays in this collection. My dissertation and digital

project contributes to what I hope will be a major shift toward a focus on Asian American women poets and women of color more generally.

To conclude, I would like to return to Lucille Clifton's untitled poem in *Mercy*, in which she asks: "why/is there under that poem always/an other poem?" As evident in each analyzed text in my dissertation, metacognitive reflection and visibility are imperative in a poetics of haunting. The poet always knows there is something else there: "an other poem." This metacognitive awareness allows for transgressive and bold choices, refusing "textbook" histories. In conversation with Cathy Linh Che, she reflects on her project of recording her parents' stories over their scenes in *Apocalypse Now*: "I saw it as a kind of recovery project and a proactive way to insert their narratives into the dominant narrative of the Vietnam War. They were paid as extras [in *Apocalypse Now*] to become different characters, playing all kinds of people including the Viet Cong who were the exact people they were running from." This proactive move refuses "romanticized" scenes where soldiers are surfing in the Philippines. Che includes a quote from her father, translated from the Vietnamese: "That's not real. While fighting in a war, who in the world is going to be surfing? That's just ridiculous." During her reflective and meditative piece on the website, Kapil implores us to invoke our ghosts, in any way we can: "The ancestors. To communicate with an ancestor. Make an offering." This offering – somatic or otherwise – rewards the poet with more poems under poems. This dissertation and its digital space, along with my own creative work, is my own offering to my ancestors and communities of color – for, to return to M. NourbeSe Philip, we "share an interest in the future" (Philip).

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