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Abstract

This dissertation turns to contemporary Asian American literature to examine how the aftereffects of U.S. Cold War violence and trauma manifest themselves in minor subjectivities. In the texts I explore, peripheral subjects, whose physical and psychic dislocations stem from Cold War dynamics between Asia and the United States, develop affective modes of reciprocity and intimacy and thereby collectively act out and work through historical damage. In these sites of wounded sociality, trauma appears not just as catastrophic but also as ordinary; rather than displaying itself as an individual psychic pathology, trauma is reconfigured as a collective affective labor that produces a set of minor historiographies. In rewriting the dominant U.S. Cold War historiography through a traumatic genealogy of American empire in Asia, the cultural productions this project discusses create an aesthetics of the periphery and reveal the forgotten historical sites that the progressive temporality of U.S. imperialism has occluded. The writers I explore, including Jessica Hagedorn, Jane Jeong Trenka, Aimee Phan, and Ruth Ozeki, engage multiple historical scenes of the Cold War across the Pacific, from the metropolitanization of Manila and the refugees and transnational adoptees produced by the Cold War's "hot wars" in Korea and Vietnam to the economic alliance between Japan and the United States. This dissertation proposes that these historically, geographically broad and diverse sites are interlinked not simply through the shared experience of U.S. Cold War dominance and neoliberal governance, but also through literary mediations establishing an affective transnational zone: an alternative historical space that at once reveals the contradictions of "liberal empire" and produces an eccentric temporality disrupting its linear forms of progress.

Degree Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group

Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

First Advisor

David L. Eng

Second Advisor

Josephine N. Park

Keywords

Affect, Cold War, Minor, Trauma, U.S. empire, Violence

Subject Categories

Asian American Studies | English Language and Literature

TRAUMA OF EMPIRE:
VIOLENCE, MINOR AFFECT, AND THE COLD WAR TRANSPACIFIC

Jungha Kim

A DISSERTATION

In

Comparative Literature and Literary Theory

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2014

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TRAUMA OF EMPIRE:
VIOLENCE, MINOR AFFECT, AND THE COLD WAR TRANSPACIFIC

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Jungha Kim

2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has been inspired and sustained by numerous encounters, communions, and conversations that I shared with my dear friends, teachers, and family.

I have been fortunate and privileged to have a tremendously brilliant and extremely supportive supervising committee. Knowing what I now know about the demands of their own academic lives, I am the more grateful for their being there whenever I needed them. Heather Love was an amazing interlocutor who always responded thoughtfully to my work and teased out layers and nuances that would otherwise have passed unnoticed. Many thanks to Ayako Kano, whose warm and considerate mentorship made my life and studies at Penn not just possible but sustainable. I couldn't have asked for better advisors than David L. Eng and Josephine N. Park, whose unwavering support for me and faith in my work—even when I myself wavered in doubt—enabled everything that has come from this long journey. I thank Josephine for her intellectual animation and poetic insight, to which I owe a great deal of this dissertation's geographical imagination and literary sensibility. Her presence echoes throughout every part of this work and through every moment of my graduate school life, for which I am truly grateful. My deepest thanks go also to David, whose unique combination of scholarly excellence and witty charisma transformed the process of crafting the dissertation into an often scintillating engagement. His unfailing commitment to this project always helped me to return to it with regained rigor and with sharpened eyes. I will miss our chats at coffee shops over my chapters.

I also appreciate the long standing support of my teachers in Korea. I thank Yim Cheolgyu *sun-saeng-nim* for being such a passionate scholar even in his seventies and for becoming a pathway himself. I am just stunned by how productive he has been in the past few years writing persistently and publishing books. Sipping bottles of beer with him in the breezy evening hours of summer in Sinchon was one of the joyful events in my school days. To Lee Kyungdeok *sun-saeng-nim* I owe a great deal of my critical vocabulary and acumen, areas developed in her methodology classes. Lee Kyungwon *sun-saeng-nim* was the one who led me to English literature through his inspiring classes on postcolonialism and has seen me grow from a student who liked to spend most of the time at the campus newspaper office to a scholar who now takes libraries a chosen home. I also thank Woo Miseong *sun-saeng-nim* for her unmatched sweetness and creative versatility, which have been a continual support and comfort from afar.

Without the fabulous support of my dear friends and cohorts at Penn and beyond, this dissertation would have been impossible. In the English department, I met my lifelong friends: Kelly Rich was always there listening to me and sharing with me all those ups and downs in our graduate school life. Our “embarrassingly long” hug at my defense will be in my heart forever. Philip Tsang and I were kin in our penchant for slow

movies and Asian foods. The numerous chats and laughs we had together helped me to come through many difficult times in a foreign country. Yumi Lee has seen me and has been with me from the start to the end since we met in a class of our first semester. I do appreciate that we were together along the way and could see each other grow. Alan Niles generously and tirelessly read through the whole dissertation and offered rigorous feedback with his flashes of brilliance, for which I am very grateful. It was quite a stroke of luck that I had an amazing group of people as my dear cohorts in the Comparative Literature and Literary Theory program: Kristi Tillett, Joseph Lavery, Sarah Nicolazzo, Elizaveta Strakhov, and Aishwarya Lyer. I thank in particular Kristi for her warm friendship and support, which always made me feel connected with a gentle soul. Jerry Yung-Ching Chang belatedly entered my life at Penn and made it merrier and enjoyable. JoAnne Dubil was my rock. I always felt “home” in her big hugs, which I will miss so much. Many thanks (and cheers!) to our program chair, Kevin Platt, for his unrivaled dedication to the department and thoughtful care of the community.

At the Samson dormitory at Penn, I met Son Gayeon, Oh Seungju, Ha Donhyung and Lee Hyejeong. Our rumbustious gatherings on the weekends and mutual caring and support in our diasporic existence were sort of a sibling solidarity. My West Philly comrades Jo Hyejeong, Won Shinjae, Hwang Ilwoo, and Choi Jaeseong kept my spirits up all the time and made my life outside of campus fun, cool, and flamboyant. Thanks also to Song Jinhee and Walter Hakala for food, haven, and friendship. While I was staying in Los Angeles during the dissertation, I met good friends in Shim Jiwon, Lee Yewon, Yoon Sujin, Kim Jaeun, and Celina Hung, who afforded me spectacular years of study leave. I am especially thankful for Kim Miyeon for her peerless gentleness and extraordinary companionship. Thanks to Oh Yoonjeong, Seo Jeongeun, Shin Nami, Yoon Deul, Jung Gayeong, and Choi Narae for showing their abiding friendships whenever our paths cross one another’s in the United States. Thanks also to Kim Jeongah for staying in touch over the six years. My deepest thanks to my old and treasured friends Lee Soyoung and Kim Sookyung for their fast friendships over the years I was away from them.

The last line is for my beloved family—Thank YOU all, for everything.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Kim Sangwoon and Kim Sunyoung, and my mother-in-law Kwak Myungsil, who always dreamed and wished the best for me; and to my dear husband, the best friend ever, Choi Yool, to whom I will always wish the best.

ABSTRACTTRAUMA OF EMPIRE:
VIOLENCE, MINOR AFFECT, AND THE COLD WAR TRANSPACIFIC

Jungha Kim

David L. Eng

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This dissertation turns to contemporary Asian American literature to examine how the aftereffects of U.S. Cold War violence and trauma manifest themselves in minor subjectivities. In the texts I explore, peripheral subjects, whose physical and psychic dislocations stem from Cold War dynamics between Asia and the United States, develop affective modes of reciprocity and intimacy and thereby collectively act out and work through historical damage. In these sites of wounded sociality, trauma appears not just as catastrophic but also as ordinary; rather than displaying itself as an individual psychic pathology, trauma is reconfigured as a collective affective labor that produces a set of minor historiographies. In rewriting the dominant U.S. Cold War historiography through a traumatic genealogy of American empire in Asia, the cultural productions this project discusses create an aesthetics of the periphery and reveal the forgotten historical sites that the progressive temporality of U.S. imperialism has occluded. The writers I explore,

including Jessica Hagedorn, Jane Jeong Trenka, Aimee Phan, and Ruth Ozeki, engage multiple historical scenes of the Cold War across the Pacific, from the metropolitanization of Manila and the refugees and transnational adoptees produced by the Cold War's "hot wars" in Korea and Vietnam to the economic alliance between Japan and the United States. This dissertation proposes that these historically, geographically broad and diverse sites are interlinked not simply through the shared experience of U.S. Cold War dominance and neoliberal governance, but also through literary mediations establishing an affective transnational zone: an alternative historical space that at once reveals the contradictions of "liberal empire" and produces an eccentric temporality disrupting its linear forms of progress.

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INTRODUCTION

Consider the word *rim*: A rim unites—it unites across oceans, across ethnic and racial divides. It presumes a unity, a centeredness with no center, a totality, an unbrokenness. A rim is thin. It is stable but precarious. One can fall off a rim. A rim is a horizon: the horizon of capital, of history, of space and time. It is a topology for the “suppression of distance” said to be characteristic of our times.

—Christopher Connery, “Pacific Rim Discourse: the U.S. Global Imaginary in the Late Cold War Years”

In her autobiographical documentary *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (2010), Deann Borshay Liem renders a unique visualization of her everyday struggles with loss as a Korean adoptee. While chronicling her journey to Korea to find her film’s eponymous woman, Borshay Liem films herself collecting and displaying a variety of photos on an acrylic panel—from images of different women named Cha Jung Hee whom Borshay Liem happens to meet in the course of her search to split pieces of the faces from portraits of young adoptees. Cha Jung Hee serves throughout the film as Borshay Liem’s uncanny double; Borshay Liem was herself adopted in place of Cha (having been given Cha’s name and birth date) by the Borshay family in 1966.¹ As “both a stranger and also [her] official identity—a persona unknown, but always present, defining [her] life,”² Cha Jung Hee continues to haunt Borshay Liem’s conflicted adoptee identity. Yet in this film, the adoptee’s journey to come to terms with her psychic distress

¹ As the film eventually reveals, Cha Jung Hee, who was originally supposed to be adopted, was recovered from the orphanage by her father shortly before she was supposed to be sent to America. As a result, Deann Borshay Liem (whose Korean name was Kang Ok Jin and who was at the same orphanage as Cha Jung Hee) became a substitute Cha Jung Hee and was sent to the Borshay family for adoption.

² From the director’s note, Deann Borshay Liem, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* (Harriman, NY: New Day Films, 2010).

is extended and transformed into historical commentary. The acrylic panel of photos, on which a constellation of various faces are collected, pieced together, and projected, not only materializes the process of the search but also constitutes an alternative historical plane indexing otherwise vanishing stories. By presenting the displaced images of the faces of child adoptees on this flat surface, Borshay Liem returns persistently to the traumatic scene of identity transformation and thus reconfigures the history of transnational adoption as a traumatic history of human commodification. The figure of Borshay Liem recomposing the fragmented face photos of little adoptees on the panel recurs at regular intervals throughout the film; the repetitive enactment of loss establishes a space in which history appears as trauma.

This dissertation, *Trauma of Empire: Violence, Minor Affect, and the Cold War Transpacific*, explores the intersection of trauma and history in everydayness as it emerges in a group of contemporary Asian American cultural productions. In much the same way as Borshay Liem's repetitive reconfiguration of displaced photos, the writers I investigate attend to sites of historical damage as it is entwined with mundane psychic or social predicaments. In their recurrent attempts at recalling and recuperating various kinds of injury, with their characters looking backward and living the present at the same time, these writers interrogate and interrupt the celebratory linear temporality of progress embedded within the dominant U.S. Cold War historiography. Focusing on the particular crossings of trauma, ordinariness, and Cold War history in these novels, films, and stories, this dissertation argues that the Cold War does not simply function as a historical epoch or background in these texts but rather appears as a historical instance of the

dissemination of liberal imperialist epistemology and temporality alongside its particular practices of war and both visible and invisible violence. Just as Borshay Liem does with the acrylic panel, the writers I examine transform ordinary objects and mundane events into an affective channel through which the past infiltrates the present and vice versa, breaking and disrupting historical continuity.

Alongside these thematic and theoretical concerns with ordinary trauma and disordered temporality, *Trauma of Empire* places Asian American cultural productions in dialogue with trauma and affect theories and with the discourses of postcolonialism and transnationalism. While trauma studies scholars have grappled with issues of the representability and referentiality of socio-historical damage, whether it be incidental or insidious, the recent critical endeavors of affect theory provide a renewed pathway for approaching trauma with a focus on non-conscious material and corporeal responses to external events. If poststructuralism has exerted an epistemological pressure on trauma studies in terms of its theoretical invocation of the unknowability of the traumatic event, the insights of affect studies turn critical attention to ontological and phenomenological aspects of traumatic experience. While focusing attention on these theoretical shifts in trauma studies and their resonances with contemporary Asian American cultural forms, this dissertation also delves into the way in which these cultural texts recast and revise issues of subalternity and temporality in postcolonial studies. I argue that the particular traumatic figurations of marginal subjects in the cultural works I explore imbue the concept of subalternity with qualities of mobility and vitality that displace the poststructuralist inflection of the concept—radical alterity—with minor subjects’

affective practices in ordinary lives. In other words, these subjects are minor not simply because they inhabit a space outside of the dominant grammar of race, gender, and class, but because they embody a disruptive point of identity, normality, and universality ingrained in the time and space of post-Cold War neoliberal triumphalism. In this way, the Asian American cultural forms under investigation in *Trauma of Empire* emerge as a transnational minor cultural formation marking disruptive times and spaces dissonant with liberal imperialist epistemology and ontology.

My dissertation's engagement with trauma and minor transnationalism picks up and develops the concept of "haunting" formulated by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993) as a key epistemological, historical, and ethical framework. Written in response to Francis Fukuyama's "good news" about the end of history and the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy, *Specters of Marx* characterizes the discourse of "the end of history" as a form of ontological presence that conjures away, silences, and forgets the ghosts of the past and present. Just as Walter Benjamin once articulated a materialist historiography opposed to the "empty, homogeneous time" of modern historicism, Derrida proposes hauntology against the neoliberal telos of progress that subscribes to what Fukuyama calls the "coherent and directional History of mankind."³ In contrast to the empiricism of the "end of history" discourse, which dismisses the emergence of global catastrophes as

³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, cited in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006 [1994]), 70.

an instance of “empirical” facts that would never refute the “ideal orientation of the greater part of humanity,” Derrida renders the realm of the “potential—force and virtuality,” the dimension of the ghostly through which we can consider and encounter “all these failures and all these threats” of triumphalist neoliberalism:

This neoliberal rhetoric, both jubilant and worried, manic and bereaved, often obscene in its euphoria, obliges us, then, to interrogate an event-ness inscribed in the gap between the moment in which the ineluctable of a certain end was heralded and the actual collapse of those totalitarian States or societies that gave themselves the figure of Marxism... This is where another thinking of historicity calls us beyond the metaphysical concept of history and the end of history.⁴

Hauntology thus leads us to a structure of feeling⁵ that disrupts the “empty and homogeneous” time of neoliberal triumphalism: it ushers in elusive, intangible and untimely social formations as a Derridian trace that cannot be fully foreclosed by history’s claims to universality, and that persistently challenges that claim from within. My project, *Trauma of Empire*, suggests that contemporary Asian American writers recast, renew, and rearticulate the concept of haunting and put it in dialogue with their own thematic and theoretical rubrics of labor, affect, and trauma. Rather than simply following the direction of Derridian hauntology in order to test the applicability of deconstructive thinking to cultural texts, I aim to illustrate the way literature deploys

⁴ Derrida, *ibid*, 87-88.

⁵ I use the phrase “structure of feeling” following Raymond Williams’s formulation. Williams writes, “a structure of feeling methodologically ... is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand ... specific feelings, specific rhythms ... and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132-33. Terry Eagleton renders a more finely articulated definition of a structure of feeling as a way of describing “those elusive, impalpable forms of social consciousness which are at once as evanescent as ‘feelings’ suggests, but nevertheless display a significant configuration captured in the term ‘structure’” in *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Verso, 1991), 48.

haunting as an affective cultural practice for a critique of the discourse of the “end” of history and its temporality of the teleological endpoint.

Transnational Minor Cultural Formation

Recent critical efforts in Asian American studies focus on the question of how to put nation-based fields like Asian American studies in conversation with the concerns of postcolonialism and transnationalism. Recognizing the risk of playing into instrumentalized liberal multiculturalism that the discipline of Asian American studies entails, Kandice Chuh and Jenny Sharpe suggest that we mobilize the field to become a critical tool for analyzing the operations and contradictions of American imperialism and U.S.-led global capitalism. Sharpe argues for revamping the problematic of postcolonialism in the U.S. context by redirecting Asian American studies from its limited association with identity politics to “the point at which internal social relations intersect with global capitalism and the international division of labor.”⁶ From a deconstructive view inflected by Jacques Derrida, Chuh also claims that postcolonialism as an analytic for critiquing imperialism and global inequalities might help Asian American studies to “resist [its] transformation into a depoliticized instrument of hegemonic nationalist ontology”; the rubric of postcolonial studies also helps the field to

⁶ Jenny Sharpe, “Is the United States Postcolonial? Transnationalism, Immigration, and Race,” in *Postcolonial America*, ed. C. Richard King (Urbana, IN: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 104.

reflect on the dimension of the political as an “investigation into what ‘justice’ might mean and what (whose) ‘justice’ is being pursued.”⁷

Transnationalism as a new object of study has emerged at the historical moment of late capitalism⁸ and the last few decades’ latest wave of globalization, characterized by the logic of finance capital, flexible accumulation, racialized/gendered differentiation of labor markets, and post-Fordist international division of labor. As Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih suggest in *Minor Transnationalism*, the transnational, in contrast to the homogenizing and universalizing imperative of globalization, can be conceived as a horizontal, hybrid space in which the intersection of what Saskia Sassen calls “multiple spatiotemporal (dis)orders”⁹ is observed, inscribed, and negotiated. Without being bounded by the vertical relationship between the global and the local, the center and the periphery, or the dominant and the resistant, the frame of minor transnationalism as transversalism refers to the creative terrain on which not just a major-minor binary but also minor-minor networks are posited and interrogated across multiple temporalities and spatialities. Distinguishing itself from the models of globality that privilege flexibility or

⁷ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 14.

⁸ “Late capitalism” is Ernest Mandel’s periodizing framework for the postwar era, marking the third stage of capitalism’s career following the periods of free competition (prior to 1880) and “classical” imperial capitalism (1880-1940). According to Mandel, this period is characterized by “the juxtaposition and constant combination of development and underdevelopment. *The accumulation of capital itself produces development and underdevelopment as mutually determining moments of the uneven and combined movement of capital*” (emphasis in original). *Late Capitalism*, trans. A.M. Berret et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001[1975]), 85.

⁹ Saskia Sassen, “Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization,” *Public Culture* 12:1 (2000), 221: Cited in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

nomadism unmoored from the persistent control of the state,¹⁰ minor transnationalism turns our attention to the ongoing, regulating power of nations as well as to the psychic and material investment of individuals in geographical spaces.

This dissertation engages in these critical conversations by bringing together the understanding of subalternity and temporality in postcolonial theory with minor subjects' embodiment of "multiple spatiotemporal (dis)orders" in the Asian American cultural texts explored here. This attempt to recast Asian American studies through postcolonial and transnational perspectives is intended as an engagement with the injustice and injury stemming from U.S. imperial history and global capitalism. The writers I examine present a variety of scenes of structural, imperial, and invisible violence; interrogate the lingering effects of historical damage, both material and immaterial, on marginalized subjects; and imagine a differential historical moment that might mark the crises of liberal empire.

Since Ranajit Guha and his colleagues inaugurated the historiographic project of *Subaltern Studies* to write the history of the Indian peasant and Gayatri Spivak's 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was published as a supplementary gender perspective

¹⁰ Examples of this free-floating globality that Lionnet and Shih suggest are Gilles Deleuze's nomadism and Aihwa Ong's flexible citizenship. About Deleuzian nomadism as acentered, rhizomic globalism, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). Anthropologist Aihwa Ong formulates "flexible citizenship" to explain an emergent form of privileged, diasporic subjectivity who is able to develop a "flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power" in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

on subaltern studies,¹¹ discussions on subalternity have been widely expanded beyond the context of Indian history to cover various non-hegemonic, gendered national subjects discordant with nationalism. Subalternity in postcolonial theory offers an important conceptual grounding for formulating minor subjectivity; in particular, its elusive character defies the binary of the dominant and the resistant and challenges the premise of transparent representation of subaltern experiences. As Neferti X. M. Tadiar notes, “subalternity is identifiable only as traces or fade-out points of realities that, in their radical alterity and absolute incommensurability to notions of agency and subjectivity within an imperial episteme, can never be recovered or restored.”¹²

Minor figures that appear in the literary texts I draw attention to here embody the subalternity of postcolonial theory in the sense that they assume a radical position unable to be neatly incorporated into the imperial episteme of liberal empire. However, they are not simple fade-out points of reality or representability in that these minor subjects express their own mode of affective practices, both as a survival tactic and as a way of relating to the past and to the remainder of imperial violence. Through various forms of affective practices such as haunting, loneliness, hesitancy, and mimesis, the characters of the literary texts of this project perform mediations connecting the singular (individual experience) to the universal (structure or history); in particular, they reveal the way the

¹¹ Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies: Studies in Indian Society and History* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983-1993), vols. 1-6. The editorial board of later volumes 7-10 consists of, respectively, Gyan Pandey and Partha Chatterjee; David Arnold and David Hardiman; Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty; and by Susie Tharu, Gautam Bhadra, and Gyan Prakash. Gayatri Spivak’s essay appeared in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988).

¹² Neferti X. M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 7.

psychic, affective conundrum of the individual is intertwined with the contradiction of the structural and the historical.

In addition to their interventions in the problematic of subalternity, the Asian American cultural texts in this project add new literary archives, contexts, and theories to the project of postcolonial critique by interrogating the issue of temporality dissonant with liberal capitalist modernity. Postcolonial critics including Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty argue that time itself should be understood as multiple in the postcolonial imagination as a means for dismantling the concept of Western Enlightenment progress. Homi Bhabha posits a “double and split” time of the postcolonial when “the archaic emerges in the midst of margins of modernity as a result of some psychic ambivalence or intellectual uncertainty.” Bhabha values this double and split time because it leads us “to question the homogeneous and horizontal view associated with the nation’s imagined community.”¹³ Furthermore, Bhabha develops this postcolonial temporal understanding as a spatial politics, what he calls a “third space,” where social differences introduce the disjunctive time of dissident histories to the normalized national culture.¹⁴ Chakrabarty argues for a hetero-temporality that is at odds with the historicism based on Eurocentric conceptions of progress: temporal knots of “discontinuities, ruptures, and shifts” that challenge the dominance of historicism.¹⁵ The linear understanding of history is “a

¹³ Homi Bhabha, “Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 206.

¹⁴ For his discussion on the third space, see “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation,” *ibid*, 303-337.

¹⁵ Chakrabarty defines historicism as follows: “historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This “first in Europe, then elsewhere” structure of global historical time was

recommendation to the colonized to wait” to be civilized and enlightened enough to enter history proper; it consigns non-European nations to “an imaginary waiting room of history.”¹⁶

Applying these insights to Asian American cultural productions, *Trauma of Empire* investigates the way contemporary Asian American cultural productions present their own mode of hetero-temporalities as a universe of negativity to the linear temporality of American liberal empire. Christopher Connery observes that U.S.-Asia relations in the late Cold War years have been overdetermined by non-othering partnerships. In contrast to postcolonial critic Edward W. Said’s formulation of Orientalism as a discourse based on “a fundamental othering” that presumes a categorical asymmetry between the imperial power (self) and the colonized (Other), Pacific Rim discourse in the 1970s hinges on the geographical image of the horizon without center. If Said’s othering operates through the ideology of Western superiority and bespeaks its material manifestation in the form of economic exploitation and territorial domination in the colony, then Pacific Rim discourse transforms the spatial distance of the othering to a progressive temporal plane aiming at a capitalist universalist teleology. The Pacific is not a colonial space physically dominated, but rather is an imagined community constituting an extension of America where the dream of uninterrupted flows of capital comes true: “The United States, Japan, the East Asian NICs, and the second tier of developing Pacific

historical.” Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000]), 7.

¹⁶ Chakrabarty, *ibid*, 8.

nations (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, coastal China) are linked in a Rim that is an imagining of transnational capital, a co-prosperity sphere. Japan and the NICs represent capital's transformative promise—their recent history is capital's teleology.”¹⁷

In the introduction to *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production* (1995), the edited volume to which Connery's essay on Pacific Rim discourse contributes, Arif Dirlik and Rob Wilson suggest that we differentiate the “Asia-Pacific” with a hyphen from the “Asia/Pacific” with a slash: the frame of the Asia-Pacific indicates the multinational linkage formulated for securing economic and military cooperation; the Asia/Pacific with a slash, Dirlik and Wilson suggest, would bespeak a counter-hegemonic space of cultural production. As Rachel Lee observes, the idea of the Asia-Pacific stands on a tension between the global and the local, between economic boundlessness and geographical moorings. In one respect, the Asia-Pacific constitutes a particular type of globalism: transnational economism that undermines territorial nationalism.¹⁸ In another, it represents an offshoot of a long genealogy of U.S. imperialism, one that Victor Bascara defines as “the ideologies and attendant discourses of how the United States imagined and explained its varieties of growth.”¹⁹ The concept of the Asia-Pacific in the late Cold

¹⁷ Christopher L. Connery, “Pacific Rim Discourse: The U.S. Global Imaginary in the Late Cold War Years,” in *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, eds. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 36.

¹⁸ Rachel Lee, “Asian American Cultural Production in Asian-Pacific Perspective,” *Boundary 2*, 26:2 (1999).

¹⁹ Victor Bascara, *Model-Minority Imperialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). “U.S. imperialism describes the ideologies and attendant discourses of how the United States imagined and explained its varieties of growth. At times it alternately excused, glorified, excoriated, bemoaned, self-pitied, and puzzled. It went by numerous and well-documented aliases and euphemisms: errand into wilderness, settling the frontier, Manifest Destiny, interventionism, keeping the world safe for democracy, finding a Passage to India, ferreting out weapons of mass destruction, exercising dollar diplomacy, and

War period offered a particular American framework for the United States to respond to the economic successes of East Asian nations, Japan in particular. As Lee writes, “A primary reason for evoking a postnational community, then, is to deny the waning of U.S. superiority by incorporating “outsider” threats into a new transnational coalition.”²⁰

However, the idea of disseminating capitalist universal teleology across the Pacific can also be traced back to U.S. imperial endeavors to incorporate the potential “enemies” of the Cold War to the body of democratic capitalism, from the former Japanese enemy of World War II, and anti-colonialist nationalists of Korea in the early 1950s, to the Vietnamese communists. From this perspective, the Asia-Pacific is an imaginary Cold War geopolitical entity that is promoted in a particular historical moment of capitalist (not just territorial) expansion; it thus fundamentally characterizes the project of U.S. imperialism in Asia during the latter half of the twentieth century. The Asia-Pacific is teleology, but its teleological character, to borrow Connery’s words, “has been shaped in part by a residual American frontierism.”²¹

In this context, my dissertation contrasts an array of Asian American cultural productions with the teleological geographical imagining of the Asia-Pacific and examines how these texts alternatively imagine other temporalities and different linkages across national borders. The writers I explore, including Jessica Hagedorn, Jane Jeong Trenka, Aimee Phan, and Ruth Ozeki, offer the cultural realm of the “Asia/Pacific” with

advocating neoliberalism. Each of these is a form and a moment in what can properly and somewhat broadly be called U.S. imperialism” (xxix).

²⁰ Lee, *ibid*, 235.

²¹ Connery, *ibid*, 43.

a slash as a sign of tension and contestation against the “Asia-Pacific” as it stands for free market ideology and America’s unique civilizing mission of democratic universalism. These writers present a range of historical scenes of the Cold War across the Pacific, from the metropolitanization of Manila in the 1960s, and the refugees and transnational adoptees produced by Cold War’s “hot wars” in Korea and Vietnam, to the economic alliance between Japan and the United States. These historically and geographically diverse sites are interlinked not simply through the shared experience of U.S. Cold War dominance and neoliberal governance, but also through literary mediations establishing an affective transnational zone: an alternative historical space that at once reveals the contradictions of “liberal empire” and produces an eccentric temporality disrupting its forms of linear progress.

Linking the Cold War with the history of American hegemony in Asia, Jodi Kim suggests “a critical genealogy of the Cold War as a genealogy of American empire, one that reframes the Manichaean U.S.-Soviet Cold War rivalry and shows how it was...triangulated in Asia.”²² Recasting the dominant Cold War historiography that has shed light primarily on the facets of a Western inter-imperialist war over “cold” ideologies, Kim turns to multiple scenes of “hot” wars intersecting with U.S. Cold War intervention and militarism in Asia and to the gendered racial formulation of Cold War epistemology around the figure of Asia. Not just as a historical epoch that ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but as “a structure of feeling” and “a hermeneutics” that

²² Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 8.

has enjoyed its epistemological, affective power for supporting capitalist liberal forms of “developments,” the Cold War represents a particular conjuncture of U.S. liberal empire in Asia. In this revisionist perspective on the Cold War, Kim situates Asian American critique as an *analytic*, not as an identity category, for understanding the specificity of American imperialist practices in Asia. This dissertation is aligned with Kim’s work in that it attempts to reveal the critical genealogies of American imperialism in the Cold War by excavating the dimension of the repressed in U.S. nationalist ontology.

Mobilizing Asian American cultural forms beyond the terrain of liberal multiculturalism, which manifested itself as an institutionalized and commodified appreciation of racial difference within the national, *Trauma of Empire* ruminates on the way these texts emerge as a transnational minor cultural formation and render temporalities supplemental to the developmental narrative of U.S. imperialism. Put differently, rather than offering an aestheticized sign of difference incorporated into the national body, the corpus of Asian American cultural texts I explore presents heterogeneous symptomatic sites where the remainders and reminders of U.S. Cold War trauma testify to their own seething presence and demand their own mode of representation.

From the perspective of the genealogy of imperial formations, U.S. Cold War hegemony in Asia marks a fundamental transition from territorial expansion to a more flexible and neoliberal dominance. As Kim notes, this does not mean that territorial domination completely lost its controlling power in the Cold War. Rather, it suggests that the Cold War opened a new phase of “an imperial governmentality whose dominant logics have operated (and continue to do so) through a flexible combination of

nonterritorial imperial tactics.”²³ Following the “loss” of China to Mao’s communist party in 1949, America’s heightened anxiety over “Red Asia” was transformed and translated to an official political language—the well-known domino theory. As an abstract entity consisting of a number of dominos, Asian nations were considered objects that should be checked and protected from the threats of communism. This patronizing gesture of the United States, however, was not politically disinterested: the “democratizing mission,” as Kim notes, was “an attempt to install governments and economic systems favorable to U.S. interests in the name of ‘democracy’ and ‘collective security’.”²⁴

This extraordinary logic of democratic solidarity across the Pacific masking U.S. economic and military interests in the region provides the ground for the workings of liberal empire. Each of my chapters highlights specific cultural scenes in which Asian American writers alternately map out and critically index histories of American liberalism as it intersects with U.S. imperialism and its governing tactics for political, economic, and cultural domination in the Cold War transpacific. The cultural texts I examine, most of which were produced after the “end” of the Cold War, either critically look back on that era or interrogate the neocolonial and neoliberal global capitalist formations directly or indirectly deriving from Cold War dynamics. *Trauma of Empire*

²³ Kim provides a series of examples of “nonterritorial imperial tactics” that include “military intervention or occupation, war, treaties, mutual security agreements, covert CIA operations, trade barriers and agreements, economic support or aid, humanitarian aid, and the work of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, as well as World Bank and International Monetary Fund “structural adjustment policies” and loans,” *ibid*, 18.

²⁴ Kim, *op. cit.*, 19.

begins with Hagedorn's Manila in the 1960s, which represents the fantasy of the Asia-Pacific in the form of a project to build a global cultural center in a neocolonial city, and which materializes this fantasy's constitutive contradiction in the haunting of dead laboring bodies. It ends with Japan-U.S. virtual interconnection in Ozeki's novel, set against the backdrop of American beef export to Japan in the 1990s and the process of neoliberal subject making embedded within this economic exchange. While Hagedorn's text presents a neocolonial practice that intensively and extensively extracts surplus value from Filipino labor, Ozeki sheds light on a more invisible and insidious mode of domination involving U.S.-led neoliberal globalization. Between these two antipodal scenes of the Asia-Pacific economic "alliance," neocolonial exploitation of Third World labor and neoliberal regulation of the "faithful" Cold War partner, respectively, I situate stories of diasporic orphans who are uprooted by Cold War's "hot wars" in Korea and Vietnam. Bracketed by these first and last chapters dealing more directly with the intersection of U.S. imperialism and global capitalism and with subjective responses to that violence, the two chapters in between explore ways exilic subjects of split kinship grapple with historical memories against the post-Cold War discourses of reconciliation and forgetting.

As this outline of my dissertation reveals, U.S. imperialism of the Cold War is heterogeneous in its aspects and manifestations. Indeed, U.S. empire is, to borrow Ann Laura Stoler's words, a "flexible empire" in its "active realignment and

reformation...[an] empire that puts movement and oscillation at the center.”²⁵ The aim of this dissertation is thus not to narrate a coherent and exhaustive history of U.S. imperialism in the Cold War Asia; as Kim observes, the Cold War was itself “an unruly set of engagements,”²⁶ and attempting to narrate U.S. Cold War history in Asia in a single seamless project would be impractical. This dissertation’s more modest and focused goal is to trace and qualify the various forms of violence that this flexible empire employs and to theorize the way literature registers the effects and aftereffects of adjustable imperial power. While my chapters are organized around specific nation-states of the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan, this particular geographical linkage does not indicate that I argue for any historical commonality among these countries other than their shared experience of U.S. influence. My focus is rather on the way the peripheral subjects of the texts I survey, whose physical and psychic dislocations stem from Cold War dynamics between Asia and the United States, develop affective modes of reciprocity and intimacy and collectively act out and work through imperial violence.

Crises of Ordinarity and Traumatic Figurations

By rewriting the dominant U.S. Cold War historiography through a traumatic genealogy of American empire in Asia, the cultural productions I engage in this project create an aesthetics of the periphery refocusing attention on historical sites forgotten or

²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, “Intimations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen,” in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

²⁶ Kim, *op. cit.*, 31.

disregarded in the progressive temporality of U.S. imperialism. In delving into this topic, trauma theory provides an important theoretical framework for this project and, in turn, the Asian American cultural productions I focus on offer a theoretical site through which to engage and develop the insights of trauma theory. In sum, in these cultural texts, trauma appears not just as catastrophic but as ordinary; rather than manifesting itself as an individual psychic conundrum, trauma is reconfigured as a collective affective labor in everydayness producing a set of minor historiographies.

Sigmund Freud's well-known *fort-da* episode in *Beyond Pleasure Principle* (1920), arguably the origin of the theory of trauma,²⁷ provides a defining scene for my discussion. Insofar as the U.S. Cold War flexible empire displays heterogeneous governing tactics infiltrating everydayness and thus multiplies scenes of violence and dominance, the *fort-da* episode stands as a significant theoretical instance for considering the everyday psychic effects of this particular Cold War politics on minor subjects and subjectivities. The *fort-da* game is a Freudian fable of how the violence of World War I is transformed into and repeated anew within a child's everyday play: with his father gone to the battlefield, whenever left alone by his mother's absence, the child plays a game of throwing away a spindle and telling it to "go to the fwont." In one respect, this game refers to the absent but forceful presence of war and violence lurking in the ordinary life, flexible and powerful enough to penetrate a domestic space and a child's mundane play.

²⁷ From feminist perspectives, the origin of the theory of trauma is Freud's work on female hysteria, representatively Dora's case. According to them, trauma was at first closely linked to the sexual experiences of women in the modern bourgeois family, and symptoms of female hysteria were the result of that trauma. For a feminist reading of Freud and trauma, see E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

In another, it signifies minor subjects' repetition compulsion in ordinary lives and their reparative gestures, as they are drawn to and overshadowed by the traumatic scene ("go to the front") and as they affectively respond to it within a common everyday activity, within and despite the not-yet-articulated language of child ("o-o-o" and "a-a-a").

Freud opens the second chapter of his work with a modern genealogy of 'traumatic neurosis' as stemming from mechanical accidents or disasters such as railway accidents or World War I. Soldiers returning from the front of World War I, like victims of mechanical accidents, found that in their dreams, they would be drawn back to terrifying scenes of war. Confronting his patients' compulsive fixations on these sites of wounding in their dreams, Freud finds an example of the "mysterious masochistic trends of the ego"²⁸ that constantly bring the patient back into unpleasant reminiscences and thus work *beyond* the pleasure principle. But what happens when patients wake up? Is repetition compulsion something that only manifests itself in dreams?

Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, *a situation from which he wakes up in another fright*...I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied *in their waking lives* with memories of their accident (emphasis added).²⁹

As elsewhere in the text, Freud's tone is tentative and speculative rather than definitive or decisive.³⁰ However, considering his distinction between dreams and waking lives, it is

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1961 [1920]), 12.

²⁹ Freud, *ibid*, 11-2.

³⁰ Jay Watson comments on Freud's style in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as follows: "Even among Freud's speculative works, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is an unusually tentative offering, experimenting with daring new ideas but rarely going so far as to commit fully to them. The text's prevailing mood is one of uncertainty, skepticism, and a scrupulous honesty that insists on theoretical circumspection," "Guys and

quite obvious that Freud distinguishes trauma in normal life when people “wake up in another fright” from the unavoidable, repetitive reminiscences in dreams. Hence, when Freud makes a sharp break from the “dark and dismal subject of the traumatic neurosis” to the “*normal* activities” of children’s play, we might say that the terrain of trauma never disappears but merely returns in a different form: the ordinary play of a child. That is, it is when the tenor of dreams tied to war neuroses is displaced by a child’s activity of repeatedly throwing away his toy and retrieving it that the language of trauma leaps into the realm of the ordinary, the dimension of “*normal*” activities. Yet, of course, the trace of war does not completely fade out, but rather shadows the play in the form of the command, “go to the front.”

The *fort-da* game goes like this: the mother leaves and the child is left alone. He begins to create a game to reenact his loss with a wooden reel. He throws the ball uttering “o-o-o” and retrieves it with the sound “a-a-a,” each of which Freud interprets as meaning *fort* (gone) and *da* (here). A year later, when he learns that his absent father is at the front, the child adds the command “go to the front” to his throw of the ball. This transformation of the passive, distressing experience of his parents’ absence into the activity of the game enables the child to take on an active part in dealing with his loss. In this way, the compulsion to repeat one’s trauma manifests itself in the untiring performance of compensation rather than in the relentless reminiscence of the catastrophic event. From a slightly different angle, the *fort-da* game might be said to

Dolls: Exploratory Repetition and Maternal Subjectivity in the Fort/Da Game,” *American Imago* 52:4 (1995), 467.

constitute an act of spacing, a mapping of the child's own reparative territory in the everyday. As a way of compensating for loss, the little boy produces an imaginative zone where the substitution of the lost object—the soft ball held tightly by the string to prevent it from being lost forever—moves back and forth “within his reach.”³¹ This displacement of the haunting event with a present performance, a stretching of the horizon of the subject's reach, is the logic of the *fort-da* game. The ordinary object of the child's toy becomes an affective vehicle to link the event to the present and loss to recovery.

From a slightly different perspective, if the *fort-da* play transforms the punctual event of trauma into an everydayness, then, in the context of the Cold War transpacific, it serves as an apt concept-metaphor to describe the insidious domination and violence of liberal empire. As discussed above, the Cold War in the Pacific offers its own genealogy of trauma ranging across war, development and reformation, all under the name of modernity and capitalism. As an eccentric case of Oedipalization, wherein the law of the father (i.e., universal progress) exerts its power on “partner” Asian countries on the condition of the law's inconspicuous presence, the logic of the *fort-da* in the Cold War transpacific is itself a psychic scenario of American imperialism. Revealing the symptoms and manifestations of the *fort-da* as penetrative imperial practice, the Asian American cultural forms I examine rework and recast the logic of the *fort-da* as an everyday affective language of minor historiography—they rewrite it as a language of trauma.

³¹ Freud, op. cit., p.14.

Trauma studies has provided productive cases and terms for the putative deadlock of poststructuralism regarding the accessibility and representability of history. As Patricia Ticineto Clough observes in her introduction to *Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007), critical theory of the late twentieth century after poststructuralism was able to mobilize its focus from decentering to multiplicity, from dislocated identity to difference, through conversation with trauma studies:

The affective turn throws thought back to the disavowals constitutive of Western industrial capitalist societies, bringing forth ghosted bodies and the traumatized remains of erased histories... In taking up trauma, critical theory was able to transition from the deconstruction of the subject of Western modernity to the production of multiple subjectivities and multiple modernities expressed in new forms of history.³²

Although the concern with trauma in cultural studies in the 1990s developed out of scholarly interests in the historically specific context of the Holocaust and its place in the reassessment of Western modernity, it soon expanded its conceptual capacity by engaging different historical, cultural, and political contexts and “alternative modernities.”³³ In the United States, studies of trauma merge with a so-called “memory culture” that rebels against the amnesiac powers of national culture and revisits its own history from the perspective of injured groups and individuals.³⁴ As Andreas Huyssen says, “The privileging of trauma formed a thick discursive network with those other

³² Patricia Ticineto Clough, introduction to *Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

³³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

³⁴ For discussions of U.S. culture’s transformation into a trauma culture, see Wendy Brown’s *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), Mark Seltzer’s *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America’s Wounded Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), Andreas Huyssen’s *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995) and *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crew, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, MA: University Press of New England, 1999).

master-signifiers of the 1990s, the abject and the uncanny, all of which have to do with repression, specters, and a present repetitively haunted by the past.”³⁵

Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) has been one of the most influential source books on trauma in cultural theory. Turning the focus of trauma theory from its clinical and pathological dimensions to its literary and sociocultural implications, Caruth sheds light on trauma as an instance of representational or epistemological aporia. Trauma, according to Caruth, does not simply refer to a wounded psyche or corresponding bodily symptoms after an accidental event. Rather, trauma itself is the story of a wound, “the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound,”³⁶ which haunts the survivor after the traumatic event and which, in its belated correspondence and in the form of flashbacks, inescapably involves the problem of knowing. Hence, Caruth’s influential definition of trauma as “unclaimed experience” emphasizes the impossibility of the subject’s approach to the traumatic event as it occurs and, furthermore, the unknowability of the event itself.

Caruth’s deconstructive reading of Freud’s wartime neurosis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* proposes that what is striking in this repetitive, unconscious infliction of the injury is neither the materiality of the punctual event nor the pathology of the recurring symptoms but rather its sheer literary dimension, “the textual itinerary of insistently recurring words or figures...which emerge out of the rhetorical potential and

³⁵ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 8.

³⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

the literary resonance of these figures.”³⁷ Caruth argues that the image that constantly appears in and circulates throughout Freud’s text is the *accident* and the incomprehensibility and unknowability of the event:

What returns to haunt the trauma victim in Freud’s primary example of trauma, as I emphasize in my readings of *Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*, is not just any event but, significantly, the shocking and unexpected occurrence of the event... The accident, that is, as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known.³⁸

Recent scholars involved in thinking through trauma in terms of affect theory, such as Ann Cvetkovich and Lauren Berlant, shift attention away from Caruth’s focus on the accidentality of trauma to the everydayness of trauma.³⁹ Moreover, they recast trauma as an affective language registering the experiential dimension of the everyday, not just limited to an epistemological limit point triggered by an accidental event.⁴⁰ In the context of sexual trauma and lesbian culture, for example, Cvetkovich suggests that we turn to the way “trauma digs itself in at the level of the everyday, and in the commensurability of

³⁷ Caruth, *ibid.*, 5.

³⁸ Caruth, *op. cit.*, 6.

³⁹ They also point out the Caruth model’s implication within poststructuralist theory, an obstacle to its offering a universally applicable theoretical framework. Cvetkovich writes “By consistently stressing questions of epistemology and trauma as structurally unknowable, she flattens out the specificities of trauma in a given historical and political context.” Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19; Berlant acknowledges “the authority of Cathy Caruth’s model in humanities work on trauma” and explains that this model “represents trauma through a symptom’s blockage of full subjective experience, performing, marking, and foreclosing the exposure to self-shattering loss.” Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 80.

⁴⁰ See also Nigel Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* (London: Routledge, 1991), Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), and Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991).

large-scale events and the ongoing material details of experience.”⁴¹ In her exploration of postwar American optimism for the democratic access to good life, likewise, Berlant argues that trauma enables a productive linkage to the present rather than detachment of the subject from it. Through her provoking (and poetic) reading of the unique temporality of belatedness in trauma, which is known as deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), Berlant provides a theoretical ground for understanding the temporality of everyday trauma:

But the temporal whiplash of the concept *Nachträglichkeit* is far more complex. As an affective concept, it bridges: a sense of belatedness from having to catch up to the event;... a sense of being saturated by it in the present... a sense of being frozen out of the future (now defined by the past); and, because ordinary life does go on, a sense of the present that makes no sense with the rest of it, merging hyperconsciousness with the kind of self-interruptive or self-forgetting action... *Trauma, after all, does not make experiencing the historical present impossible but possible... it transforms the work of survival without much of a normative plot or guarantees* (emphasis added).⁴²

Rendering trauma as an occasion that enables the work of survival “without much of a normative plot or guarantees,” Berlant suggests the concept of a “crisis of ordinariness”: a crisis referring to the non-normative actions and gestures of survival after the event, that is, “the spreading of symbolizations and other inexpressive but life-extending actions throughout the ordinary and its situations of living on.”⁴³ In other words, the “crisis of ordinariness” is an overwhelming ordinariness incited by trauma, whether accidental or not, where the everyday becomes an affective zone for the convergence of forgotten

⁴¹ Cvetkovich, *ibid.*, 20.

⁴² Berlant, *ibid.*, 80-81.

⁴³ Berlant, *op. cit.*, 81.

histories: “Crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what’s overwhelming.”⁴⁴

Following this model, this dissertation explores the site of trauma as a capacious force field through which to view intersections of emotional and social crises as well as historical injuries’ embeddedness in everyday experiences. In particular, I delve into two specific topics discussed in recent critical efforts to link trauma and affect studies: first, the way that affect theory renders a unique perspective of *reciprocity*; and second, the status that the temporality of *the present* assumes in trauma as a zone of convergence of memories and histories.⁴⁵ Prominent in the definition of affect, in opposition to emotion, is that “affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*.”⁴⁶ Affect theorists often differentiate emotion from affect by contrasting the reciprocal dimension of affect to the personal property of emotion: Brian Massumi’s often-quoted definition, for example, places affect as something that does not require a subject and that is

⁴⁴ Berlant, *op. cit.*, 10.

⁴⁵ By deploying the crisis of ordinariness in the present and in its material manifestations and experiential inscriptions, the writers I examine suggest a new way of thinking through crisis in the present distinct from that of poststructuralist nuclear criticism. The term “nuclear criticism” was first suggested in the 1984 special issue of *Diacritics*, following a symposium held in 1983 at Cornell University. The introduction of this terminology responded to the nuclear threat as a defining feature of the Cold War. What dominated the Cold War imaginary was not the nuclear threat *per se* but its status of the permanently postponed event. The essays collected in the 1984 *Diacritics* issue engage with the unrepresentable and inscrutable presence of atomic power, putting it in dialogue with contemporary theories such as deconstruction, semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. Indeed, in his essay contribution to the *Diacritics* issue, “No Apocalypse, Not Now,” Jacques Derrida, the figurehead of deconstructionist critical theory, writes that “nuclear war has no precedent. It has never occurred, itself; it is a non-event ... The terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or a text,” “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” *Diacritics* 14:2 (Summer 1984), 23.

⁴⁶ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2 (emphasis in original).

unformed, beside emotion, which does require subject and involves meaning.⁴⁷ Mel Y. Chen similarly explains that affect “engages many bodies at once, rather than (only) being contained as an emotion within a single body. Affect inheres in the capacity to affect and be affected.”⁴⁸

Each chapter of this dissertation engages various forms and consequences of affective reciprocity: haunting in *Dogeaters* as intersubjective entanglements among disavowed figures of labor and concomitant traumatic awakening; loneliness in *Fugitive Visions* as an index of psychic wounds and as an impetus for curious vitality stemming from the displacement of the death drive by a new language of survival; hesitancy in *We Should Never Meet* as an ambivalent mode of straddling and shuttling between injury and recovery, the constant motion structured by a traumatic break and the necessary continuity across that break; and traumatic mimesis in *My Year of Meats* as a unique way of corporeal reciprocity between ailing bodies. As an intimate and relational language of minor subjects, affective reciprocity in these instances bespeaks the kind of situation that allows an alternative re-figuration of the post-Cold War normative narrative of the end of history; such instances are reciprocal not simply in the sense that they mediate between two different individuals but also in the sense that they mediate individual crisis through historical crisis.

⁴⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

As a binding concept that embraces these forms and affects of wounded sociality, I suggest the term *traumatic figurations*. Punctuated by historical or social trauma but never stuck in immobility or inability, instances of traumatic figuration demonstrate what David L. Eng and David Kazanjian call “a continuous double take on loss,” where, as Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism teaches us, “one version moves and creates, the other slackens and lingers.”⁴⁹ Empathically at odds with the time of historicism, and with history proper, traumatic figurations render a differential historical moment that marks crises and registers disregarded experiences. From another angle, traumatic figurations, in the sense I develop, can be seen as a translation of the workings of melancholia: melancholia as a constant struggle with loss. Such a translation is necessary because, despite the vitality and persistency embedded in the concept of melancholia, my analysis requires the sense of crisis or the rupture of the social that is invoked by *trauma*, as well as the use of *figurations* to help us to imagine various image constellations of different subjectivities and collectivities. Through their unique rendering of traumatic figurations, the writers I explore here excavate the repetitive and untiring dimension of *labor* in trauma: labor that extracts material and immaterial energy and practice from the workers; labor that produces a set of traumatic figures revealing a supplemental historical plane, a minor historiography. While the idea of the Asia-Pacific dreams of a utopian zone for free flows of capital, the cultural productions I draw attention to in this dissertation usher

⁴⁹ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, introduction to *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

in a transnational zone of affective labor, a constant work of acting out and working through historical loss, and a making and spacing of a reparative territory.

CHAPTER ONE

Haunted Bodies and the Collapsing City in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*

Hypervisibility is a persistent alibi for the mechanisms that render one invisible.

—Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*

Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1991) has offered a test-point for raising and developing many of the major issues and controversies of recent Asian American literary criticism. Set in the city of Manila in the mid-twentieth century and written by a female Asian American writer in a postmodern style, Hagedorn's novel has prompted debate and discussion around multiple pairs of seemingly incompatible or mutually exclusive analytics: Western viewership and Third World reality, diasporic authorship and ethnic authenticity, and postmodern aesthetics and postcolonial politics. Early critical responses to Hagedorn's text typically responded negatively to its politics, claiming that the novel's postmodern style evades questions of domination and subordination.⁵⁰ Since Lisa Lowe

⁵⁰ Nerissa Balce-Cortes, for example, makes a strident and even pejorative remark about the novel: "A racist and fetishistic project ... claiming exoticism for the author's acceptance into the U.S. literary mainstream," "Imagining the Neocolony," *Critical Mass* 2:2 (Spring 1995), 102. E. San Juan Jr., in his Marxist evaluation of the novel, also dismisses its postmodern narrative style as a problematic sign of liberal pluralism that privileges diasporic hybridity indifferent to "a relation of domination and subordination." *Racial Formations/Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities International Press), 125. See also Caroline S. Hau's "Dogeaters, Postmodernism, and the 'Worlding' of the Philippines," in *Philippine Post-Colonial Studies: Essays on Language and Literature*. Eds. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo and Priscelina Patajo-Legasto, (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1993): "The 'worlding' of the Philippines extends not only to the Othering of the West but also to an Othering of the Other of the West. The project of Hagedorn's production of the Philippines as Other appears to be an enabling project. In

offered her critical insight on the work of Asian American cultural productions as an expressive tool of cultural politics in *Immigrant Acts: on Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), however, critics have produced more sympathetic readings. Among more recent approaches to this text, Rachel Lee and Grace Kyungwon Hong in particular share Lowe's view that "decolonizing writing" deploys postmodern narrative styles not in the service of a facile multicultural liberalism but as a tool for revealing the contradictions of the postcolonial condition. Lowe observes that "'decolonizing' writing, which may include features associated with postmodernism (such as nonlinear, antirepresentational aesthetics), emerges not from a terrain of philosophical or poetic otherness within the West but out of the contradictions of what Bipan Chandra has called the 'colonial mode of production'."⁵¹ In a similar vein, Lee identifies Hagedorn's postmodern technique with decolonizing writing that functions as a critical juncture, not simply an aesthetic glitch, for challenging U.S. hegemony: "Hagedorn's thwarting of traditional linear, realist narratives that purvey the "truth" stylistically parallels her text's thematic critique of U.S. imperialism."⁵² In critiquing U.S.-led late capitalism, Hong analyzes Hagedorn's postmodern style as a strategy of mimicking and critiquing the economic logic of

short, the Othering of the Other exposes the conditions of its Otherness. But I also see that the privileging of the Other foregrounds its Self-constituting aspect" (124).

⁵¹ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 108.

⁵² Rachel Lee, *The Americas and Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 81.

“flexibility”—the extensive use of differentiation subsuming precapitalist and informal sectors for flexible accumulation.⁵³

Unpacking a genealogy of criticism on *Dogeaters* from this perspective does not only allow us to reassess the kaleidoscopic form of the text as a more nuanced political assemblage. It also pushes us to explore further the intertwined issues of aesthetics and politics, postcolonialism and postmodernism, and nationalism and transnationalism. The rather harsh reception of the novel in early critical reviews was predicated on the aesthetic, political value that they commonly placed on realist representation and resistant postcolonial subjectivity, considered to be incompatible with diasporic authorship and postmodern aesthetics. In contrast, later more positive readings of the novel hinge upon a more articulated analysis of postmodernism as it is entangled with issues of gender, race, visibility, and U.S. imperialism.⁵⁴ If the former line of critique emphasizes the inadequacy of the diasporic perspective contained in fragmentary form to represent the ‘real’ Third World and ‘pure’ postcolonial consciousness, the latter group of criticism challenges this realist impulse of privileging coherent narrative and character development as formal

⁵³ Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 107-142.

⁵⁴ This reevaluation of the postmodern finds its useful theoretical vocabularies in visual studies, especially in spectatorship theory, and tries to reformulate it to grapple with the neocolonial dynamics of looking-relations. Viet Thanh Nguyen, Myra Mendiabile, and Stephen Hong Sohn emphasize the dimension of the visual in their analyses of spectacle, commodification, and queer culture. See Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002); Myra Mendiabile, “Desiring Images: Representation and Spectacle in *Dogeaters*,” *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43 (2002), 289-305; Stephen Hong Sohn, “From Discos to Jungles: Circuitous Queer Patronage and Sex Tourism in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 56:2 (2010), 317-348. As for psychoanalytic reading of the novel, see Juliana Chang’s “Masquerade, Hysteria, and Neocolonial Femininity in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*,” *Contemporary Literature* 44 (2003), 637-663.

elements for indexing nationalist revolution and extends its critical horizon to include the outside of the nation-state.

Focusing on the hitherto unexplored issues of urban commodification and trauma in *Dog eaters*,⁵⁵ this chapter contributes to the latter line of discussion placing the novel in a more productive relationship with transnationalism and critique of U.S. imperialism. *Dog eaters* depicts two intersecting developments of Philippine modernity during the Marcos regime (1965-1986): metropolitanization and globalization. In the novel, this intersection is focused in the processes of urban commodification in the construction of a “global cultural center” in Manila and their disturbing result in a disastrous collapse followed by the haunting of the ghosts of dead workers. Hagedorn thus renders the city of Manila as a site of contradiction in which the material consequences of intensifying globalization and the neocolonial situation of the Philippines emerge. As a commodity, the city in *Dog eaters* is an object to be displayed for consumption and investment in global market, exposed to random deconstruction and reconstruction. The city is also a spatialized commodity as a meeting ground of multiple power structures and embodied urban labor,⁵⁶ where the desires for universal capitalist modernity confront their material symptoms.

⁵⁵ The issues of labor and the city have been briefly sketched in their relationship with queer culture and sex work (see Sohn and Chang) and discussed by Mark Chiang, *Trans/National Crossings of Asian America: Nationalism and Globalization in Asian American Cultural Studies* (PhD diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1998). However, these issues have yet to be explored in their relationship with the concept of trauma and against the backdrop of the neocolonial relationship between the U.S and the Philippines and late capitalism in globalization.

⁵⁶ As I’m concerned with the body of laborer rather than his/her personified labor power, I refer interchangeably to “labor” and “embodied labor.”

Hagedorn presents the city of Manila as a problematic space through which to observe the violence of development, modernization and globalization. The city also allows us to see the seething presence of forgotten human activities buried under power structures but unveiled, in the end, through the novel's haunting. Approaching the threads of labor and the city from this transnational perspective, my reading of *Dogeaters* approaches three key critical inquiries: first, how the particular scene of urban commodification in the novel involves a fantasy of the Asia-Pacific community as forgetting and eliding its own constitutive contradictions, such as the intensively exploited labor of its periphery; second, how theories of affect and trauma might provide a useful analytic lens to excavate the dialectic of the hypervisibility of the city and the invisibility of labor, and how the novel itself, in reverse, offers a theory of trauma as both catastrophic and ordinary; third, how haunting is deployed in the novel as an affective and ethical language of awakening to confront the "flesh" side of the city, and as a way of mediating structure and lived experience.

In the first half of this chapter, I focus on the dialectic of the impromptu makeover of the city and its erasure of laboring bodies. With the transcript of First Lady Imelda Marcos's speech on "the City of Man," I juxtapose Hagedorn's novel's fictional rendering of the dream of the "first lady" filled with the architectural image of the "white island house in the middle of the Pacific." In doing so, I show how Hagedorn rewrites the urban plan for materializing global modernity in terms of the imaginative. The first lady's dream is a collective fantasy that moves everything around it (i.e., labor, ideas, and infrastructure) into motion for a single goal of metropolitanization. Connecting this

transforming quality of her dream to the making of the city-as-commodity, I argue that this urban plan follows the logic of the commodity fetish in Marx as masking the scene of labor in its theatricality. However, as *Dogeaters* reveals, the dream of urban phantasmagoria is always already fractured: it contains a built-in rupture, prefigured in the novel in the image of the first lady's chipped red toenails in her dream.

The second half of this chapter examines traumatic consequences of the construction of the urban façade, or, so to speak, the dimension of this crack on the first lady's red toenails. I focus on the urban hustler Joey's disorientation when he is haunted by the dead workers of a construction site for a global cinema complex and by his dead mother Zenaida, who was a prostitute in Manila. Building on Cathy Caruth's idea of trauma as awakening, I argue that Joey performs a remembering of the structural and imperial violence behind the catastrophic accident in the course of the construction of this global cultural center that had taken those workers' lives. As such a traumatic awakening, Joey's haunting reveals a site of contradiction within U.S. imperialism in the late Cold War period, as it constitutes a dream of a pure economic zone of unhampered capital flows through the Asia-Pacific.

By way of conclusion, I investigate haunting as a textual strategy that Hagedorn's postmodern style, marked by such features as fragmented narrative and nonlinear temporality, can offer. Focusing on the final chapter, "Kundiman," an eccentric mix of prayer and a love song in which Joey's dead mother and other subaltern female figures appear, I argue that Joey's earlier scenes of haunting constitute a means to address the unnamed workers' deaths recorded in the novel and thus eventually pave the way for this

final chapter's work of collective mourning and traumatic figuration of the unknown. As such, the imaginary urban and Joey's haunted body stretch towards the horizon of alternative history and subjectivity within the city. This space of potential represents a periphery where the sticking point of global capitalism appears. Instead of allowing differences to be mutually indifferent or fragmentary, the traumatic aesthetics of *Dogeaters* causes seemingly distinct narrative instances to encounter and become entangled with one another in a unique blend of temporal sinkhole and eccentric repetition.

Urban Commodification and the Collapsing City

Halfway through Hagedorn's novel, a government-endorsed beauty contest is held in an open-air pavilion on a hill overlooking Manila Bay. At the bottom of the hill, on the parched lawns of the public park, thousands of the nonpaying members of the public and vendors jostle each other in the "unrelenting sun" either to catch a glimpse of movie stars or to trade "bottles of warm soda pop" (103). However, the physical and metaphorical distance that cuts across the architectural height and the human bustle threatens to collapse because the pavilion, "one of the First Lady's unnecessary monuments, a morbid pile of gray stones, [is] crumbling slowly" (102). Above the "tight mass of people" (103), the architectural monument stands ostentatiously but with its foundation under threat of erosion.

This small passage, previously overlooked in past criticism of *Dogeaters*, renders a particular and peculiar figuration of the urban: the fragile distance between architecture

as excess and the human who works and lives under and against an unstably constructed physical environment. The sense of impending danger or disaster finds its dramatic manifestation later in the text when Hagedorn depicts the construction of new buildings for the Manila International Film Festival followed by the abovementioned tragic collapse of one of those structures. For the artificial “global cultural center” to be produced promptly for international viewers, new structures are raised at frenetic speed right next to the already crumbling Pavilion of the pageant:

The Manila International Film Festival is the First Lady’s latest whim. She orders the city and slums rejuvenated with fresh coats of paint, windows and doorways lined with pots of plastic flowers, the streets swept and reswept by women in red and yellow sweatshirts with “Metro Manila Aide” printed in big black letters on the back and front... Funny thing is, it all looks fake. Painted scenery is a slum no one’s going to bother visiting... A bunch of new buildings have been built right next to the Magsaysay Pavilion on Roxas Boulevard. She’s calling the whole thing a *cultural center*, whatever that means. Movies, ballerinas, and opera *daw*. (130)

Geared by desires for improvisation and artificiality, the making of a “cultural center” aims to create an urban spectacle to attract global capital by eliminating the traces of poverty and residues of living. By “coating” slums and the city with “fake” cosmetics squeezed from laboring bodies, this creation of urban façade makes the city itself into a commodity to be beautified and displayed for foreign tourists. As in Karl Marx’s logic of the commodity, the making of this urban commodity hinges upon the forgetting of labor and social relations therein:

The workers are busy day and night, trying to finish the complex for the film festival’s opening night, which is scheduled in a few weeks. Toward the end, one of the structures collapses and lots of workers are buried in the rubble ... She orders the survivors to continue building; more cement is poured over dead bodies; they finish exactly three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown. (Ibid)

The accident momentarily disrupts the cosmetically sleek urban surface, but is covered over soon by the elision and double entombment of laboring bodies: “more cement is poured over dead bodies; they finish exactly three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown” (130).

In *Dog eaters*, the city comes to take shape as a commodity-façade through a dialectic between the impromptu makeover of architecture and the erasure of laboring bodies. Yet, the more the architectural façade strives for the effect of a clearly demarcated wall between the surface and the underside, the less it maintains any kind of stability, unavoidably drawing closer to the crack or rupture of its urban formation. The city of Manila is an insecure space, perpetually in the throes of frantic urban transformation and thus always irresistibly vulnerable to the imminent interruptions resulting from its unstable foundation: “it is crumbling slowly.”

From this perspective of urban commodification, the chapter “The President’s Wife Has a Dream,” though infrequently commented on in past criticism, acquires a new importance. Placed in between the two scenes of the disintegrating architecture for the beauty contest and the collapse of the international cinema complex, this chapter depicts a fantasy that contours the beautification of the city. Parenthetically placed between the symptom and the irruption of the accident, this dream sequence displaces the scene of structural transformation with one of imaginative dreamwork, thus revealing a space for the intersection of fantasy and urbanity. What runs through the first lady’s dream is the allure of “white architecture.” She dreams of a white plantation house standing on a tiny

island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Yet the white architecture that the first lady fantasizes about is also a sign of violence. It stands on an island like a sharp knife that threatens to destroy something:

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a larger white plantation house with imposing white pillars stands on a tiny island round as a pancake. The waves are still, the water glistens in the blazing sunlight. The island seems deserted, the house pristine and perfect in the silence. She thinks of starched white shirts, sharply pleated white sharkskin trousers, the gleaming blade of a knife (121).

In the first lady's dream of white architecture, the sign of whiteness is associated with consumerism and violence. Throughout the jumbled dream sequences, the first lady travels back and forth between New York City and the "white verandah of the white house" on the island with "her hundreds of Vuitton suitcases in all shapes and sizes black steamer trunks pale pink hatboxes assorted plastic shopping bags" (122). Suddenly she is frightened by "a haunting mambo...a funeral march" (122) near the white island house and "a man asleep in a coffin" in the hotel room (123) in New York City. Her "perfectly choreographed moment[s]" of exchanging greetings with Cristina Ford, dancing with George Hamilton, and having sex with Pope John XXIII culminate in her recognition that "the red polish on her toenails is chipped." She can even "smell her own blood" (122).

The episodes of urban beautification alluded to throughout *Dogeaters* correspond to an actual project of urban renewal launched and led by the Philippines' First Lady Imelda Marcos. Supported by the World Bank and its development program for the Philippines, the Metro Manila project was one of the state-sponsored action plans for national development accompanied by the export-oriented and foreign capital dependent project of economic development under the Marcos regime. Among others, the

prostitution industry played a significant role in the national economy, an economy reliant on the marketing of sexualized labor to attract international (largely U.S.) investment. As Neferti X. M. Tadiar notes, this urban renewal program included building an array of new architecture such as “five-star hotels, an international convention center, a cultural center, specialized medical centers, and numerous other ‘beautification projects’, all under the supervision of the Metro Manila Commission (MMC).” This construction drive also entailed plans for the removal and destruction “of unsightly structures such as slums.”⁵⁷

Throughout this era of urban renovation, Imelda Marcos fashioned herself as the advocate and practitioner of “the City of Humanity.” *The Ideas of Imelda Romualdez Marcos*, a collection of over 70 scripts for Imelda’s public speeches over the period of the authoritarian modernization in the Marcos regime, offers a rich archive of the underlying scheme and ideology for the metropolitanization of Manila.⁵⁸ An overarching theme and key metaphor of Marcos’s statements is the city of the universal human, epitomized in the expression “The City of Man.” Marcos repeated this idea constantly in her public addresses at national and international events (e.g., the inauguration of the Philippine International Convention Center in 1976, the opening of the Metro Manila Billy Graham Crusade in 1977, and the annual meeting of the Rotary Clubs of Metropolitan Manila in 1977), and it threads in varied formulations through her speeches and other writings:

⁵⁷ Neferti X. M. Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 82-3.

⁵⁸ *The Ideas of Imelda Romualdez Marcos*, ed. Ileana Maramag (Manila: National Media Production Center, 1978).

On a stretch of land reclaimed from the sea through modern technology, rises a complex of new buildings: one dedicated in a broad sense to capital and technology, two others dedicated to art, and another to trade and industry... We are all spectators and actors in the drama of survival. But mere survival is not enough. The balance and equality of human life must be sought, preserved and protected. (“Philippine International Convention Center,” 51-2)

This new complex of buildings, erected on land reclaimed from the sea, stands in dramatic contrast to the slum areas which blight our city. The contrast of shrine and shanty symbolizes the shining future against our impoverished past... We all know that the ultimate goal of capital and technology must be the survival of humankind. Since the ultimate beneficiary is man, all endeavors must be based on a humanist code of ethics. *Humanitas*—the well-being of mankind—is the common responsibility of all, for we live in one world, one planet. (“Between Two Worlds,” 58, 62)

You may ask, “Could all these be done all at once? Shouldn’t we proceed step by step, one by one?”... My friends, with Metro Manila, not to say with the entire nation, everything must be done at once... The same thing can be said of the hotels of Metro Manila. We cannot wait for tourists and investors to come in droves before our businessmen can be followed to construct their lodgings. Tourism and investors follow infrastructure, and not the other way round... As with all the great cities of the world—New York, Moscow, Peking, Paris, London, Rome or Tokyo—Metro Manila is for everyone, for every human being of whatever nationality who craves for that community which is in rhythm with universe. For to be metropolitan is, in reality, to be cosmopolitan... The call of the metropolis is truly a summons to humanity. Metropolitan Manila must then vibrate with the rhythm of the universe. In this sense, Metropolitan Manila demands our hearts and our minds to sustain that rhythm, the pace of a renewed vigor in our identification with all of mankind. This is the essence of our endeavor, the quintessence that we have learned to call “the City of Man.” (“The Metropolis: A Summons to Humanity,” 83, 85, 86)

The belief in capital, technology and humanity is the guiding principle of the program of Metropolitan Manila. The desire to synchronize with a universal capitalist human development (“Metropolitan Manila must then vibrate with the rhythm of the universe”) engenders the necessity of quickened whole-sale urban reconstructions (“everything must be done at once”). The beautification of Manila is predicated on the yearning to be integrated into a progressive temporality and general humanity and that would allow the city to emulate and catch up with the “great cities of the world... the City of Man.”

In *Dog eaters*, Hagedorn rewrites and reinscribes this urban renovation program in the form of the first lady's dream. Foregrounding fantasy as it works on the transformative urban plan, Hagedorn stages the scene of commodification, both frantic and violent, that is embedded in the narrative of development and progress. In Hagedorn's literary world, the first lady's dream of "the City of Man" is tied with her dream of whiteness and consumerism. Her desire for white architecture makes her wander around New York City with her bare feet polished with red manicure and with "her hundreds of Vuitton suitcases ...[and] shopping bags" (122). Her "red toenails" represent this embodied desire for consumerism and partake of the form of neocolonial consumer-subject produced and operating through imperial practices. Put differently, in this intersection of consumerism and whiteness, Hagedorn presents the governing tactics of U.S. imperialism working in the Philippines for disseminating the idea of global consumerism. As Grace Kyungwon Hong points out, "U.S. territorial imperialism "failed," but its imperial experiment in the Philippines produced the technologies of neocolonialism that made consumerism a *more*, rather than *less*, important category. U.S. neocolonialism became a way of extending the ideal of consumerism as citizenship all over the world."⁵⁹ In *Dog eaters*, this conception of consumerism as citizenship, by way of the first lady's dream, extends to the project of making the city as a commodity allowing the membership of the Philippines in global markets.

⁵⁹ Hong, *ibid*, 120.

As discussed above, the process of building a “global cultural center” is swift and violent. The First Lady’s “latest whim,” it proceeds at a marvelous pace: “they finish [building the cultural center] three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown” (130). In producing such artificial and even surreal transformations, the urban renewal program echoes the magical processes forming the commodity fetish. In his reading of Marx’s commodity fetish in *Capital*, Jacques Derrida focuses on its haunting effects. The moment that Derrida is struck by is a contagious “ghost dance” that occurs when a wooden object, a table, becomes a commodity. The sudden looming up of the mystical character of commodities takes place when the ordinary table is changed to the commodity-table and enters the market into relations with other commodities. In this transmutation of the thing-table (as a container of use-value) to the commodity-table (as an instance of exchange-value), Derrida sees the effect of the “ghost dance”: “yes, it puts everything around it into motion.”⁶⁰ At the very moment of its stepping into the market, Marx writes, the table “not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head.”⁶¹ The transfiguration process puts the wooden thing-table into motion, into endless signifying chains of commodities. A relationship between producers transforms into the spectral movement of commodities; both human producers (and their social relationship) and the wooden table (and its use-value) seem to

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006 [1994]), 192.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, “Capital I,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1978), 320.

disappear in this table-turning dance but return “as if they were becoming ghosts in their turn.”⁶²

What initiates this haunting effect is the form itself: the commodity-form. The key is not what is ghost, what haunts, or what is haunted, because “the [haunting] effect is born of a relation.”⁶³ Haunting begins when the commodity-form comes into being through its theatricality. Hence, the secret of the commodity-form: the object relationship between commodities is a phantasmagoric form of social relations between persons. It is not that the commodity-form is a mere reflection or displacement of the social relation between people but that it embodies such a haunting (moving, changing, and transcending) relation to everything: “yes, it puts everything around it into motion.”

In *Dog eaters*, it is the city, not the wooden table, that comes to enter the frantic system of market exchange and takes on the commodity-form; the making of the commodity-city “puts everything around it into motion.” As seen in the episode of the construction of the cultural center for the Manila International Film Festival, the dream of white architecture moves the entire mass of the city’s people and things. What distinguishes this particular form of the city-as-commodity is that haunting here refers not only to the frenetic movement of the process of commodification. It also, more remarkably, presents a disruption of the ghost dance, that seemingly inexhaustible chain of commodities. Indeed, the first lady’s red toenails as an embodiment of desire for white architecture are “chipped”; she recognizes their crack as she travels back and forth

⁶² Derrida, *ibid*, 193-5.

⁶³ Derrida, *op. cit.*, 193.

between New York City and the white architecture in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, hearing a “haunting mambo” (122).

The dream of the city-as-commodity moves towards its moment of rupture as it insists in coating the surface over the dead bodies, in constructing an edifice out of sacrifice of the human. While bringing to the fore the historical instantiation of urban modernity tied to the cause of development and globalization, Hagedorn creates a theoretical as well as an imaginative urban space that links abstractions like nation-state, imperialism, and the global political-economic system with the material dimensions of life, labor, and the human. The desire to synchronize the Philippines with the universal norm of modernity articulates itself most visibly in urban transformations, but its effects on unacknowledged laboring bodies are not entirely invisible. When the edifice built for the Manila International Film Festival finally collapses, such desires for metropolitanization confront a hysteric rupture breaking away from normative order and thereby revealing its contradiction. The ultimate giving in of the architecture, prefigured in the “chipped red toenails” of the first lady’s dream, testifies to the point of failure: urban hysteria as (in Slavoj Žižek’s terms) the “failed interpellation”⁶⁴ of modernity.

From a slightly different perspective, the dialectic of the hypervisibility of the city and the tragic accident at the construction site might be reread as a dialectic of masquerade and hysteria. In her reading of the novel, Juliana Chang suggests that these

⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008 [1991]), 101. Here, Žižek renders a provoking formulation of hysteria as history: “Hysteria/history is more than a trivial word game –hysteria is the subject’s way of resisting the prevailing, historically specified form of interpellation or symbolic identification. Hysteria means failed interpellation” (101).

two types of ambivalent femininity function as modes of maintaining and exposing, respectively, the contradictions of global capital and neocolonial relations in the novel. Female figures of masquerade, such as the First Lady; Isabel Alacran, the wife of the national mogul Severo Alacran; and the talk-show host Cora Camacho, all embody proper femininity to smooth over the workings of neocolonialism and maintain spectacle in the service of the state. On the other hand, female hysterics such as Isabel's daughter Baby Alacran represent feminine excess to point of prompting the failure of masquerade and power structures: "Masquerade and hysteria unsettle and destabilize hegemonic formations such as the patriarchal state even as they seem to support them. By enacting, and thus making visible, contradiction at the level of the subject, these performative femininities exacerbate contradiction at the level of the social, political, and economic."⁶⁵

Returning to the beautification project of Manila and its traumatic aftereffects, one might see another level of masquerade and hysteria operating beneath the processes of development and modernization of the postcolonial city. The making of the city as a commodity follows the heteronormative sexual scenario of the relationship between the First and the Third world: the male investor and customer and the female service provider. Throughout its long history of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism, the Philippines has been subjected to extensive exploitation. Since the mid-1970s, the period when the novel is set and when U.S.-led developmental plans for the Philippines intensified, the Philippines has been hyperfeminized for its debt and dependence

⁶⁵Juliana Chang, "Masquerade, Hysteria, and Neocolonial Femininity in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*," *Contemporary Literature* 44 (2003), 645.

producing “the surplus pleasure (wealth) that the U.S. extracts from its bodily (manual) labor.”⁶⁶ In this context, Hagedorn stages Manila as a beautified face performing a masquerade to cover over urban eyesores and secure the smooth operation of transnational capital that is destined to confront its own material contradictions.

As I map out in the introduction, the idea of the “Asia-Pacific” represents a dream of a pure economic zone for uninterrupted capital flows. As Rob Wilson reminds us, if the Asia-Pacific (with a hyphen) is an “imagined community that tries to forget the trauma, war, and power inequities of the Cold War”⁶⁷ for the sake of the smooth operation of capital, what Hagedorn illuminates is the realm of the forgetting resulting from the euphoric narrative of communal companionship claimed by this idea. As Tadiar observes, the First World fantasy of the free world forgets or elides its constitutive contradictions as they are manifested in Third World countries like the Philippines. Setting the episode of the metropolitanization of Manila at the core of the narrative, Hagedorn displays how the intensification of globalization that dreams of the unbound capacities of capital finds its rupturing moment in the form of urban catastrophe in the Third World city.

In the wake of postmodernism, insofar as we limit the extension of this concept to the dominant form of aesthetic experimentalism in the mid-through-late twentieth century in the United States, cities have come to be equated with cognitive, psychic, emotional

⁶⁶ Tadiar, *ibid*, 43.

⁶⁷ Cited in Rachel Lee, “Asian American Cultural Production in Asian-Pacific Perspective,” *Boundary 2*, 26:2 (1999), 250.

spaces of disorientation and fragmentation. In his now classic essay on postmodernism, Fredric Jameson suggests that if anxiety and alienation characterize modern urban feelings, the postmodern city is dominated by schizophrenic disorientation: modern depth and density (emotion as an outward expression of inward feeling) are displaced by postmodern flatness and fragmentation (the collapse of the inside/outside binary in emotion). What cuts across this cultural transformation in urban affect, according to Jameson, is the rise of decentered multinational capitalism and our perceptual inability to map out the whole system. The postmodern city represents the subject's cognitive incapacity for representing global capital networks and the concomitant urban dislocation and "waning of affect."⁶⁸

By offering the city as an embodiment of the ghost dance of commodification, Hagedorn departs from this mutual reflection of aesthetic form and economic system in postmodern urban narratives, the particular brand that mirrors fragmentary form and the unrepresentability of the closed system. Hagedorn presents the city not as a micro-aesthetic entity, in Jameson's formulation, not as "the *ideologeme*, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses...as traces or

⁶⁸ Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1989) in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991): 1-54. Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), arguably most representative of postmodern urban writings, presents this disorienting treatment of urban spaces reigned over by a proliferation of signs causing the failure of signification and concomitant paranoia. Cities in Pynchon's work are abstract concepts or signs rather than lived spaces: "San Narciso lay further south, near L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts –census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway." Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009 [1966]), 15.

anticipants of modes of production.”⁶⁹ Rather, Hagedorn’s city is akin to what Homi Bhabha calls a “third space,” where a sudden disjunctive temporality emerges in resistance to the construction of totality.⁷⁰ Despite its postmodern narrative style, *Dogeaters* focuses less on epistemological enigmas than on instances of undoing and disrupting the workings of abstract/universal totality such as modernity and development. Hagedorn’s city leads us to the frantic stage and the shadows of the fetishized urbanity, the scenes of “blood, torture, death, and terror” that Jameson relegates to the “underside of postmodern culture.”⁷¹

As Mark Chiang points out, the issue in *Dogeaters* is “not Western imperialism *per se*, but the interface of the nation with the global system.”⁷² The interface that Hagedorn foregrounds, however, is not only that of the nation with the global system but also that of power structures with lived experience. Hagedorn’s formulation of the city as a meeting ground of seemingly disparate social dimensions recalls Saskia Sassen’s valorization of the urban framework in the era of global capitalism. For Sassen, the global city⁷³ is a site where the effect of economic globalization is observed not only in its

⁶⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981), 76 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁰ Hagedorn’s deployment of the urban might be said to renew Bhabha’s account of “third space” by shifting its focus on the metropolitan cultural politics of immigrants to the transnational dynamics of capital and labor in the periphery. For Bhabha’s deconstructive postcolonialism, which prioritizes the politics of cultural difference as a battle of enunciation, see *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004 [1994]).

⁷¹ Jameson, *ibid.*, 5.

⁷² Mark Chiang, *Trans/National Crossings of Asian America: Nationalism and Globalization in Asian American Cultural Studies* (PhD diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1998), 221.

⁷³ The “global city” as articulated in Saskia Sassen’s urban sociology is apparently based on the changing urbanity of metropolitan centers like London, Paris, New York, and Tokyo as they grow to be the command nodes of the global economy. See Sassen’s *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Considering the economic, geopolitical status of Manila

changing features of capital but also in the realm of labor and subjectivity. It is “a strategic site not only for global capital but also for the transnationalization of labor and the formation of transnational identities.”⁷⁴ While Sassen’s global city refers to the strategic platform in developed economies for structural transformations cultivating the growth of a professional class and associated built environments, Hagedorn stages how the intensification of global capitalism manifests its internal contradictions in the urban catastrophes of developing nations. To this end, Hagedorn brings together the insecure architecture and the precarious human condition stemming from the desire for a universal norm of modernity. Rendering the image of the perilous city-as-commodity, Hagedorn produces the urban as a transnational zone that is more abstract than material urban spaces, but more material than the abstractions of market, capital, and nation-state.

Trauma, Haunting, and Figural Enactment

After the disturbing moment of the double entombment of workers at the construction site for the Manila International Film Festival, the dead bodies buried under the urban façade never disappear but rather remain a haunting presence. At the

located in the global South, one might think that the concept of the “megacity,” referring to the rapidly-growing, “big but not powerful” cities of the Third World, might be a better term to describe Manila. However, in agreement with the critique of megacity discourse for its problematic situating of cities of the global South on the single, Western timeline (that is, in a manner so as to say that “your” dark, dirty city is the future of “our” global city), I opt to employ the term “global city” as centering on the city as a platform or a meeting ground of capital, labor, and subjectivity in globalization, and seek to investigate Hagedorn’s fictional account of the dynamic encounter in a global city in the periphery. For the megacity controversy, see Sarah Nuttal and Achille Mbembe, “A Blasé Attitude: A response to Michael Watts,” *Public Culture* 17:1 (2005) 193-202 and Austin Zeiderman, “Cities of Future? Megacities and the Space/Time of Urban Modernity,” *Critical Planning* (2008 summer), 23-39.

⁷⁴ Sassen, “Whose City Is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims,” in *Cities and Citizenship*, ed. James Holston (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 189.

postfestival party at the nightclub CocoRico, the character Chiquiting tells us about this haunting, “They say ghosts of dead workmen haunt the place... you can hear them howling, late at night” (135). Interestingly and strangely enough, the story does not linger on these haunting figures. Just as dead bodies are quickly entombed under the “fake” urban edifice, which is “built on a foundation of flesh and blood” (135), the narrative seems to sew up the bloody gash in haste, erase bloodstains, and then move with deceptive smoothness to the seemingly separate story of Joey Sands, the biracial gay prostitute.

Most critics focusing on the character Joey read his queer subjectivity as a key metaphor addressing the layers of power relations not only within the Philippines but also between the United States and the Philippines. In one respect, the visibility of Joey’s queer sexuality and his central role in the anti-dictatorial revolution at the end of the novel displace the heterosexual, patriarchal narratives commonly found in nationalist revolutions. In another regard, the symptomatic disappearance of his queerness once he becomes a revolutionary fighter, which Stephen Hong Sohn describes as Joey’s transformation “from Disco to Jungles,”⁷⁵ might be understood as a critique of dominant discourses of (Western) queer sexuality based upon “outing” and visibility or even as a critical commentary on the global commodification of queer cultures.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Stephen Hong Sohn, “From Discos to Jungles: Circuitous Queer Patronage and Sex Tourism in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 56:2 (2010), 317.

⁷⁶ For other readings of queerness in the novel, see Victor Mendoza, “A Queer Nomadology of Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters*,” *American Literature* 77 (2005), 815–45 and Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a discussion of Western queer discourse as a universal model for gay liberation, see Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

Without rejecting these insights into Joey's crucial role both within the narrative and for the critiques of nationalism and queer liberalism, I would like to focus attention on the metonymic resonances between his urban experience and the metro Manila project. In particular, I explore the peculiar character of his haunting as a traumatic awakening—not simply the psychological process of a traumatized individual, but an ethical encounter with the “flesh” side of the city, with the forgotten figures of urban labor. Put differently, Joey's haunting is a form of mediation between abstract systems and lived experience, between structural violence and individual forms of figural survival. Through this embodied mediation, the sites of trauma of *Dogeaters* stand on the intertwined terrain of the catastrophic and the everyday.

While involved in the sex tourism business, Joey hyperbolically performs his agency by imagining himself as an actor whose life is cast upon a screen, thus covering over the embedded power dynamic between Western tourists and indigenous prostitutes. Joey presents himself as a free hustler, deejay and talented seducer, not simply as a submissive service laborer: “I know how to do that. Make them love me even when I break their hearts, steal, or spend all their money” (45). On the opening night of the film festival, when stories of dead workers hover around the CocoRico nightclub, Joey, an expert in urban masquerade, “put[s] on something different, something dangerous” (141). He transforms his business of “flesh” into an illusory stage performance surrounded by “mirrored walls” (131), creating and inhabiting a fantastically constructed imaginative world where his abject poverty and limited options can be temporarily elided.

Joey's deceptive performance of his agency, a blurring and muddling of the embedded power relationship between customer and service provider, allows him to slide smoothly across the alluring city. Just as the Manila international film festival is planned for international recognition, Joey's sex work participates in a "flesh" business veiled in a national beautification project enticing global tourists. Covering over the raw and rough sides of sex work, Joey embodies and enacts the double aspect of urban masquerade: smoothing over the surface of the city while rubbing out its corporeal underside, its fleshy side. Hence, as the narrative abruptly proceeds from the episode of the artificial urban architecture to Joey's urban tactics, these two seemingly separate stories come to converge upon this dynamic.

Indeed, the sex business in which Joey is involved and the processes of urban commodification are mutually implicated. While the commodification of urban spaces has a long history of labor-intensive tourism work, the metropolitanization of Manila hinges particularly upon sex tourism. The sex industry in the Philippines is one of the pivotal service industries designed not only to support the national economy but also to tempt global capital. As Tadiar notes, "The tourism-sponsored identity of Manila is created, in fact, by the flesh trade, that is, the thriving prostitution industry which first received an enormous boost from the Marcos regime...to attract foreign investment and interest through 'tourism'."⁷⁷ The vexed intertwinement of sex work and the city-as-

⁷⁷ Tadiar, *op. cit.*, 92.

commodity thus allows us to read Joey's situation as a direct commentary on urban commodification and its tragic effects.

Just as the city is brought to moments of encounter with its constitutive cracks, Joey's theatrical performativity and his skillful acting of agency confront fleshy, bloody spurts of explosive instability. In this form, the flesh reveals its bare and brutal skin when Joey witnesses the assassination of Senator Avila. Chang observes that the death of Avila, a "vocal critic of neocolonial dependence," is "hysteria at the level of the nation-state, revealing the violence that is necessary to maintain the neocolonial regime and its relationship to the United State." It "exposes the violence, sacrifice, and trauma at the heart of neocolonial alliance."⁷⁸ When confronting this traumatic scene, Joey feels as though "[his] flesh burst[s] open" (151):

His blood, oozing bright and dark on the carpet...I see everything. I want to scream, concrete sidewalk pressed against my face, my face twisted as I snatch one more glance at the blood in the lobby, imaginary gun pressed against the back of my head by imaginary assassins, my flesh bursting open...I hear screams come out of nowhere. The desk clerks, the bellhops, the drowsy waiters, the invisible doorman are all suddenly here in the lobby, bending over the dead Senator. Everyone's busy being hysterical...I scrambled up to my feet and start running, I don't look back. I run. I run. I almost fly down the street. I disappear around the corner before the faceless men with dark glasses show up...bullet holes in the walls, the Senator's lifeless body, so much blood from one man spattered everywhere. (151-2)

This intense, graphic scene is blood-spattered, particularly so in comparison with the representation of the collapse of the cinema complex. The dead construction workers' physicality is felt indirectly only through verbal language—"I must admit, opening night was impressive," Rainer says; "*Siempre!* Built on a foundation of flesh and blood,"

⁷⁸ Chang, *ibid*, 654.

Andres snorts in response (135). Senator Avila's death, however, comes with vivid visual imprints. The senator's corporeality is tangible: his dead body is right there and not hidden under the cement. The scene is the more intense for "the matter-of-fact brutality of the murder" (189): "See his blood. His blood, oozing bright and dark on the carpet...the Senator's bullet-ridden body sprawled on the carpet...the Senator's lifeless body, so much blood from one man spattered everywhere" (151-2).

After the assassination of Senator Avila, the mourning of his death is performed by women.⁷⁹ Among these female mourners, the weeping bride, Rosario "Baby" Alacran, mourns in ways that reflect and invite comparison with Joey's experience of haunting after he witnesses Avila's death. Baby Alacran develops a "mysterious illness: aching bones, lack of appetite, occasional chills, and frequent nightmares" (136). Alongside this inscrutable illness, moreover, hysterical bodily symptoms recur, "[t]he tiny, itchy, watery blisters that have suddenly reappeared on her fingers after so many years" (156). The tragic event of Avila's death manifests itself in Baby's body as the discursive site of her trauma. As David L. Eng notes, for the hysteric, traumatic memories are "transformed into corporeal symptoms so that the body becomes the discursive field upon which unconscious traumas find their displaced expression."⁸⁰ In nightmarish dreams, Baby Alacran sees her wedding banquet as a never-ending event with a never-ending parade of dishes. Black dinuguan, literally the black pig's blood stew, appears again and again:

⁷⁹ "Senator Domingo Avila has been shot dead. Mourned by his stoic wife Luisa, by his missing daughter Daisy...by his bewildered teenage daughter Aurora...by the weeping bride, Rosario "Baby" Alacran" (155).

⁸⁰ David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 172.

The wedding banquet never stops. A nauseating feast for the eyes, as well as the belly and the soul. Ox-tails stewed for hours in peanut sauce, egg custards quivering in burnt sugar syrup, silver tureens filled to the brim with streaming hot, black dinuguan...It's the black blood of a pig she pours on her head, the black pig's blood stew she bathes in, to mourn the death of a man...Senator Domingo Avila has been assassinated. Dinuguan—it's the black blood of a pig the weeping bride pours on her head, the black blood stew of pale pink pig entrails she bathes in, mourning the death of a man she never knew. (156-8)

In contrast, Joey does not (or cannot) simply mourn Avila's death because he is directly involved in the incident as a witness. Whereas Baby Alacran incorporates the loss of Avila's death into herself and thereby fulfills her need for mourning, Joey fails to free himself from the shadow of that death. Baby Alacran bathes and absorbs herself in (Avila's) blood, but Joey remains impressed with the paranoia-inducing image of that blood as he runs away from the place of the assassination: "He was unable to erase the vividness of the actual moment from his mind, the Senator's body sprawled in a pool of blood on the plush carpet, the blood so red it vibrated black in Joey's buzzing mind" (190).

In this regard, Joey's experience of trauma recalls Freud's formulation of melancholia in "Mourning and Melancholia" as a psychic process linked to loss, not merely a mood state of depression. As a psychic structure of "countless separate struggles" with loss,⁸¹ melancholia is an enduring and endless devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object. In this persistent refusal of closure, melancholia, unlike mourning, constitutes an ongoing relationship to loss, bringing its ghosts and its fleeting images into the present. The past in melancholia is thus neither fixed nor completed but rather

⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York, NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1989 [1917]), 584-589.

remains alive in the present. Because the lost object continues as an animating absence in the present, melancholic agency cannot capture its history through chronology but rather experiences the dissolution of sequential temporality and exerts “countless struggles” with loss. In contrast to mourning, which is finite in its character through the withdrawal of libido from the lost object, melancholia refuses closure, resists forgetting.

Trapped in and not free from “the matter-of-fact brutality of the murder” (189), Joey might thus be said to be stuck in the structure of melancholia while Baby performs and completes mourning. In other words, following the traumatic event of Avila’s assassination, Joey comes to embody melancholic figuration of loss. He gets lost and wanders around the city aimlessly. For the first time, he feels “dreadful emptiness and confusion...along with the fear” (192) otherwise never articulated due to his exaggerated performance of agency, his masquerade. Walking around the “fake” city, Joey’s numb senses and feelings regain their sensitivity to the outer world. His theatrical self-aggrandizement now confronts the world, and he gets disoriented and frightened by its bare sounds and senses: “The world resonated around him, incomprehensible and steadily more terrifying as they day wore on. People brushed lightly against him as they hurried to their destinations, the trailing sound of their laughter and conversation startling his overloaded senses” (192).

Joey’s melancholic awakening addresses other figures of loss. Out of nowhere, unknown ghosts appear and accompany him in his urban dislocation. These ghosts encompass him, make him feel their weight and presence, and claim their inseparability from himself. In this haunting, Joey is led to these unnamed ghosts’ living traces: “He

tried to shake off the ghostly apes that squatted down on his shoulders...The delicate phantoms on his shoulders stirred, pressing their weight down upon him. Like him, they were afraid” (191-2). Joey’s haunting recalls, or is recalled by, the forgotten death or disavowed labor under-articulated and erased just beneath or as a prop for the urban masquerade. Ignored and silenced at the level of plot throughout the urban excitement of the opening night party and Joey’s succeeding masquerades, the ghosts of the dead workers suddenly surge into the novel’s focus as they join Joey’s wanderings.

Joey’s haunting is thus an emotional awakening into fresh if painful connections with the world outside of himself. Forgotten voices creep over and exert their pressures on his shoulders, transporting him into materiality of the world around him: “The world resonated around him...startling his overloaded senses” (192). Unable to be detached from various figures of loss, Joey experiences the transformative force of melancholia—one that which Jonathan Flatley defines as involving “a mode of vital connection with the world”⁸²—and an active entanglement with lost objects. With this transformation Joey experiences a new desire to live, to escape from the shack of the man he calls “Uncle,” who raised him and taught him how to survive in the city, and who is now going to sell him out to the assassins. Joey feels Uncle’s shanty “even smaller and more claustrophobic” (203): “He knew he had to escape, somehow...He knew he wanted to live: it was that simple and basic” (205).

⁸² Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4.

In the end, Joey's haunting, by disrupting the sleek, cultivated masquerade that had been devoid of all material traces of the past, leads to his conversion into a revolutionary guerrilla fighter. This drastic change from the city to the jungle, from prostitute to guerilla, which cuts Joey off from the allure of the commodified city, requires a kind of ritual sacrifice. In order to arrive "somewhere safe and anonymous," Joey must go "past the growling dog" (205), must at once soil and purify himself by killing this guardian imposed by Uncle. As "his anguished cries and the animal's became one and the same" (207), his tears and the dog's blood flow together. At the end of this exhausting wrestling, Joey leaves behind his bloody T-shirts and jeans "stained and splattered black with gore" and the dead dog itself as "souvenirs" (207).

In its particular and peculiar social figuring of loss, the city of *Dogeaters* might be said to index the singular (form of survival) within the universal (structure of violence). By the "singular" I invoke Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of that which refuses an easy translation or subsumption into a general and identifiable structure like nationalism or capitalism and thereby "strain[s] against language itself"⁸³ for different forms of being and imagined belonging. Joey's body is an affective field, rather than an individuated site of perception, through which different times and forces of life pass, with their own intensities. This affect escapes confinement of a particular body or sociolinguistic fixing of meaning in opposition to emotion (what Brian Massumi calls "the autonomy of affect"); it constitutes a force-field that "momentarily suspend[s] the linear progress of

⁸³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000]), 82-3.

the narrative present from past to future...as...temporal and narrative noise.”⁸⁴ What is distinctive in Joey’s haunting, however, is its affective rootedness in loss and the socio-historical embeddedness of a particular accident. If there is no such a thing as a suspension triggered by a sense of loss or a moment of actual damage in Massumi’s philosophical formulation of affect, Joey’s haunted body (or the haunted city of Manila) involves a crisis that haunts the current juncture of globalization. To delve into this particular material dimension of Joey’s haunting, I would like to reflect more on its relation with trauma and issues of survival.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth offers a provoking juncture between trauma and survival through her reading of a dream introduced by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and reinterpreted by Lacan in his seminar. In the story of a father who has lost his child and then dreams about the burning of his child’s body, a conflagration that is actually taking place at that moment in the next room due to a fallen candle, Freud sees the father’s dream as fulfilling the wish to sleep entangled with the wish to see his dead child again at the expense of the reality of the fire. What is striking for Lacan, on the other hand, is the moment in this narrative when this wish to sleep is defied (by *awakening*) and the instance that gives rise to this awakening, the voice of the child in the dream: “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” Where Freud sees the fictional dream world of the child once again alive, Caruth suggests, Lacan, in his focus on awakening, turns to the reality of repetition of trauma as

⁸⁴ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 26.

a confrontation with death: the child's death and the accident of the candle falling on the dead body. As a *too-late* response to the child's request of seeing, the father's awakening reveals a contradiction inherent to trauma: he sees too late to prevent the burning as well as the death of the child; the father's awakening is always already a response and a miss at the same time. Hence, Caruth formulates trauma as an ethical encounter and relation to the other: "*Awakening, in Lacan's reading of the dream, is itself the site of a trauma, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death.*"⁸⁵

By foregrounding the father's awakening as a mode of survival determined by the impossible structure of response and responsibility, Caruth emphasizes an ethical relation generated by the story of trauma rather than by the accidentality of the traumatic event *per se*. The importance of awakening does not merely come from the repeated confrontation with the loss of the child (the death and the burning), the repetitive return of these traumatic scenes. Rather, awakening as a site of trauma finds its significance in the unavoidable imperative to live with the otherness of the child, in the untimely but irresistible encounter with the real beyond the single empirical event of his death. Put differently, the father awakens to see not from the inside—the inside of the dream, the only place to see the dead child once again alive—but from the outside, to pass the awakening on to others. As such, Caruth's peculiar understanding of trauma as a site of

⁸⁵ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 100 (emphasis in original).

awakening leads us to enter into and become implicated in others' histories and traumas, a process Peter Ramadanovic links to Caruth's repetitive invocation of "entanglement."⁸⁶

From this perspective on trauma as an ethical encounter, Joey's haunting constitutes a traumatic experience of awakening causing him to bind himself with the deaths of urban workers and reawaken the dead. After his witnessing the assassination of Avila and the ensuing itineraries of his escape, Joey undergoes the transformative force of awakening to confront the repetitive emergence of forgotten figures and view the world anew. However, Joey's haunting does not culminate in the same kind of transmission of awakening or the ethical sense of responsibility Caruth argues for. Rather, it leads to his participation in anti-colonial guerrilla war against his country's dictatorship. It also paves the way to the emergence of submerged female figures, as I discuss below. While Caruth's deconstructive understanding renders trauma as enabling a form of survival to listen to the address of the dead despite or because of the impossibility of proper seeing, Hagedorn offers trauma as a form of bodily entanglement resulting in material effects within and beyond the ethical awakening of a survivor.

Put differently, Joey's haunted body is a space; it is a capacious affective field through which structural violence can be felt and lived. Where Caruth finds a structural unknowability, Hagedorn renders the way effects of structure are manifested in everyday lived experience. In her discussion of trauma as an affective language, Ann Cvetkovich maps out a genealogy of "sensational Marxism" as a crucial resource for theories of

⁸⁶ Peter Ramadanovic, "When 'To Die in Freedom' Is Written in English," *Diacritics* 28:4 (1998), 62.

trauma.⁸⁷ As a symptom of systemic violence, trauma understood from this perspective does not necessarily involve extreme or cataclysmic events such as war but rather engages ordinary and elusive life experiences in which structures like capitalism can be lived and felt. Cvetkovich notes that Karl Marx's *Capital* is a document written not just for a conceptual analysis of capitalist production and exploitation but also for a graphic observation of the feeling of life under capitalism, most notably in the case of factory workers and their pain.⁸⁸ This line of "sensational Marxism" considering both the systemic violence of capitalism and its felt experience is developed by Walter Benjamin, who renders the shock experience of the urban flaneur as a mode of trauma penetrating the psyche's protective shield throughout the course of everyday life. More recent cultural theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Michael Taussig also place an emphasis on the impact of multinational late capitalism on the structure of feeling.⁸⁹ For these thinkers, trauma is a form of mediation that links structure and individuals, capitalism and its experience, and history and biography; it is "sign or symptom of a broader systemic problem, a moment in which abstract social systems can actually be felt and sensed."⁹⁰

In a similar fashion, Joey's haunting as a traumatic experience mediates otherwise separated structural determinations and figural survivals. From one perspective, his

⁸⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 42-44.

⁸⁸ For a more detailed reading of Cvetkovich on Marx's *Capital*, See *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

⁸⁹ Among many of their works on sensation and capitalism, see Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992) and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁹⁰ Cvetkovich, *ibid*, 43.

haunting unveils and embodies multiple layers of contradiction at the level of the national, economic, and social. Although Joey's urban disorientation is triggered by the national hysteria surrounding the assassination of Senator Avila, it is also symptomatically prepared by other moments of the "failure of interpellation" of modernity such as the collapse of the cultural center and the double entombment of the dead workers. From another perspective, his haunted body becomes a vehicle through which to consider a new mode of life, one that persists after physical death and that requires very different means of expression and interpretation. As Judith Butler notes, if the temporality of melancholia is the in-between because it marks losses that can only be indexed by acts of haunting, the "collapse of sequence into simultaneity" implies "both spatiality and figuration."⁹¹

Joey's haunting is not only his individual awakening to his implications in others, but also the moment of the dead workers' return and their recovery of their own mode of expression of being and belonging. By returning to Joey, the figure of a double of the city-as-commodity and the nation-state of the Philippines, and by confining him in a suspended animated temporality of melancholia, these unseen figures of labor testify to their presence as a contradiction. Analyzing a variety of subaltern figures and their uncanny forms of life in contemporary Philippine literature, Tadiar notes that those unrecognized lives *do* "figural enactment." While performing their own affective practices of relating to the world, distinct from the willful actions of resistance, these

⁹¹ Judith Butler, foreword to *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 469.

unacknowledged figures enact mediations between the particular (individual life) and the universal (abstract system). They thus redirect the understanding of subalternity in postcolonial theory as “fade-out points of realities” by mobilizing it beyond its incommensurability towards the urgency of survival. Through this invisible mediating activity, their experiential modes of figural enactment serve as “devices for tracking the dynamics of political and economic transformation.”⁹²

Seen within the specific context of the Asia Pacific, Joey’s (and the dead workers’) figural enactments impart a critical terrain through which we can investigate and critique the status of the Philippines as a prime source of exploited and undervalued labor for multinational capital and developed countries. In terms of the making of the city-as-commodity in particular, these figural enactments refer to an invisible affective labor that constantly fractures from within the sign of commodity and thus threatens to rewrite the dominant narrative of development and progress. In showing that the entire city of Manila stands on the literal and metaphorical burial of laboring bodies, Hagedorn reveals that the creation of the city-as-commodity always contains built-in difference, difference that undergirds but cannot be subsumed by the form of commodity. This difference inherent to the logic of commodity finally reveals itself through scenes of haunting creating a temporality supplemental to progress.⁹³

⁹² Tadiar, *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Makings of Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

⁹³ I indebted this deconstructive reading of the logic of commodity in its relation with labor to Chakrabarty’s analysis of labor as a history of difference in its translation into capitalism in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 90-96.

In *Dog eaters*, this rupturing moment of difference within the logic of commodity finds visible manifestations in the catastrophe of the collapse and Joey's bodily haunting. Hagedorn thus formulates trauma as an intertwinement of the exceptional event with the ordinary and insidious. In these frantic urban scenes, the merging of the accidentality and everydayness of trauma is dramatized in the violent actualization of contradiction. Geared by desires to synchronize with global modernity, the structural transformations of metropolitanization contain inherent points of stress threatening the disclosure of heterogeneities incommensurable to the progressive time of capitalist modernity. Trauma in *Dog eaters* is from within and inherent in its urban structure, even as it produces accidents without. In this particular intersection of accidental and ordinary trauma, Joey's haunting functions as a figural enactment, an affective, experiential indexing of structural violence.

The Vanishing Mediator and the Sphere of Flesh

In the sense that Joey eventually participates in revolutionary nationalism, his body might be said to function as a "vanishing mediator"⁹⁴ that enables impalpable bodies to emerge but that itself vanishes as soon as it is institutionalized: he enters the jungle to become a guerilla fighter and subsequently disappears from the narrative. In this concluding section, I deal with the way Joey's haunting functions within the narrative

⁹⁴ I borrow this term from his discussion of post-Marxist political theory. Žižek explains that the moment of the "vanishing mediator" is the moment of the punctual "event" when the "truth" of established structure emerges, which, "once the eruption of the "event" is institutionalized into a new positivity, is lost or, more precisely, becomes literally *invisible*," (emphasis in original), *ibid*, 188. Likewise, Joey disappears into the legible, recognizable realm of the national after his haunting.

structure to allow the address of otherwise unnoticed female subaltern figures. In focusing attention on Joey's haunting as it functions as a way of invoking his dead mother, Zenaida, a prostitute who gave birth to Joey after becoming pregnant from a GI, and as a way of addressing other unnamed deaths, I would like to suggest that Hagedorn's postmodern style may be characterized by jump cuts that perform a narrative mode of haunting. Seemingly fragmented parts of narratives and characters come together and are addressed in Joey's haunting, leading to the final chapter of *Dogeaters*, "Kundiman," in which a sacred-profane prayer for mother figures and "fleshes" appears.

It is through Joey's haunting that the story of Joey's dead mother, a figure of the mother-whore who is absent in the narrative up to that point, emerges. She is only briefly introduced when Joey tells us about his background:

There are those who say my poor whore of a mother sold me to Uncle for fifty pesos. *Zenaida*: desperate, half-crazy, unable to feed me and herself those last few months...*Zenaida*. She was a legendary whore, my mother. (42)

After this passage, the mother figure does not reappear until the moment of Joey's urban dislocation. Zenaida is dead at the starting point of the novel; she might even be said to be Joey's traumatic kernel, repressed at least since her passing in his childhood. As Joey tells us, "They say I was five or six years old, that I was mute for months after her death. I was so dark, small, and thin, they called me "*Gagamba*"—little spider." After he joins Uncle, however, Joey becomes a different person, casting aside the memory of his mother: "I went home with Uncle and never shed a tear. I don't want to remember anything else about my sad whore of a mother. I've heard enough. That's why I never ask Uncle. That's why he never brings her up" (43). In other words, Joey's urban masquerade

begins at the point he suppresses and buries the memory of his mother. Hence, *Zenaida*, from the beginning of the book, is marked by an enforced silence in stark contrast to Joey's overtly visible, hyperbolic performativity of agency. As an economically indispensable but morally disavowed instance of labor power buttressing the national industry of sex tourism, *Zenaida* embodies, in Chang's formulation, "subaltern femininity...illegitimate, illicit, and illegible female labor."⁹⁵ As an abandoned and degraded figure, Joey's mother is "human shit ... and garbage" (42):

They described how she jumped in the river, a watery grave black with human shit, every dead thing and piece of garbage imaginable: the rotting carcasses of wild dogs and cats, enormous rats with heads blown off by bullets... When they pulled out my mother's blued corpse, they say her long black hair was entwined in this mass of slimy foliage and decay, a gruesome veil of refuse dragging on the mud beneath her. (42)

The moment when he has to leave Uncle—since Uncle will otherwise inform on him to the police for his having witnessed the assassination of Avila—Joey unexpectedly "feels hurt...despair and anger at being betrayed" (205). Confronting this unprepared emotional turmoil, Joey, in spite of himself, whispers to himself his mother's name, "*Zenaida, Zenaida...* Mother of God, my god" (205) and realizes that "he had never considered himself capable of self-pity, terror, or yearning for his long-deceased mother" (205). When he calls out to the forgotten figure of his mother, his phantoms participate in this summons: "Mother of a whore, his phantoms chanted, whore of a mother, son of a whore! They beckoned to him: Once a whore, always a whore!" (205). Trapped in and haunted by those "floating [dead] bodies" (46), Joey is invited, as Avery Gordon

⁹⁵ Chang, *op. cit.*, 652.

describes the experience of haunting, “affectively...into the structure of feeling of a reality...not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.”⁹⁶ In this moment, his deceptive urban masquerade no longer buries its fleshy side, but rather confronts its bare skin, its relentless life.

Joey’s haunting culminates in his turn to guerilla warfare, his absorption into the legible and legitimable realm of the national. However, Hagedorn renders his haunting as a *situation* to address his long dead mother and others, enabling a particular form of poetic prayer capable of indexing their traumatic figurations.⁹⁷ His haunting is not just an occasion for his political awakening at the personal level as it is sublimated into the project of completion of national, political revolution. Rather, Joey’s haunting represents an embodied rupturing moment that breaks in and interrupts the rational, linear temporality of historical progress and paves a way for a final prayer for the sacrilegious and sacred mother figure, “*defiled, belittled, and diminished...our Mother, who art in heaven*” (250). The prayer’s mingling of the personal and the universal in such phrases evokes Joey’s own mother but cannot belong exclusively to her. Just as the ghosts that haunt Joey do not belong to any certain individuals but rather to anonymous figures of labor, this prayer seems to be dedicated to those disavowed and submerged “floating [dead] bodies” (46), traces of “flesh.”

Spilled blood of innocents, dead by the bullet, the dagger, the arrow; dead by the slingshot of polished stones, dead by grenades, hunger and thirst; dead by profound longing and profound despair; spilled blood of ignited flesh, exploded

⁹⁶ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1997]), 8.

⁹⁷ Kundiman is a genre of traditional Filipino love song.

flesh, radiated flesh; spilled blood of forbidden knowledge, bless us, Mother, for we have sinned. (251; emphasis in original)

When we read the invocation of “*ignited flesh, exploded flesh*” as blasting from and being brought to the textual surface by Joey’s haunting, an unexpected effect of what I would call textual haunting comes to the fore. Instead of constituting distinct, mutually unrelated pieces that resist becoming building blocks of a unified whole, the chapters placed as though indifferently in sequence take on new life in freshly opened textual resonances. Defying the facile translation of postmodern form into lack of historical complexity and depth, Hagedorn establishes a figural and spatial formation organized around urban trauma and the concomitant Joey’s haunting. In particular, “Kundiman’s” irregular and erratic typography recalls early chapters made up of excerpts from newspapers and historical documents. This final chapter resonates with particular echoes of the earlier “FLOATING BODIES” section, which consists of an excerpt from *The Metro Manila Daily*, and which follows as the very next chapter after the brief introduction of Joey and his mother’s death:

FLOATING BODIES

MAKUPIT, Pangasinan—Three bodies, one headless, were found in Makupit River earlier this week, police said yesterday.

Major Anacleto Rivera, Makupit’s police station commander, was visited by General Nicasio Ledesma recently as part of the continuing investigation by the Chief of Staff of turmoil and insurgency in the troubled area. Only last month the body of a woman was found washed up on the banks of the same river. The woman had been beheaded, and her hands and feet were also missing. She has never been identified.

In this week’s gruesome discovery, the bloated bodies belonged to two women and a teenage boy...

There were unverified reports of two more bodies in advanced states of decomposition found on the riverbank of the neighboring town of Lazaro.

According to a government survey, the frequency of headless and dismembered cadavers washing up on shore has reduced demand for fish in

Makupit, which was one of the centers of a thriving fishing industry until these recent alarming discoveries...

The Metro Manila Daily (46)

The indifferent tone that reports “the frequency of headless and dismembered cadavers” (46) and its negative effects on fishing industry is in contrast with the visually intense and poetically deep tone of “Kundiman” in its address of the unnamed dead: “*Dead by profound longing and profound despair; spilled blood of ignited flesh, exploded flesh, radiated flesh; spilled blood of forbidden knowledge*” (251). If the detached report anticipates the subsequent salient absence of Zenaida, the activated remembrance of the prayer testifies to the always seething presence of those excluded figures, their persistent claim to being.

With the active remembrance ignited in Joey’s experience of haunting, those “floating [dead] bodies” awake, halting and disrupting the logic of linearity, in the form of an interrupting anonymous voice that breaks in to resist textual, historical closure: “*Now and forever, world without end. Now and forever*” (251). As Gordon reminds us, if “the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure” who claims a potent imagination of “what is to be done otherwise,”⁹⁸ Joey’s haunting, through its unsettling encounter with the forgotten dead, leads us to the ethical call “to engage the shadows and what is living there.”⁹⁹ By haunting (moving, changing, and disrupting) preexisting forms of identities that would exclude temporal or subjective dissonance,

⁹⁸ Gordon, *ibid.*, 8, 18.

⁹⁹ Gordon, *op. cit.*, 18.

Joey's urban disorientation becomes, paradoxically, an affective form of survival not just for himself but also for those elusive social figures.

Hence, Joey's haunting reveals textual resonances between otherwise mutually indifferent, fragmented narratives. As E. Ann Kaplan observes, the first kind of trauma aesthetic, if there is any, is temporal sink and narrative discontinuity: trauma marks texts "in the moments showing paralysis, in the endless repetition, the unheeded circularity—all aspects of the nonrepresentability of trauma and yet of the search to figure its pain."¹⁰⁰ This point of haunting interruption collapses linear sequence into simultaneity and generates both a spatiality and a figuration for expressing trauma. As a disruption of linear temporality and an encounter with a missed temporal dimension, a traumatic aesthetic requires this spatial and figurative imagination.

In *Dogeaters*, it is when the narrative voice of the novel loses its vocal authority and admits its failure to function as a reliable vehicle of signification that the bodily and textual entanglements provoked by Joey's haunting create that figurative space.

"Kundiman" represents an alternative historical plane in which disparate textual pieces and distinct human traces emerge and encounter one another. To allow this figurative spacing to come to the surface, Hagedorn places a symptomatic penultimate section in which a letter sent to Rio, one of the two major narrators other than Joey, confirms the unreliability of these narrators' storytelling.¹⁰¹ If Joey's escape from the city to the jungle

¹⁰⁰ E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 65.

¹⁰¹ Many reviewers already have pointed out that the precarious condition of the two major narrators consists of the novel's peculiar postmodern narrative style. Rio's cousin Pucha's contesting voice in the penultimate chapter is one example: "Rio, you've got it all wrong ... You like to mix things up on purpose"

corresponds to his transformation from a first person narrator to a character gazed upon by another narrator, presumably Rio, the contesting voice of the letter stating that “Rio, you’ve got it all wrong... You like to mix things up on purpose” (248) finally defies not just the veracity of Rio’s narration but also the narrator-subject position *per se* as the sole channel of meaning.

Rather than attempting any form of narrative completion or conclusion, Hagedorn leaves us in the subjectless, linguistically anomalous world of the “fleshes” of “Kundiman.” This world belongs to a graphic sphere of figures filled with blood and tears—figures, in Spivak’s formulation, of/as an “undecidability” that is resistant to immediate comprehensibility but that requires persistent critical and ethical efforts of disfiguration.¹⁰² As Joey’s haunting brings to the fore the invisible underside of the city, his body ceases to be a linguistic center of narration and instead becomes an affective field or embodied “vanishing mediator” through which various submerged human traces are channeled. This figurative realm of blood and tears opened up through Joey’s haunting is, in one respect, the sphere of what Chang observes to be “the obscene/idealized excess of neocolonial capital”¹⁰³ in its repetitive invocations of the sacrilegious/sacrosanct figure of female labor. From a more spatial angle, it also creates a disruptive sphere of “*ignited*

(248). Joey’s playful self-reflections are other oft-quoted moments regarding this questionable veracity: “Hey, I’m just kidding” (38); “Maybe I’m lying. Uncle says I was born a liar, that I can’t help myself. Lies pour out of my mouth even when I’m sleeping” (45).

¹⁰² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 71.

¹⁰³ Chang, *op. cit.*, 659.

flesh, exploded flesh, radiated flesh” (251) breaking in and disrupting the logic of global capitalist modernity.

Where all the architectural attempts at building the structure of modernity cease to work, what finally emerges is the figurative space, a world of “flesh.” This world is not immediately recognizable or articulable within the preconditioned frame of language or subjectivity but apparently claims to different mode of being and belonging. When this flesh gets “*ignited, exploded, radiated*” at the arrested time of “*now and forever*” (251), the haunted text of *Dogeaters* is transformed into a shimmering plane onto which forgotten figures of embodied labor project blood and tears and thereby imprint their traces.

CHAPTER TWO

Transnational Adoption and Endless Labor in Jane Jeong Trenka's *Fugitive Visions*

If you decide to perform this one, you have some tough choices to make to compensate for those little hands. You might try some exercise to stretch your span as long as you're at it.

—Jane Jeong Trenka, *Fugitive Visions*

While my analysis of *Dogeaters* examines urban commodification and the haunting of embodied labor, this chapter attends to a different site of commodification and invisible labor involving transnational adoption. At once an adoption narrative, a diasporic memoir, and an Asian American text, Jane Jeong Trenka's *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee's Return to Korea* (2009) chronicles Trenka's return to Korea and her diasporic urban experiences in the "hypermodern" city of Seoul. In this oeuvre of a particular, contested homecoming, Trenka portrays her everyday life in a foreign "homeland" which she left adopted by an American family in 1972, visited subsequently only intermittently, and returns to as a resident only in her thirties. It is in Trenka's struggle with her conflicted self in an unfamiliar "home" country that the aftereffects of Cold War dynamics between Korea and the United States reveal themselves. As epitomized in a lyric line in the text, "I'm still at war with myself...in this beautiful terrible city,"¹⁰⁴ the process of Trenka's coming to terms with her split identity is itself an affective work, one

¹⁰⁴ Jane Jeong Trenka, *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee's Return to Korea* (Minnesota, MN: Graywolf Press, 2009), 139, 133. Pages in parenthesis hereafter.

in which the scene of her labor is invisible and its value is not rationally calculated. Overdetermined by the condition of Trenka's physical and psychic survival in a familiar and unfamiliar city, the "war with herself" in *Fugitive Visions* is not simply an existential matter of diasporic uprootedness. Rather, Trenka's own war is a fierce affective front that persistently brings to the fore the traces of the Korean War, itself a Cold War phenomenon and the origin of the long-standing history of transnational adoption from Korea to the United States.

This chapter delves into Trenka's diasporic journey and her unique embodiment of global citizenship in *Fugitive Visions* as it is intertwined with the lingering effects of U.S. Cold War interventions in Korea and its neoliberal governance. As I argue in my introduction, the history of the Cold War in Asia was the history of the dissemination of the American brand of democratic liberal capitalism. As a structure of feeling or a hermeneutics to frame and assess multiple economic and social "developments" of Asia, the Cold War has functioned as a powerful cause and epistemology supporting a renewed American frontierism. In *Fugitive Visions*, the Cold War as a logic of advancing American universal values shadows the commodification of transnational adoptees returning to Korea; in particular, this Cold War epistemology overshadows the neoliberal appropriation of the adoptee figure from English-speaking countries as a model global citizen, one embodying an ideal of Korea's state-sponsored globalization.

Situating Trenka's memoir in this revisionist understanding of the Cold War as a genealogy of U.S. imperial domination, this chapter explores Trenka's experiences of adoptee commodification in the city of Seoul and the dimension of her affective labor to

resist objectification. In the first half of this chapter, I study the way the logic of the commodity fetish as emptying of labor operates in Trenka's conflicted reception and performance of a commodified identity *given* to her. The prolonged effect of U.S. Cold War dominance in Korea prefigures and predetermines Trenka's diasporic identity even before her arrival: a cosmopolitan figure equipped with a desirable American accent. For Trenka, as an alien visitor, this presupposed identity exerts a pressure, material and immaterial, to perform that persona to survive in the city. Moving from a suburban town in Minnesota to the "hypermodern" Seoul, Trenka encounters and comes to embody new forms of value. As an English speaker in the globalized Asian city, she assumes a privileged position as a model cosmopolitan with marketable English language skills. Trenka's experience of her embodied value as an English speaker, and her conflicted feelings toward performing and selling her linguistic difference, together provide a particular scene of that prolonged Cold War epistemology and its structures of feeling.

In the second half of my discussion, I interrogate and qualify loneliness in *Fugitive Visions* as an extraordinary affective state that emerges when a human-object arduously struggles to make its way out of the chain of commodification. As an affective remainder resulting from the withdrawal from the imperative to perform her objectivity, Trenka's loneliness refers to a state of refusal to adopt her enforced persona, a state in which the smoothing operation of her becoming a commodity confronts a dysfunctional rupture. Not merely a passive psychic state, loneliness in *Fugitive Visions*, I argue, is itself a form of affective labor, one that is veiled behind the process of adoptee commodification but that reveals its seething presence only when the endless

commodifying chain founders. In arguing for the curious vitality and persistence of loneliness in this memoir, I take insight from British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's essay "On the Sense of Loneliness," which describes this affect as a constant shuttling between the destructive and loving impulses, between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. In turn, I demonstrate what Trenka's literary mediation of loneliness might provide us beyond this Kleinian "sense." Trenka's loneliness offers a form of a labor that is hidden behind and undergirds the scene of human commodification; it is thus a labor that produces both the particular textual energies of the memoir and an ethical pedagogy enabling a reparative gesture toward oneself and toward history.

In analyzing adoptee commodification and Trenka's loneliness in the city, I also examine the way Trenka's memoir remobilizes the problematic of trauma from the catastrophic to the everyday. Recent critics working in the field of affect studies expand the rubric of trauma to cover the mundane details and experiences of psychic injury. Lauren Berlant's conceptualization of "crisis of ordinariness" in her study on postwar American optimism and Ann Cvetkovich's discussion on trauma as an affective language to describe everyday lives of lesbian culture are exemplary. Placing these critical efforts in dialogue with Trenka's diasporic journey, I argue that the present in *Fugitive Visions* appears as a condensed temporal plane with intense affective connections between individual psychic dislocation and historical damage. In this work, sites of trauma offer a capacious force field through which we can investigate intersections of emotional and social crises and historical injuries' embeddedness in individual affective experiences.

While trauma in *Dogeaters* is triggered by an accident resulting from the structural violence of urban commodification, everyday trauma in *Fugitive Visions* involves Trenka's constant negotiation of her own objectivity as a commodity.

Against Trenka's crisis of ordinariness, which imbues the everyday with the residual effects of historical damage, I juxtapose Sigmund Freud's *fort-da* game episode in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As I discuss in my introduction, the transition from the war neurosis to the child's play of the *fort-da* in Freud's oeuvre is itself an iconic figure that describes the key problematic of this dissertation: the infiltration of structural/historical violence of the Cold War into minor subjects' everyday trauma and their affective labor therein. From a slightly different perspective, I argue in this chapter that the *fort-da* episode offers a figurative model of adoption narrative and its possibility as a form of social critique. The image of the lonely child in the *fort-da* game, who ceaselessly acts out and works through the loss of the mother, is itself a figuration of adoptee writers: writers who—having been tossed back and forth across national borders like a spindle in the *fort-da* game—begin to speak back and thereby create an imaginary territory for supplementary history.

Illuminating the complexity of Trenka's loneliness, I also show how *Fugitive Visions* adds new thematic and theoretical materials to the form of the adoption narrative. The recurring theme of the adoption narrative has revolved around kinship, in particular around what David L. Eng calls "maternal predicament."¹⁰⁵ The search for or the first

¹⁰⁵ David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 95.

encounter with the birthmother has been one of the most important subject matters of such narratives. While Trenka's first book, *The Language of Blood*, deals with the issue of maternal predicaments, in *Fugitive Visions* Trenka depicts a state of reprieve from relationships, or what we could call a state of non-kinship. As distinct from the trope of kinship, loneliness in this memoir renders a unique case of affective labor disrupting the logic of commodity and thus suggests a new possibility of social critique opening up in the form of the adoption narrative itself. In lieu of a narrative of *Bildung* toward an endpoint of redemption, Trenka's text repeatedly invokes the disquiet that the weak and small scale of loneliness persistently cultivates.

The Hypermodern City and Adoptee Commodification

As many adoption studies scholars note, the practice of transnational adoption between Asia and the United States is a post-World War II phenomenon associated with American imperialism, Cold War politics, and more recently global consumer markets. American Cold War military intervention and wars in Asia produce the conditions for adoption such as, in Jodi Kim's formulation, "the birth of GI babies, increasing numbers of orphaned and abandoned children, devastation of local economies, and unequal economic and neoimperial dependencies."¹⁰⁶ While American Cold War interventionism generates episodes of violence and destruction on Asian soil as the material condition for children being sent abroad, the sentiment of white respectability to "rescue" the war-torn

¹⁰⁶ Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 169.

continent, combined with post-war prosperity in North America, functions as the affective condition for facilitating the adoption of children from Asia.¹⁰⁷ In the late twentieth century, in the period of globalization, transnational adoption becomes a more viable and popular option for both heterosexual and homosexual couples as a domestic actualization of multiculturalism. What is often obscured by hegemonic narratives such as the humanitarian trope of salvation and the ideal of multiculturalism are the histories of U.S. imperialism and unequal global political economy that have shaped, and still shape, the condition of transnational adoption. It is also not until recently that adoptees who have come of age have begun to tell their stories and thus create an alternative archive of adoption history.

David L. Eng observes that transnational adoption as a particular form of Asian American immigration produces the adoptee as a human commodity straddling both capital and labor, objecthood and subjecthood, and privilege and exploitation. On the one hand, as one of the gendered postwar patterns of privileged immigration such as war brides and mail-order brides, transnational adoptees, because of their immediate and full entitlement to citizenship, represent a remarkable reversal of the gendered history of racialized exclusion in the United States.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, transnational adoption is also a unique case of exploited Asian immigrant labor. As a symbolic and valuable asset

¹⁰⁷ See Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender and History* 15:2 (2003), 179-200. Christina Klein observes that the adoption advertisements in the 1960s were fraught with the eccentric mix of the logics of consumption, anti-communism, and the politics of pity. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ One of the most notable examples is the Page Law of 1875, which largely banned female immigration from Asia.

to support the ideal notion of family and multiculturalism, the adopted child performs a type of ideological labor that serves to produce and protect social community as a supplement to capital. Distinct from the pre-World War II Asian exclusion and the exploitation of wage labor, the practice of transnational adoption as a post-World War II phenomenon generates a new form of invisible labor, ideological or affective, in global capitalism. However, the histories of Cold War imperialism that have created the adoptee's value as a human commodity bought and sold in the global market often remain underrepresented. Hence, transnational adoptees are, Eng argues, "on the threshold of a tenuous subjectivity continually threatening to undo itself, to unmask the history of its commodification."¹⁰⁹

In *Fugitive Visions*, the precarious condition of adoptee subjectivity, "threatening to undo itself, to unmask the history of its commodification," confronts different scenes of objectification as well as of embodiment of capital and labor. Trenka's peculiar diasporic psychic journey, and particularly her difficult affective work to make a home in a city that is both homely and unhomely, are entangled with her sense of another process of commodification revolving around the figure of the transnational adoptee. As she moves from a suburban town in Minnesota to the "hypermodern" city of Seoul, from a space of Anglo-Saxon whiteness in the West to rapidly changing global urban scenes in the East, Trenka recognizes new forms of value and labor that she unknowingly gets to embody and partake in through her transpacific crossing. Adopted children in the global

¹⁰⁹ Eng, *ibid*, 102.

North work affectively to secure the ideal boundary of multicultural families as a supplement to capital. The returned adoptee in this memoir performs another form of affective labor consolidating another form of multiculturalism, one that manifests itself not within the domestic realm of family, which Trenka left behind in the West, but rather in the public space of a global Asian city. English, for which Trenka had to trade her Korean m/other tongue, becomes indispensable capital that she is able but is also forced to employ in order to survive in this strange city. Trenka's psychic journey is entangled with this particular commodification of her linguistic difference. Her diasporic subjectivity constantly negotiates, and is inflected by, her objectivity as a commodity.

Trenka's observations highlight the forms of multiculturalism she encounters:

I received my first job offer through an adopted friend. The job was to do what most American adoptees living in Korea do: teach English.

Afternoons after school, I rode the subway from Sinchon to Dongdaemun, transferred to the blue line, and rode south to Ichon-dong in the Yongsan district...I counted the number of advertisements featuring Daniel Henney, a TV and movie star in Korea. With a white American father and a Korean adoptee mother, he looks mostly Korean, but his Western features cut through just enough to make him an upgraded Korean, a whitened-up Korean. Of course, he speaks great English. "Dan-i-el!" middle school girls in blue uniforms and kneesocks screamed, rushing into his giant image in subway corridors to kiss the poster, trying to embrace his two-dimensional image. Korean, only upgraded, Korean, but new and improved, he had advertised for the international adoption agency that sent his mother to Michigan. I weighed the seduction of whiteness, of empire, and measured my own complicity. (96)

In this city, an adoptee's "upgraded, whitened up" and perfect-English-speaking son becomes a TV star and sells the image of an ideal transnational in commercials alongside Gwyneth Paltrow. Trenka's own fluent English and impeccable accent is associated with the sign of whiteness that is considered to be an emblem of a successful cosmopolitan: "a person who habitually drinks wine, eats cheese, sleeps in bed, and speaks English; a

person who is white, American, and wealthy—not yellow, foreign, and the owner of a liquor store” (99). Trenka teaches English in private institutions located in upscale neighborhoods. Her students are from wealthy families; many were born in the United States and therefore hold American citizenship; all want to go to Harvard or Yale. For them, Trenka “shines with good luck” (98). The “seduction of whiteness” in this global city thus reconfigures the processes of commodification of transnational adoption by extracting the symbolic value of a multicultural transnational from returned adoptees.

For Karl Marx, the logic of the commodity fetish accompanies the magical disappearance or emptying of labor embedded in a commodity. The sudden looming up of the mystical character of commodities takes place when an ordinary object-thing is transformed to the commodity. “So soon as it [in Marx’s example, a table] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.”¹¹⁰ In this transmutation of the thing-table (as a container of use-value) to the commodity-table (as an instance of exchange-value), the scene of labor vanishes from the conjuring commodification. At the very moment of its stepping into the market, Marx writes, the table “not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head.”¹¹¹ In this trancelike stage of the commodity fetish, traces of social relation and residues of human feelings fade out from the endless signifying chains of commodities.

¹¹⁰ Karl Marx, “Capital I,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1978), 319.

¹¹¹ Marx, *ibid*, 320.

In just the same way, Trenka's performance of the linguistic difference she depends on to market herself and survive in the city keeps her affective labor from view. While her teaching is paid according to labor time—"a person who teaches English, as most adoptees do, can pay the entire month's rent by speaking English for six hours" (14)—Trenka's performance requires the concealment of her psychic loss, which in turn places the demand upon her of constant emotional labor. Trenka's theatrical enactment of her linguistic capacity can proceed only through she recognizes as relentless "erasures":

Erasure as passing

Erasure as job skill

Erasure as survival

Erasure as economic development (97)

As implicit in this repetition of the idea of "erasure," the performance of her linguistic privilege is tied to the unceasing veiling of her conflicted self. Her passing as a privileged transnational who speaks perfect English, sometimes just to avoid probing questions to figure out "the riddle of [her] face and tongue" (125), is a remarkable example of her everyday struggles with such "erasures." In one of the scenes depicting her avoidance of the chore of explaining to people the conflict between her Korean face and her inability to speak Korean, she parries her students' gentle teasing with a reminder of her occupation: "I didn't tell them that...I am the expendable of Korea who can pass as one of its elite...All I have to offer is my English...When my students asked me to speak Korean, I made emergency evasive maneuvers—they pay me to speak English, right?"

(98-9). Trenka's daily life is fraught with such evasions; it takes place without the possibility of definitive answers or tidy summations.

Eleana J. Kim notes in her discussion of adult adoptee return to Korea that the figure of the transnational Korean adoptee has been symbolically appropriated for South Korea's state-sponsored globalization project and its diaspora politics since the 1990s.¹¹² In standing as representatives for the nation's globalizing neoliberal drive, adoptees, particularly ones from English-speaking countries, come to constitute invaluable assets as models for ideal ethnically Korean global citizens. This transformative reinscription of adoptee figures marks the absorption of the history of transnational adoption within the model of development and globalization characterizing U.S.-Korea relations following the Korean War. In a dramatic reversal, transnational adoptees are transformed from pitiable orphans who have been abandoned in the course of the Korean War and its restoration period to model cosmopolitans to be welcomed and embraced as returnees supporting the globalizing national project. The myth of South Korean economy as a "miracle upon the Han River," which once enjoyed discursive power to explain the nation's development in Cold War years under the shadowy but certain presence of U.S.

¹¹² Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Kim provides a succinct account of the relationship between South Korea's state-sponsored globalization project (*Segyehwa*) and its diaspora politics as follows: "Announced during the APEC summit of 1994, in anticipation of Korea's matriculation into the OECD and its achievement of \$10,000 per capita income, Kim Young Sam's *segryehwa* project was a proactive and symbolic appropriation of globalization discourse aimed to boost the nation's competitiveness in light of new global economic pressures. Harnessing the power of the then 5.3 million ethnic Korean (now 7 million) residing outside of the peninsula was key to realizing this project...As a form of diaspora politics, the *segryehwa* policy endeavored to assist overseas Koreans with their economic and social status in their host countries and to foster ethnic ties to Korea" (178-9).

imperialism, passes through and is renewed in the nation's own appropriation of U.S.-led neoliberalism and its dreams of becoming global (*segzehwa*). The hyperextraction of symbolic value from transnational adoptees hinges on this half-century-long transpacific alliance.

The ironic reinscription of the figure of the adoptee from pitiable orphan to model global citizen, what one adoptee described as an experience of being swung like a human “pendulum,”¹¹³ requires more than just the effacement of adoptees' psychic and cultural losses. As we see in *Fugitive Visions*, the resignification process also demands collective involvement of the transnational adoptee in the ongoing commodifying process of the hyperextraction of the symbolic value of their own selves. Trenka's passing as an ideal cosmopolitan thus requires not the concealment of her racial or sexual difference, which in other cases would mark cosmopolitan identity, but rather demands the theatrical demonstration of her linguistic difference as a privileged sign of whiteness even before strangers in the street. If the logic of the commodity denotes the phantasmagoric transformation of use-value into exchange value, presence into difference, essence into signification, then the human “pendulum's” relationship to and recognition of herself as a commodity is more complicated. In the context of neoliberal multiculturalism, the history of human commodification around the practice of transnational adoption confronts the

¹¹³ This is a term that one adoptee uses in an interview with Kim to describe the mutable, hybrid identity of adoptees. “Adoptees, like other transnational subjects who return to purported homelands, confront the impossibility of true reparation in the form of seamless belonging or full legal incorporation and may discover that their hybridity, which is marked by racial difference in their adoptive countries is, in the context of Korea, inverted, thus swinging them to the other side of what one adoptee described as a “pendulum” from Korea to Danish or American.” Kim, *ibid*, 186-7.

site of self-materialization of the adoptee: the human “pendulum’s” self-conscious and theatrical enactment of becoming a commodity.

Indeed, Trenka’s everyday consists of a highly self-conscious performance of her linguistic ability often accompanied by the concealment of her inner conflict. It is a demanding act of dissimulation and a hard-won, imaginative mode of survival. Trenka’s theatrical performance of global citizenship emerges from the suppression of the historicity of her adoptee identity, and its burden as both psychic and physical labor stems from that dissociation of enactment and historicity.¹¹⁴ These psychological pressures could be described as what José Esteban Muñoz refers to as the “burden of liveness” of minoritarian subjects.¹¹⁵ In his discussion of the paradox of contemporary minoritarian performances, Muñoz argues that for minoritarian subjects, performance can be a form of forced labor wherein they reenact their story of “otherness” for the entertainment of dominant groups. “Minoritarian subjects do not always dance because they are happy; sometimes they dance because their feet are being shot at,”¹¹⁶ he writes. The moment of “their feet are being shot at,” the instant of both being seen and moving constantly, bespeaks “the burden of liveness” not just as a scene of labor but also as a matter of temporality that places minoritarian subjects within an ahistorical vacuum: they

¹¹⁴ See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993). Butler argues that performance as a reiteration of a norm is not primarily theatrical. It is when the historicity of a performance remains dissembled that its theatricality is generated. Performance’s “theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity” (12).

¹¹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 187.

¹¹⁶ Muñoz, *ibid*, 189.

exist, or are recognized to exist, only in the performative *now*, devoid of historical representation.

Trenka's performance takes place in this *now* in the sense that it demands from her a skillful acting out of her linguistic ability without any reminder or remainder of her history. The temporality of her performance is also that of the present. Her theatrical act as an ideal global citizen is another form of forced labor that places both psychic and physical demands upon her. However, when people seek to perceive whiteness on her yellow face, the sign of a successful transnational, her performance appears only in the relentless "erasure" that rubs out its historicity: "erasure as passing/ erasure as job skill/ erasure as survival/ erasure as economic development" (97). Like the endless chain of empty signifiers in the commodity fetish, her body as a commodity that comes with a marketable ability in English begins to embody a series of signs associated with the image of a cosmopolitan. Hence, Trenka's version of the "burden of liveness" is being trapped in her own performative *now*—the magical temporality of commodification that erases, escapes, and transcends not just traces of her affective labor but of history as well.

The city in *Fugitive Visions* serves as the stage for Trenka's everyday performances. Trenka's act, however, is not always successful. Her masquerades repeatedly and inevitably reveals their insufficiency and slippage in a multiplicity of scenes on the subway, on the streets, in markets, and in bars. The city is never a safe place for her to smooth over her dissimulations: its dynamic space is filled with social contingencies and accidental interruptions. Trenka exists in a constant state of unease, pressured to hide the conflicts of her feelings before strangers in the street. Sometimes,

the precarious equilibrium she struggles to maintain, filled with “emotions of familiarity and repulsion ... a mix of comfort and fear” (110), confronts its failure:

In small shops in Seoul, it’s not uncommon for me not to be able to complete a transaction before I explain the riddle of my face and tongue. Usually I satisfy their curiosity, but on Bad Korea Days I have walked out of shops leaving all my goods at the cash register because I just don’t feel like justifying my existence for someone else’s entertainment or categorization. (123-4)

If the logic of the commodity fetish denotes the phantasmagoric transformation from a thing-object to a commodity, then in moments such as these “Bad Korea Days” Trenka’s refusal to perform disrupts the smooth operation of her own commodification. When the demanding performance of dissimulation confronts such instances of its own dysfunction, the magical temporality of the commodity fetish founders in a temporary moment of pause and suspension. In this crisis of masquerade, the traces of her suppressed affective labor come to reveal their presence, which the normal seamless functioning of commodification would otherwise cover over and obliterate.

In one striking passage, Trenka shows us a moment when the crisis of masquerade discloses the dimension of labor and affect that has been suppressed, a moment in which Trenka’s withdrawal from becoming a commodity creates an affectively charged spatio-temporal plane distinct from the empty time of the performative *now*. For brief spaces of reprieve, Trenka sometimes withdraws to a backstage from where she can encounter the city as a haunting image and an emotional space, not just as a stage for her performance:

Remembering not to speak, I ride the subway at night, crisscrossing a metropolis of twenty million people living in layers. I ride underground, over the Han River, next to highways jammed with traffic, sometimes riding to get somewhere, sometimes riding just for the sake of motion, the train rocking me to sleep; other times standing to see my own ghostly reflection in the glass doors, bisected by highways and bridges slicing through my legs, the fluorescent night lights of tall

empty office buildings streaking across my chest...in such a hypermodern country as this—each city connected by bus, train, or airplane; each neighborhood of each city connected by bus or subway; and this, the subway of Seoul, being one of the world’s busiest, cheapest, and most efficient in the world, its train cars, where every night I ride, some of the cleanest in the world, its shining windows a mirrored reality in which my reflected body is slivered into parts, to match the way my life, my mind, has been...[T]he catharsis of watching cars and trains rush through my body without pause... (94-5)

In this scene, Trenka presents a version of what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as the “outside of architecture.” The city of Seoul does not exist out there, in shiny architectural monuments or in efficient transportation systems. Rather, the city is reflected, felt within Trenka’s diasporic being, within her “slivered” body as reflected in the mirror of the subway. The image of her distorted “ghostly reflection” in the glass doors of the subway, the mutilated body “bisected by highways and bridges” and “empty tall buildings,” serves to demonstrate the affective intimacy between the city-image and her shattered self. This fierce entanglement that binds together images of Trenka’s diasporic body and the city—“the catharsis of watching cars and trains rush through my body without pause” (95)—testifies to their inseparable intersectionality. The flat screen of the window of the subway reflecting and being reflected by an adoptee’s mutilated body becomes, therefore, the urban as the “outside of architecture,”¹¹⁷ which, for Grosz, denotes the field of bodies, fantasies, and politics as a constitutive edge of the city. In this moment of temporary reprieve captured in the plane of the window, unexpected intensities of connections and confluences among built forms, human feelings and bodies, and history take shape.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), xvii.

Grosz's formulation of "the outside of architecture" draws on Gilles Deleuze's philosophical thought on nomadology and the outside. As an alternative to the semiotized model of architecture inspired by Jacques Derrida, which claims that the city is a closed textual space, Grosz turns to the question of how architecture can be "rethought in terms of the outside, in terms of surfaces, in terms of a certain flatness, in terms of dynamism, and movement rather than stasis or the sedentary."¹¹⁸ She suggests that the urban and its architecture can move us to confront the outside, create new connections, produce cartographies of force rather than form, and thereby generate affective transformations. While "textuality" has been the core concern of the Derridian urban model focused on cities' signifying systems or textual implications, Grosz's formulation of the urban as a cartography of force shifts perspective towards affective intensities, unexpected connections between objects and subjects, and temporal pauses. The "outside of architecture" is a field of forces in which the interruption of "what resists assimilation, what remains foreign even within a presumed identity" takes place.¹¹⁹

The flat window of the subway in *Fugitive Visions* serves as a literary example of the outside of architecture that brings to the fore the unseen forces of the assimilated. Grosz's outside of architecture prioritizes the radical and transformative power of new philosophical thought or political subjectivity (i.e., becoming) over historical bearings. In contrast, Trenka's version of the outside of architecture, in its affective invocation of the unavoidable entanglement between the past and the present, turns to a historical site of

¹¹⁸ Grosz, *ibid.*, 70.

¹¹⁹ Grosz, *op. cit.*, 64.

development and infuses the city with the haunting of the hitherto disregarded figures of that particular development. In this haunting image, the history of swaying the human “pendulum” back and forth, which cuts across the whole history of South Korea’s development and the U.S. Cold War politics directing and undergirding its rapid growth, reveals its contradiction: the “ghostly reflection” of an adoptee in the subway window “bisected by highways and bridges” (94). Through the flattened, but affectively condensed image, the “hypermodern” city encounters the residual feelings of its destructive history.

Recent critical discussions of trauma and everydayness illuminate the insidious infiltration of damage from the past to the present and the intersection of structural violence with lived experience. In particular, scholars working in affect studies seek to expand the contours and contents of trauma theory from a genealogy of the psychoanalytic canon to the various contexts of the social. For these critics, the ordinary occupies a privileged spatio-temporal position in that it renders an emotional field around trauma in which we keep returning and re-relating to the site of violence, defying the spatial and temporal distance of the event. Lauren Berlant, for example, considers everyday life in the neoliberal brand of optimism to constitute “a crisis of ordinariness,” in which crisis appears not as exceptional to history but as a process embedded in the everyday, and where the situations of living on to ongoing crisis unfold an array of life-extending actions, if not liberation from the injury. In this framework, the present emerges as having an affective urgency, thus rendering the subject’s historical experience

a densely corporeal one.¹²⁰ Ann Cvetkovich also argues for the “elasticity” of the category of trauma to mobilize it to cover the social, in particular the everyday experience of sexual trauma. As a way of remapping and rewriting global histories in terms of affective experience, such attention to everyday offers an alternative form of knowledge to abstract structural analysis: “trauma is a window onto the study of how historical experience is embedded in sensational experience.”¹²¹

In *Fugitive Visions*, the crisis of ordinariness finds its aesthetic expression in the haunted subway window reflecting and being reflected by the disfigured adoptee. History enters the text as/through a flat plane of the ordinary, as/through the porous present. In Trenka’s daily subway ride, through its banality and everydayness, the ordinary object of the subway window becomes an affective field that embraces both history and the quotidian. This unexpected visual entanglement of built forms, human feelings and bodies, and history is what Eng calls “affective correspondence,” what provides “unconscious links through which identity and history might come to be redefined in psychic and social life.”¹²² It is through this eerie image of an everyday object that the “hypermodern” city of Seoul emerges as an affective transnational zone connecting subjects to historical traumas.

The myth of South Korea’s economic growth as a “miracle upon the Han River,” which once enjoyed discursive power to explain the rapid development of South Korea

¹²⁰ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹²¹ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 285.

¹²² Eng, op. cit., 192.

with the aid of the United States in Cold War years, thus confronts its phantasmagoric double, its forgotten side, in the haunted screen of the subway window. The train Trenka rides runs along and over the Han, the metaphorical spatialization of the miraculous transformation of a war-torn country to one of the rapidly growing Asian dragons. The surreal image of her disfigured body, divided by the window of the train reflecting buildings and highways above the river, reconfigures the mythology of economic growth as a miracle. In a passage later on, Trenka explicitly remarks on the “destruction” that the myth of development suppresses despite its materialization in adoptees’ bodies.

The fact of Seoul, how I loathe its energy of destruction; how this destruction is inscribed into the face of almost every adoptee I meet after midnight... We Koreans—whatever that means—have emerged from the disaster of the twentieth century, bumping and scratching our way into the next, disoriented and confused, not knowing the difference between stranger or family, friend or enemy... And the sparkling miracle upon the Han River that Seoul has become, with all its great wealth laid out upon the skyline, came to pass because of the endurance of many people. We—the outcasts—are numbered among them. And now to this place we have returned, a stain upon the conscience of Korea... (188)

As Bliss Cua Lim observes, if allegory is a “textual doubling” that allows one instance to be doubled by another and resist historical oblivion,¹²³ the window of the moving train in *Fugitive Visions* might be said to be an allegorical spatial palimpsest behind which unseen times and spaces lurk. Yet history in this memoir emerges not through the foreclosure of literary form, as Fredric Jameson’s anti-transcendent hermeneutic model would suggest. For Jameson, the aesthetic responses to an affective epistemology of a

¹²³ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 156.

historical period deploy a particular formal register.¹²⁴ Instead of deploying a literary form, however, Trenka's allegorical doubling as addressing other times and spaces in the subway scene renders an aesthetic *situation*. In Berlant's formulation, an aesthetic "situation" is a state of an animated suspension in the ordinary lives when something that bridges the past and the present creates affective forces but the genres of storytelling about it have yet to be defined.¹²⁵ I will discuss in more detail in the following section the genre of memoir and its relationship with the affective register of loneliness. Here it is enough to emphasize that the subway window in *Fugitive Visions* is a traumatic site that condenses alternative figurations of history, presenting eccentric time and space contesting the narrative of development: the belief and continued efforts in sequential progress that mark the politics of U.S. imperialism in Asia in and after the Cold War.

The Persistence of Loneliness

In the back stage of the subway at night, the image of Trenka's displaced body comes to circulate with a vigor that follows its own logic of repetition: the simple fact that Trenka rides the subway alone every day. As Trenka tells us, she rides the subway, sometimes just to go to work, sometimes "just for the sake of motion," and sometimes "to see [her] own ghostly reflection in the glass doors, bisected by highways and bridges

¹²⁴ See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981). Jameson's "immanent or anti-transcendent hermeneutic model" (23) is thus closely related to a study of literary genre. Suggesting the individual text is a "field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended," Jameson argues that through "a formal conjuncture," we can explore the sociopolitical conjuncture of coexisting modes of production" (98-99).

¹²⁵ Berlant, *op. cit.*, 5-6.

slicing through [her] legs” (94). This odd vitality of repetition of her lonely daily subway ride—“every night I ride” (95)—provides a mode of survival in lending her urban trajectories an everyday quality. How might we understand this curious quality of loneliness, imbued with a sense of injury and destruction as much as it is with persistence and mobility? Could we find in this instance of loneliness a new mode of diasporic adoptee subjectivity, one that is dissonant with and dismantles, if only quietly and slowly, the logic of human commodification? To address these questions, I would like to turn to a passage at the end of the text where Trenka explicitly remarks on her sense of loneliness:

And when I close my eyes and imagine Korea, despite the many places I have visited and the busyness of my life—my sixty-hour workweek surrounded by Korean colleagues, the company meals and the adoptee activist meetings, the nights of poker and clubbing with people from all over the world—the place that is most familiar to me is my own room, with its closed door. The closed door has moved from one building to another, one city to another, even as I have accumulated more books, more clothes, and even an electronic piano. But the loneliness behind each door of the first thousand nights has always been the same, the time always night, the season always rainy, water ever present in a country made up of only half a peninsula and a few hundred islands. (193)

This loneliness is not only a matter of epistemological isolation or ontological separation; it travels, it embeds itself in Trenka’s movement in the city. Throughout her diasporic urban existence, Trenka takes refuge in her loneliness, frequently associating it with her physical movements, whether through her different isolated small rooms in various temporary apartments or through her nightly subway ride. Trenka’s split self—between her enforced public persona as a successful global citizen and her inner being in constant conflict—finds in loneliness a temporary abeyance, even a form of relief. The figure of a small room with the door closed moves from one city to another as her only companion, as a psychic anchor, and as material evidence of the sheer fact of life. This image of

loneliness that shifts endlessly, physically and psychically with untiring mobility and curious vitality provides a form for Trenka's whole account of her experiences.

In "On the Sense of Loneliness" (1963), Melanie Klein insightfully describes loneliness not just as a weak and dysfunctional psychological state, but as a forceful affect enabling a constant interplay of internal and external worlds.¹²⁶ By connecting loneliness with a "yearning for an unattainable perfect internal state," Klein situates the sense of loneliness within the dynamics of her well-known psychic dyad—the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarks, Klein's psychoanalysis, in contrast to Freud's, is about the transformation of affective life. In lieu of Freudian psychoanalytic framework (theories of repression, external prohibition versus internal desire, Oedipal development), Klein provides a "uniquely spacious rubric" of psychic trajectories and languages of affective shuttling among anxiety, instability, dread, aggression, envy, hatred, and love.¹²⁷ Loneliness, for Klein, is an indispensable and impossible condition of the constant affective shuttling between the

¹²⁶ Melanie Klein, "On the Sense of Loneliness," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1984), 300.

¹²⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106:3 (Summer 2007), 636. To quote Sedgwick's comparison between Freud and Klein: "Overall, perhaps the crucial difference from Freud is that in Klein, what these primary defense mechanisms have to defend *against* is not prohibitive external impingement, as in Freud, but instead the devastating force of a largely endogenous anxiety. By analogy, in Tomkins, the conflict of substantive affects *with other substantive affects* is at least as basic and consequential as any conflict with outside forces, however intimately internalized. It is not mainly "civilization" that needs the individual to be different from the way she spontaneously is. The individual herself needs to be different, insofar as her intrinsic impulses conflict with one another even more drastically than they conflict with the claims of her environment. Instead of the undifferentiatedly blind, pleasure-seeking drives of the Freudian infant, which encounter no check but the originally external ones of prohibition or lack, the Kleinian infant experiences a greed whose aggressive and envious component is already perceived as posing a terrible threat both to her desired objects and to herself. The resulting primary anxiety is an affect so toxic that it probably ought to be called, not anxiety, but dread. It is against this endogenous dread that the primary defense" (633).

paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position toward the “unattainable perfect internal state.”

It is only step by step that integration can take place and the security achieved by it is liable to be disturbed under internal and external pressure; and this remains true throughout life. Full and permanent integration is never possible for some polarity between the life and death instincts always persists and remains the deepest source of conflict. Since full integration is never achieved, complete understanding and acceptance of one’s own emotions, phantasies and anxieties is not possible and this continues as an important factor in loneliness. The longing to understand oneself is also bound up with the need to be understood by the internalized good object.¹²⁸

It is the structural impossibility of overcoming paranoid and depressive anxieties—the impossibility of integration—that builds the foundation for loneliness. For Klein’s infant and adult,¹²⁹ the paranoid-schizoid position undergoes a splitting process—the splitting of impulses into good (object) and bad (object)—to avoid anxiety aroused by destructive impulses. The incapacity to bear anxiety in the schizophrenic is marked by the aggressive expulsion of bad parts of oneself onto objects, and generates feelings of fragmentation, helplessness, and finally loneliness: “The schizophrenic feels that he is hopelessly in bits and that he will never be in possession of his self...He cannot rely on an external and internal good object, nor can he rely on his own self...This factor is bound up with loneliness, for it increases the feeling of the schizophrenic that he is left alone, as it were, with his misery.”¹³⁰ In contrast to the paranoid, the depressive position seeks to preserve

¹²⁸ Klein, *op. cit.*, 302.

¹²⁹ See Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). As Sedgwick notes, in Klein’s later writings, “the occurrence of psychoticlike mental events is seen as universal in both children and adults, so that mechanisms such as paranoia have a clear ontological priority over diagnostic categories such as dementia” (129).

¹³⁰ Klein, *op. cit.*, 303.

the good object safely inside. But the loving impulse also comes with the destructive impulse, and this intertwining leads to a sense of inadequacy and loneliness: “[H]e feels the longing to have the good object safely inside to preserve and protect it. But this he feels unable to do since, at the same time, he has not sufficiently worked through the depressive position ... The longing to be able to overcome all these difficulties in relation to the good object is part of the feeling of loneliness.”¹³¹

The endless oscillation between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position, between destructive impulses and loving impulses, constitutes the Kleinian sense of life as loneliness, or equivalently, as constant movement. This mobility is implicit in her use of the concept of positions. As R.D. Hinshelwood points out, Klein suggests that “with the idea of position, a much more flexible to-and-fro process between one and the other than is normally meant by regression to fixation points in the developmental phases.”¹³² In this particular logic of flexibility, loneliness is understood not simply as an epistemological or ontological isolation or internal weakness. Rather, in this peripatetic shuttling between different psychic positions, loneliness appears as having an affective force and sensibility that enables and is enabled by the endless labor of the to-and-fro movement between destructive and loving impulses that is the condition of living: we live because we are lonely and we are lonely because we live.

Despite its resonance with Kleinian loneliness as a constant psychic shuttling with affective force, it would not be enough to say that Trenka’s loneliness in *Fugitive Visions*

¹³¹ Klein, *op. cit.*, 305.

¹³² R. D. Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1991), 394.

stems from the ubiquitous drive for the unattainable internal state of absolute integration. Trenka's sense of being alone, her struggle to make sense of her own destructive and loving impulses about her own self and her split sense of home, has its own particular historical roots: the history of human commodification in which Trenka, as an adoptee, is unavoidably involved. Trenka's split self between her public persona as a multinational and her inner being as a "failure" to be molded into that ideal of the two cultures is a psychic and ontological manifestation of historical contradictions. When she describes her heart's "irrational math" as one wherein "one Korea plus one America equals nothing—equals motherless, languageless, countryless" (186), we see that the material histories of human commodification are displaced by the human object's psychic and epistemological conundrum. While ruptures of urban commodification in the neocolonial city appear through haunted bodies and urban accidents in *Dogeaters*, as I discuss in the previous chapter, the history of infant commodification in the Cold War transpacific returns to the permanency of loneliness of the adoptee alive and adrift in an uncanny city. America's Cold War military intervention in Korea after World War II and its prolonged, shadowy presence in the age of multiculturalism and neoliberal globalization resonate throughout the adoptee's endless affective work as/through loneliness.

Trenka's loneliness is closely tied to her self-perception as a ghostly presence straddling subject and object. As discussed above, Trenka's inconsistent experiences of whiteness in the United States and South Korea—as a racializing signifier, and as a sign of linguistic capital—provide one strong example of the ambivalent adoptee subjectivity and objectivity. Whiteness—which in Minnesota had left her racially stigmatized and

“profoundly painful and lonely” (29)—is in Seoul translated into her new identity as an ideal global citizen equipped with a desirable American accent. This Korean identity is like “holographs,” as Eleana Kim insightfully describes: “turned one way, [she] appear[s] to be among the most privileged of cosmopolitans, turned the other, [she is] the ultimate subaltern as [an] ‘orphaned’ and ‘abandoned’ [child].”¹³³ Trenka’s loneliness in *Fugitive Visions* stems both from the fatigue she endures from her performances of objectivity and from her intermittent, repeated refusals to perform. Loneliness can be the result or an affective residue of the temporary abeyance of engaging in the particular chain of camouflages. Hence, as in the passage above, her nightly subway ride is a reprieve from the imperative to perform and, at the same time, an experience as witness to the ghostliness of her diasporic being in the reflection on the subway window.

From a slightly different angle, we might say that the psychic, ontological, and epistemological disorientation embodied in Trenka’s loneliness complicates the neoliberal subject-making logic of “flexible citizenship.” Writing within the field of Anthropology, Aihwa Ong describes flexible citizenship as an emergent form of privileged diasporic subjectivity. In Ong’s account, multinational citizenship offers strategies for subjects to accumulate capital and power. Flexibility becomes a structuring principle for upward mobility and empowerment in the globalized world.¹³⁴ In Trenka’s diasporic journey, however, this model of flexibility fails. While Trenka’s work of

¹³³ Kim, *op. cit.*, 8.

¹³⁴ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 6.

teaching English is paid fairly according to labor time, her emotional labor, her “heart’s irrational math,” is unceasing and incalculable. Her endless and unrewarded affective labor thus attests to the psychic costs of transnational adoption. As many feminist scholars argue, affective labor is broadly defined by its incalculability—people (or women) do work but the value of their labor is not rationally calculated, as in wage labor, but is usually left uncalculated or simply ignored.¹³⁵ Trenka’s “irrational” affective work, its incommensurability, generates a distinctive form of diasporic subjectivity I would like to call non-flexible citizenship. Unlike any liberal form of diasporic subjectivity that might be skillfully strategic and free from historical weight, Trenka’s non-flexible citizenship refers to an instance of a certain refusal of any facile signification or translation of adoptee subjectivity.

Trenka’s loneliness can also be defined by this non-flexibility and the refusal, even if not willful or affirmative, to participate in the self-promoting self-commodifying chain. It is not a passive or disabling affective immobility contained in debilitation or self-imposed isolation. Instead, loneliness in *Fugitive Vision* is an indispensable affective remainder of a withdrawal from the compulsion to perform. It also denotes a psychic and ontological state punctuated with the seething labor that suspends the smooth operation of the performance of flexible transnationality. In his reading of Marx’s logic of the

¹³⁵ See Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A feminist Sociology* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1987), Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), Eva Kittay, *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999). As for global division of women’s affective labor, see *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*, eds. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2003).

commodity, Jacques Derrida describes the moment when a thing-object is transformed into the commodity-fetish through the metaphor of a ghost dance on the stage that “puts everything around it into motion”: once an object enters the stage of commodification, the social relation between producers and the thing-object disappears, and only the ceaseless signifying chains of commodities remain. Once it steps into the ghost dance, an object can never easily put its feet back down to earth. Trenka’s loneliness is an extraordinary affective state that emerges when a human-object arduously struggles to make it out from the ghost dance. Stepping out of the ghostly commodifying chain that marks time as an ahistorical trance, Trenka’s loneliness paradoxically confronts the haunted image of her disfigured body, the thick dialectical image linking the past and the present.

“I am still at war with myself ... in this beautiful terrible city” (139, 133), Trenka writes, grappling with her destructive and loving impulses towards her own self and her split sense of home. Whether in her daily subway ride or in the small, isolated rooms that remain the same from one city to another, Trenka’s loneliness inescapably calls upon her own self as “still at war,” a perpetual, an unending war. This invocation of war not only indicates that her troubled and effortful life in the city is an intense affective front, but it also echoes the actual war that launched the practice of Korean adoption and has since overshadowed the complicated history of adoptee commodification in which Trenka is involved. Beginning with the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), the history of Korean adoption reflects the devastation left by the conflict and the efforts towards repair that followed. In *First Person Plural* (2000), a personal documentary about a Korean adoptee,

Deann Borshay Liem narrates the interconnected history of the Korean War and transnational Korean adoption:

The Korean War ended in 1953, leaving the country devastated. A huge international relief effort began, aimed at helping thousands of destitute families and orphans. In 1955, Harry Holt began a small rescue operation of children orphaned by the war. Tens of thousands of orphans were subsequently sent overseas for adoption by American and European families. As the years passed, the South Korean government began rebuilding the country, but there was no plan to deal with widespread poverty, orphans, or families in need... What Harry Holt began as a humanitarian gesture right after the war became big business in the decades that followed. South Korea became the largest supplier of children to developed countries in the world, causing some to argue that the country's economic miracle was due in part to the export of its most precious natural recourse—its children.

Throughout this transformation of the humanitarian project into a business transaction, adoption generates a site of invisible labor supporting South Korean modernization. Jin-kyung Lee observes that invisible labors that have been barely considered or calculated as formal labors (i.e., the military work of Korean soldiers in Vietnam, prostitutes' sex work, migrant workers' illegal labor) are, alongside mainstream industrial wage labors, “significant driving forces behind the ‘miracle’ of South Korean industrialization and the postindustrial South Korean state and capital.”¹³⁶ In a similar vein, Trenka's unending war with herself is one kind of invisible labor that the “exported” children inconspicuously perform in contribution to this phenomenal, rapid growth.

I would like to end this section by speculating on the epistemological challenge that the affective specificity of loneliness in *Fugitive Visions* creates, particularly in the context of Cold War knowledge production. Jodi Kim argues that the Cold War is not

¹³⁶ Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 27.

simply a historical period that saw its end with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Rather, the Cold War “continues to enjoy a persisting recursiveness when seen as a structure of feeling, a knowledge project, and a hermeneutics for interpreting developments in the “post”-Cold War conjuncture.”¹³⁷ As an epistemology, the Cold War has its own mode of survival, what Kim calls the “*protracted afterlife* of the Cold War,” a “resonance that exceeds and outlasts the event itself.”¹³⁸ In conceptualizing Asian American cultural productions as an “unsettling hermeneutic” that critically respond to gendered and racial optics in Cold War historiography, Kim mobilizes Asian American cultural formation beyond its tamed domesticity of multiculturalism to situate it within a global cultural critique of U.S. neoimperial domination. While rendering a critical genealogy of the Cold War as a genealogy of American empire, Kim’s project follows various “ends” of empire, the lingering effects and affects of the gendered racialized formation of Asian America. Culture itself, Kim argues, is a site of powerful dis/articulation of knowledge.

Seen from this perspective, *Fugitive Visions* is about one of the “ends” of U.S. Cold War intervention in Asia: the afterlives of transnational adoption. Chronicling her particular diasporic experience, Trenka alternately maps out and critically indexes global histories of American liberalism tied to imperialism in Asia and its gendered racial logics supporting America’s white bourgeois ideal. Persistent and pervasive, the idea and ideal of America travel across the Pacific in and after the Cold War era intersects with and

¹³⁷ Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.

¹³⁸ Kim, *ibid*, 4, 3.

supports U.S. imperialist governing tactics for political, economic, and cultural domination. The American imperial project operates through flexible strategies of governmentality that include military intervention, economic adjustment, and, more recently, a neoliberal self-governing principle. As Inderpal Grewal notes, America as a discourse (not just signifier) of neoliberalism promotes and circulates global consumer citizenship whose biopolitical aspects support and strengthen the geopolitical domination of the United States.¹³⁹ As a vexed Cold War subject, Trenka's journey as a returned adoptee rewrites and reinscribes the prolonged history of the Cold War as epistemology and knowledge production.

How then might we understand the relationship between Trenka's sense of loneliness and the alternative knowledge production that *Fugitive Visions* engages? Might this seemingly weak quality of affect become an instance of knowledge? If so, then what kind of knowledge would that be? In order to answer these questions, I would like to turn to this memoir's dual textual orientations, which I will label, respectively, the orientation of exposure and the orientation of life. While the vitality of loneliness defining Trenka's psychic and material trajectory is a figurative commentary on the lingering effects of the Korean War, *Fugitive Visions* also contains direct critiques and comments on the absurdities and contradictions of Korean adoption. One of the more straightforward criticisms appears when Trenka links international Korean adoption to the civilian massacre of suspected communists at Nogunri that occurred under U.S. military rule early

¹³⁹ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

in the Korean War.¹⁴⁰ Trenka parallels Nogunri massacre as “mass civilian sacrifice” (87) to the “expulsion of children” (94): “It is estimated that around two thousand children were sent out of South Korea for adoption, but we will never really know. Many were sent without being recorded. To count us exactly is impossible. This expulsion of children, as if we had done something to deserve it, is also a kind of “mass civilian sacrifice” (94).

This form of knowledge as exposure explicitly produces counter-knowledge opposed to the euphoric trope of the “Asia-Pacific” as a corporate and military community, or to Cold War discourses of America as representing liberalism and freedom. Trenka’s juxtaposition of a mass civilian massacre a half century ago with the afterlives of transnational adoption unveils the other side of these hegemonic views of American Cold War politics. Likewise, her vivid sketches and direct comments on the contradictions of multiculturalism in South Korea provide valuable resources to reveal an exploitative dimension of neoliberal globalization: “Koreans lump the adoptees together with the foreign brides and migrant workers under the theme of “multiculturalism” (105); “An English teacher can eat out every day, and always leave food on the restaurant table. There’s a center here for migrant workers and foreign brides from poor parts of Asia.

¹⁴⁰ It was not until 1999 when a team of AP journalists reported on the carnage that the massacre at Nogunri was known publicly outside Korea. Following this revelation, an extensive investigation by the Pentagon was launched, some fifty years after the event itself. In 2001, the Pentagon acknowledged the killings. Referring to the event as “an unfortunate tragedy inherent to war and not a deliberate killing,” the U.S. government rejected survivors’ demands for an apology and compensation. According to Sahr Conway-Lanz, the massacre at Nogunri could have been the Korean War’s equivalent of the My Lai massacre (in which American soldiers during the Vietnam War killed more than 500 Vietnamese villagers). *Collateral Damage: Americans Noncombatant Immunity and Atrocity after World War II* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 96.

They are exploited as everyone knows” (14). These occasionally scathing journalistic accounts constitute the orientation of exposure in *Fugitive Visions*—the will to alternative knowledge, the desire to debunk and to uncover a hidden dimension of existing truth. This mode of knowledge production as exposure resonates with what Sedgwick calls the program of “paranoid epistemology” that aims at the “detection of hidden patterns of violence and their exposure.”¹⁴¹ Just as paranoia as a pathological psychic condition is characterized by cognitive fragmentation and constant suspicion, paranoid epistemology as an intellectual practice engages what Paul Ricoeur calls the hermeneutics of suspicion, directed at “the process of false consciousness and the method of deciphering.”¹⁴²

Loneliness itself does not unveil anything. However, it is out of this weak and small scale of loneliness that *Fugitive Visions* derives its particular textual energies, its affective terms, and its ethical pedagogy demanding what is “forgiving, truthful, and abundant” (194). Distinct from the mode of excavating hidden truth, i.e. the orientation of exposure, loneliness offers a mode of what Cvetkovich calls “sensational knowledge,”

¹⁴¹ Sedgwick, 2003, 143.

¹⁴² Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 34. Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of suspicion” as a demystifying protocol has been a dominant mode of interpretation in literary criticism for the last few decades. Based on the belief in hidden meaning and excavation of the veiled truth, the “hermeneutics of suspicion” or “symptomatic reading” has enjoyed massive methodological power along with the acceptance of psychoanalysis and Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s. For a revisionist approach to symptomatic reading from a vantage point of surface reading, see *Representations* 108 (Fall 2009), a special issue on the topic of surface reading. See also Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; Or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You,” in which she attempts to situate symptomatic reading as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice as having features of a strong theory (in terms of the size and topology of the domain that it organizes), of a theory of negative affects, and as having qualities of anticipatory, reflexive and mimetic, and exposure. Drawing on Melanie Klein’s work, Sedgwick seeks to formulate the practice of reparative reading as a weak theory that contains instances of surprise and pleasure.

where we may see the convergences and disjunctions between systemic violence and lived experience.¹⁴³ As a moment in which abstract systems or historical pressures are felt and lived, loneliness provides an affective language to describe and understand the feeling of life under and after violence. Bounded yet paradoxically boundless, loneliness is the drifting home and womb of the text of *Fugitive Visions*: “Once inside, I lock my door and write for hours” (150). If trauma refers to a “break in the lifeline,” as D. W. Winnicott tells us,¹⁴⁴ what Trenka enacts is the toiling process of translation of that crack, disruption, and dissociation into a language of rhythm, motion, and survival. Indeed, it is another kind of work—a reformation of life after injury. Whether in subway ride or in her small, isolated rooms, Trenka’s loneliness invokes her desire for living, the yearning for life:

The subway of Seoul...its train cars, where every night I ride...its shining windows a mirrored reality in which my reflected body is slivered into parts, to match the way my life, my mind, has been. Yet despite the catharsis of watching cars and trains rush through my body without pause, despite the possibility expressed in the vibration of the floor (there is not much between the floor and the tracks below), and despite the adoptee who, one year ago, jumped from a tall building, and how we adoptees in Seoul, who are all in various degrees of suiciding our Western lives, talk about him often (we are never surprised by an adoptee death, nor do we work very hard at trying to convince our friends to stay alive)—despite all these abandonments, all these tiny annihilations—I want to live. Despite everything they took away, despite that I am lost and alone, despite that so many times I have been close to death, I want to live. (95)

I have lived in Korea for a thousand days, and I would like to live in Korea for at least a thousand more. However those thousand days come, let them come. Let them be rainy, let them be snowy, let them be full of sunshine and smog. Let the typhoons and the yellow dust storms rage and cease, rage and cease. Let my days be filled with the people who are my own, no matter how hurt, how complex, how simple. Let my nights end breathing in harmony with a man whom I have

¹⁴³ Cvetkovich, op. cit., 42-44.

¹⁴⁴ Cited in Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 179.

never seen, but whose habits I know, and who sleeps on the opposite side of the wall. If loneliness has chosen me as its bride, let it have me. In my loneliness, let me be whole. In my loneliness, let me be human. Let me believe in the humanity of other people. Let them believe in mine. Let my spirit not be extinguished... We will arrive alone and together at the end. (193-4)

It is the reparative exigencies of life that inflect her loneliness with its peculiar character.

By ending the book with the invocation of loneliness as life, Trenka foregrounds an idiosyncratic affective quality that is difficult to decode through ideological critique or systemic analysis. In her first book, *The Language of Blood* (2003), which she calls a book written to mourn her birth mother's death, Trenka delves into the issue of maternal predicaments in adoption narratives. The book thus offers something like her unfinished letters to both her biological and adopted mothers.¹⁴⁵ While Trenka's second book, *Fugitive Visions*, shifts to explorations of social kinship with her adoptee friends in Seoul and her everyday negotiations of global citizenship, the memoir ends where these alternative forms of kinship seem to fail to bind her and cease to offer a gift of belonging.

Trenka's language of affect moves differently from efforts at alternative kinship; it also distances itself from any developmental narratology or ideologically or discursively addressed subjectivity. Challenging what Anne Anlin Cheng calls the "documentary impulse" that motivates the ethnic *Bildung* toward the narrative of truth or redemption,¹⁴⁶ Trenka's memoir repeatedly returns to the site of her struggles, psychic

¹⁴⁵ Jane Jeong Trenka, *The Language of Blood* (Minnesota, MN: Graywolf Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁶ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139-168. In her analysis of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*, Cheng points out the documentary desire in minority and ethnographic discourse that accompanies what Leo Bersani calls the "corrective will" in *The Culture of Redemption* regarding the redemptive virtues of literature. By stressing the antidocumentary aspect of Cha's text, Cheng argues that "This antidocumentary document takes apart traditional historic concepts of periodization, making it impossible to retrieve or recite historical atrocity as containable events. This does not mean that Cha is proposing the

and physical, to the myriad moments of vacillation and faltering, the varied locations of failure and abandonment—all of which emerge through and as loneliness in *Fugitive Visions*. Through the portrayal of the incessant movement that strives to “make sense out of unease, dis-ease” (23), *Fugitive Visions* orients itself towards the curious mobility and vitality of loneliness as an aesthetic *situation*—situation, to follow Berlant’s definition again, as a social time and space in which an animated suspension in the ordinary bridges the past and the present. Trenka’s memoir commits to an affective disquiet, not to a literal truth, that interrupts the structure and progress of developmental narrative, whether personal or historical.

Adoption Narrative, the Fort-da Play, and the Cold War Transpacific

By way of conclusion, I would like to speculate briefly on the affinity of Trenka’s text as an adoption narrative with Freud’s theory of *fort-da* play. In my introduction, I show how the violence of World War I and the theory of shell shock on which trauma is based is transformed into everyday trauma through the child’s *fort-da* game, and I discuss how Asian American cultural texts revisit and revise Freud’s paradigm in the context of the Cold War transpacific. While the *fort-da* episode is a displacement of the accidental event into the everyday, it can also be read as a child’s play for compensating the loss of the mother, in which he spaces his own reparative territory and displays its affective

sanctification/silencing of traumatic history. On the contrary, the very form of *Dict é* suggests that the documentation of history must be recognized as itself a process of pluralization and performative reiteration” (145).

language of “o-o-o (fort: gone)” and “a-a-a (da: here).” In this case, the traumatic event is displaced by a present performance. The play of the *fort-da* does not just return to the site of damage but creates a reparative space by alternately repeating and reenacting loss and recovery.

At the beginning of *Fugitive Visions*, Trenka offers a meta-commentary on her work of writing through a story of rebuilding herself as a pianist back in Minnesota, where she grew up and spent her twenties. She begins with a recollection of her returning to the piano when her new piano teacher assigns her Sergei Prokofiev’s *Visions Fugitives* to master. What she learns from this “one last-ditch effort” (20) to rebuild herself as a pianist, after experiencing inexpressible pain in her hands and incurable stage fright, is how to create movement: the “gymnastics of choreography” (20) of using your own body. Her return to the piano is a physical as much as psychical exercise that enables her to work through her “lack of faith in big leaps” (22) and “fear [that was] ... knotted up in the piano” (23). The choreographic motion for playing *Visions Fugitives*, the shuttling between the mechanical and the spiritual, between the muscular and the psychological, is a lesson in which she stretches herself. “It is a lesson in how to be free” (22), she writes. Shifting to the present, in her small *gositel* room in Seoul, temporary housing for people in transition, Trenka is about to play her own *Fugitive Visions* without her black grand piano:

Music is a place where we can sort out what can and cannot be saved—money, time, children, sinners. Here is a scale that weighs the love of mothers: empty your pockets before you step up. Here is luck, here is solitude, here are the cribs of an orphanage. See how they are lined up like the keys of a piano. (23)

Indeed, her memoir itself is an exercise of playing a “piece”—*Fugitive Visions*, of course, comes from Prokofiev’s *Visions Fugitives*. With her memories and life serving as piano keys, Trenka learns and practices how to listen to fleeting reflections, how to figure out fading images, and how to establish a different temporality: “It is only an elaborate working out of a single motive, repetition and layering, side by side, right hand first, staggered and staggering against the left, contrary motion” (53). Without a recognizable linearity that would prompt a developmental narrative and a unified subject’s progress toward an affirmative ending, this memoir repeatedly calls attention to the stuttering, faltering site of Trenka’s struggle. As such, *Fugitive Visions* leads us to the peripatetic and performative terrain of trauma.

This image of a lonely writer—the figure of an adult orphan, with the small hands of an average nine-year-old’s, who works to stretch her span trying to deliver a reparative performance of an assigned piece after injury—is Trenka’s emblem of the adoptee of her narrative. In Trenka’s text, the debris of dreams, memoirs, histories, and narratives are the piano keys of performance, re-collected and re-assembled for the present moment of enactment. The sense of constant motion, the persistent translation of scattered and shattered traces of life into something worth a struggle in the present, characterizes the memoir’s work of writing. A double movement between re-collection of the past and re-orientation in the present offer a literary configuration of repetition compulsion, the psychic logic of trauma that brings the subject back repetitively to the site of injury and causes her to awake into another reality.

Fugitive Visions shares with the *fort-da* anecdote an ordinary, constant shuttling between the working through and acting out of trauma. Just as the child is preoccupied with the never-ending play of reminiscences and retrieval, Trenka painstakingly attempts to bring discomfiting memories and traces of loss to the present, displaying her own affective language of “here” and “away.” Instead of the logic of the mimesis of trauma—the consistent return and assimilation to, as well as identification with, the same catastrophic scene—*Fugitive Visions* displaces identity with difference, punctuality with persistence, and eventness with everydayness, and thereby generates for Trenka moments as well as movements of creation “within her reach.”

Allegretto

A melodeon’s pumping rhythm mechanical tune
 Chromatic means strike each key
 Repeat it at the fifth reproduce it at the octave
 Children of mysterious birth
 Who were sent across oceans inside sealed papers
 Who appeared, before which they had disappeared
 Who encountered strangers in strange lands
 Who responded to terror as if mechanical
 Who repeated the terror reproduced (37)

The event of crossing oceans, fraught with “terror,” what Trenka describes elsewhere in the text as her “transpacific experience mutilated” (64), is transported and translated into the musical temporality of “pumping rhythm.” And the subject who is addressed to

participate in playing a given piece becomes a plural collectivity: “Children of mysterious birth.” As implicit in the imperatives arranged around a hesitant blank pause, “Repeat it at the fifth reproduce it at the octave,” this process of displacement from what happened in the past to what is live or living in the present is never easy, but inevitable and necessary. As in the repetition compulsion of trauma, *Fugitive Visions* is preoccupied with an imperative to replay the past, but it enacts repetition in difference. Trenka’s repetitions have to come at a different place and time: either “at the fifth” or “at the octave.” As with the child in his *fort-da* play, Trenka’s “traumatic memory is trapped in time, always occurring in the present tense, its syntax *object, object, object*” (160). But this time is “deep play”¹⁴⁷—play that is quite serious and even a matter of life and survival, the collective project of the “children of mysterious birth.”

In her analysis of Freud’s *fort-da* game, Cathy Caruth connects the child’s own stammer to the stammer of Freud himself (his oscillations regarding analysis of the game) as he encountered the devastations of World War I as a psychoanalyst.¹⁴⁸ What Caruth

¹⁴⁷ I borrow this concept of “deep play” from Dominick LaCapra’s citation of Clifford Geertz. In his reading of the *fort-da* game in *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). LaCapra focuses on a “serious” dimension of the game, on a moment of suspension between mourning (the process of libidinal withdrawal from lost objects) and melancholia (the failure or refusal of that process of mourning). He writes that “One might speculate that the game would seem to combine a compulsive repetition that is acted out as well as an attempt to achieve some control over events and, to some extent, work through them. It would thus be suspended between melancholia and mourning with respect to an absent object that is easily experienced or interpreted as lost. When the first part of the game is autonomized, one would seem caught up in a melancholic loop that comes close to endless grieving. If these speculations are correct, the game is a crucial instance of what Clifford Geertz refers to as “deep play” —play that is quite serious and even a matter of life and death” (50).

¹⁴⁸ Cathy Caruth, “Parting Words: Trauma, Silence and Survival,” *Cultural Values* 5:1 (January 2001). According to Caruth, the episode of the *fort-da* game has not always been a part of the tradition of trauma theory. Rather, it has typically been interpreted as a game of mourning rather than as an expression of trauma. “The received understanding of the game is that it represents a form of mastery and is thus, not strictly speaking, purely traumatic repetition —unless traumatic repetition is understood as already itself a form of mastering. Freud does suggest at one point in his analysis that the game may express a principle of

reads in the stammering struggles of both the protagonist and interpreter of the *fort-da* is “the drive to life” to displace the death drive with a new language of life and survival that has yet to be articulated. Caruth writes that “It is through the child’s own stammer—the stammer of Freud as he faces the encounter with World War I, the reduction of the theoretical mind to the stammering struggle of the child—that Freud will first tell us about the necessity of witnessing the effects of death in the century of trauma.”¹⁴⁹

Likewise, Trenka’s own language of the child—the not-yet-fully articulated, affective language of theory—is a site of witness to the afterlives of Cold War violence that still encroach on the everyday. Just as Freud’s *fort-da* juxtaposes (however tentatively) the nightmares of war with a child’s game, Trenka writes not just the poignant infiltration of violence into the ordinary but also the troubling union of war and the transactions of infant lives. As both a protagonist and an interpreter of her own play of the *fort-da*, Trenka ceaselessly acts out and works through the multiple outcomes and various tales of the loss of the mother. The adoptee, once an object tossed back and forth across national borders like a spindle in the *fort-da* game, thus speaks back and creates an imaginary reparative territory across the Pacific. Indeed, as Freud tells us, in the *fort-da* play, “At the outset he [is] in a *passive* situation—he [is] overpowered by the experience;

mastery ‘beyond the pleasure principle’ but the peculiarity of such repetition is rarely explored within traditional analyses” (22). Caruth mentions Jacques Derrida’s *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* and Jacques Lacan’s reading of the *fort-da* game in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* as examples of interpreting the game of the *fort-da* in terms of traumatic repetition.

¹⁴⁹ Caruth, *ibid.*, 19.

but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it [is], as a game, he [takes] on an *active* part.”¹⁵⁰

Hence, the *fort-da* play becomes the child’s “first great cultural achievement.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1961), 15 (emphasis in original).

¹⁵¹ Freud, *ibid*, 14.

CHAPTER THREE

Affects and Ethics of the Gift in Aimee Phan's *We Should Never Meet*

Perhaps, figuring out the collective story of “how we die” runs the risk of silencing the story of how we live.

—Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightslessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*

Aimee Phan's experimental collection of interlinked short stories, gathered under the title *We Should Never Meet* (2004), engages a variety of forms of “failed” reciprocity. Inspired by Operation Babylift, the case of militarized transnational adoption that sent Vietnamese orphans to the United States during the Vietnam War, Phan's collection interweaves different stories of young adult adoptees and refugees in California's Little Saigon and portrays their experiences of betrayal, ingratitude, and miscommunication. In these stories, gifts are not exchanged, signs of favor are misunderstood, and good intentions are paid back by violence. This chapter explores the multiple episodes and emotions constituting the conundrum of reciprocity interwoven throughout this work. In particular, I place these stories in dialogue with the dominant narrative of reconciliatory reciprocity between Vietnam and the United States after the war and with the dominant, teleological figuration of the refugee as desperate alien-turned-grateful guest. My key argument is that Phan presents instances of disintegration and dislocation that threaten the “good” equilibrium of this reparative narrative, one that would promote progress and relegate the unassimilated refugee to the condition of a “bad” and ungrateful visitor.

Writing against this state-to-state moral economy, Phan renders what is foreclosed from the symbolic narrative of the “good” perpetrator (apologizing and benevolent America) and “good” victim (forgiving and grateful refugee figure); she turns to an ethical realm that unfolds the dysfunctional site of that particular “good” teleology and renders a possible alternative mode of being and belonging.

The trope of the gift is the underlying concept in my reading of Phan’s composite collection against the backdrop of the U.S. liberal imperialist epistemology operative in refugee figurations. Building on Mimi Thi Nguyen’s work on the gift of freedom as an affective-moral economy between a freedom-giving empire and indebted refugees, I show that Phan’s characters contest the logic of moral imprisonment and linear temporality through their eccentric embodiments of time and subjectivity. As Nguyen argues, if the gift of freedom is a new logic of biopolitical domination that affectively binds and controls Vietnamese refugees, it is also a regulation of time extending the period of affective confinement without end (indeed, it is almost impossible to find a proper endpoint for gratitude). While Nguyen highlights the duration of this time as a prolonged domination and as an invitation into the proper timetable of universal history, Phan’s characters present a temporal otherness that has an oblique relationship to the symbolic economy of the gift of freedom. In Phan’s literary world, “failed” reciprocity accompanies adoptee/refugee figures’ frustrated longings and belongings, which themselves often result in violence or suspended character development: they are outside of the gift of freedom.

In discussing the peculiar temporality that Phan's characters embody, I take insight from Jacques Derrida's deconstructive understanding of the time of the gift. In the first half of this chapter, I delve into Derrida's formulation of the gift as *the gift of time* (not simply an act of giving an object to somebody), disrupting the symbolic circle of the gift and allowing a radical temporal break. While Derrida's deconstructive thinking renders the gift as an unsettling event or a coming of the other that "will have taken place," Phan displaces this scene of waiting, the hospitable gesture of spacing to let the other arrive in a future to come (*à-venir*), with her own portrayals of the complicated arrival and survival of the historically objectified other. What is notable in Phan's stories is an urgency of the time of the present in opposition to Derridian waiting for the future-to-come. Focusing on stories set in Little Saigon, I explore the way Phan mobilizes the deconstructive frame of *the gift of time* within the social and exposes sudden temporal interruptions of refugee teleology. In particular, a small gift shop in *We Should Never Meet* functions as an affective channel through which the unfulfilled wished-for belongings of young adult adoptees and refugees circulate, confront one another, and erupt unexpectedly. In one story, an adoptee's frustration at the shop owner's refusal to lend her money, despite her feelings for that owner as a quasi-mother figure, leads to a vengeful attack on the gift shop by her foster brother and ex-boyfriend's gang. Instead of attempting to morally recuperate the disturbed emotional responses of rebellious children or sentimentalize the adoptee's failed desires for familial intimacy, Phan turns to a temporal crack that the gift shop materializes, one that unhinges the developmental narrative of the desperate alien-turned-grateful guest.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore the way Phan presents the register of hesitancy as a subjective counterpart to suspended time and space. Phan's characters linger in the space of transition from desperate to assimilated. As an embodiment of interrupted time, hesitancy in *We Should Never Meet* contours and overshadows equivocal feelings and delayed decisions straddling a static and traumatic immobility and a complete state of reform and assimilation. I argue that this rendering of adoptee/refugee figures as being in a state of hesitancy, filled with a constant psychic and physical labor after loss, constitutes an alternative affective knowledge countering the tendency to pathologize refugees. After the Vietnam War, the category of trauma was differently (and unequally) applied to Vietnamese refugees and American veterans. While the traumatic symptoms of American soldiers were considered to be evidence of humanity and functioned as a decisive factor in the institution of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) as a clinical category, comparable experiences of Vietnamese refugees, such as repetitive compulsion of being helplessly drawn to the past, caused them to be confined to the category of the underdeveloped. Phan's model of hesitancy stands on the ambivalent status between traumatic punctuation and developmental reparation; it interrupts repetition compulsion, the mimetic tendency to return to the same traumatic scene, but it neither entirely liberates from damage nor moves forward without residues of injury. Hesitancy in Phan's work amounts to the status of a threshold signaling transgressions of the circle of normalization and demonstrating the diffraction of the logic of the gift of freedom.

Building on my previous chapter's discussion of the ordinariness of crisis as an everyday manifestation of trauma in *Fugitive Visions*, I will argue in this chapter for the interventionist potential of the everydayness of adoptee/refugee trauma in the dominant remembrance of the Vietnam War in America. If America remembers the war in the spatial and temporal fixation of its eventness through monumental architecture such as Washington Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Phan relocates and reembodies memory by addressing unrehabilitated bodies and unreconciled residues of feeling in mundane places such as a gift shop in an ethnic enclave. In this way, Phan, much in the same manner as Hagedorn and Trenka, shows that everyday events and experiences constitute the site and structure within which transnational Cold War history in the transpacific is lived and felt. In so doing, these writers illustrate the potential of trauma theory as a minor historiography revising imperialist epistemologies.

In my conclusion, I provide a short speculation on the aesthetics of hesitancy. Each of Phan's stories ends with an opaque and ambiguous last scene without offering any aesthetic relief or catharsis. Building on Anne Anlin Cheng's formulation of "a state of hermeneutic uncertainty" and Sianne Ngai's "amoral and *noncathartic*" ugly feelings of suspended agency, I argue that the overall tone of hesitancy in *We Should Never Meet* embodies an aesthetic-ethical call that does not allow an easy flight into moral surrender or aesthetic relief, but that allows the persistent struggles and vibrant motions of the everyday to enter the textual space. Hesitancy is a mode of being that lives inside but is not entirely subsumed within a proper temporal mode; it is also a mode of thinking that pays careful attention to uncertainty and indeterminacy. Through this means, I suggest,

Phan offers another archive of affective knowledge resistant of imperial ontology and epistemology.

Suspended Time in the Gift Shop

In “Emancipation,” one of the short stories in *We Should Never Meet*, Phan introduces the character Mai, who came to America from Vietnam after the Vietnam War as a boat refugee. The story takes place on Mai’s eighteenth birthday, which is also the day that Mai is to be emancipated from her foster home. Mai spends the day worried about her college application essay, in which she “play[ed] up” (147) her experience as an orphaned refugee boat child. When Mai returns home at the end of the day, she discovers a white envelope from Wellesley College, placed next to the birthday presents from her foster parents whose obligation to shelter her has come to an end. In this very moment when the reader’s expectations of results are at their highest, the story ends abruptly with the following two short sentences: “Mai pressed the light switch off. She went upstairs to bed” (170). Mai’s day of waiting for her college acceptance results as well as her mixed feelings about emancipation is confronted with a moment of suspense, and we are left only with the image of the unopened letter and gifts.

In writing her application essay, Mai tries to align her own story with the narrative of progress in conventional refugee figurations, which Yen Le Espiritu has dubbed a “desperate-turned-successful”¹⁵² teleology. As Mai embellishes her experience,

¹⁵² Yen Le Espiritu, “Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (2006), 410-33.

she recollects “all the sympathies people had projected on her all her life”: “Her life had to be worse to count for something. So she played it up” (147). Following this revelation of Mai’s self-consciousness about her performativity of the reformed rescued self and finally presenting her indecision with respect to being placed commensurate to the common sensibility of “sympathies,” Phan provides us with a moment that defers and disturbs the smooth line of development conjured up by the image of the desperate-turned-successful. The juxtaposition of the unopened letter and gifts thus serves as a signifier of a state of withholding and hesitancy at work throughout the story and throughout Phan’s collection as a whole that interrupts and complicates the optimistic linearity of the narrative of the dramatic metamorphosis of refugee figures.

Indeed, the stories in *We Should Never Meet* are infused with the trope of the suspended gift. Inspired by Operation Babylift, a case of militarized transnational adoption that sent Vietnamese orphans to the United States during the Vietnam War,¹⁵³ the stories of young adult adoptees and refugees portray a series of scenes and emotions centered around the figure of the gift that are marked by miscommunication, ingratitude, betrayal, and uncertainty, as characters straddle and shuttle between the war and its afterlives. If every gift forms its own economy binding the giver and the recipient together, the characters in *We Should Never Meet* all seem to exist outside of this circuit

¹⁵³ In *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) Jodi Kim offers a sketch of the background of Operation Babylift as follows: “On April 2, 1975, President Ford announced that \$2 million would be directed from the Special Foreign Aid Children’s Fund to fly two thousand South Vietnamese families. Many critiqued what came to be called Operation Babylift as one last desperate publicity ploy or photo opportunity to gain sympathy and thus more funding for the war ... It provokes the mantra that ‘First you destroy our country, and then you rescue our children’” (203).

of reciprocal commonality, regardless of the specific circumstances of each gift. Moreover, as in Mai's story above, the conundrum of the gift in these stories operates in conjunction with the question of time, in particular that of the imagined teleology of refugees. Phan presents an eccentric temporality incommensurate and inassimilable to the flattened line of forward movement from past to future.

Interweaving the ordinary lives and difficulties of young adult adoptees and refugees in Little Saigon with stories of people in Vietnam during the war, Phan offers an interlinked transhistorical zone where the war that occurred in the past insistently recurs and haunts survivors in the present. Phan's stories, all loosely connected, follow three young adoptees and refugees: Kim, a mixed-race girl who came to the United States as part of Operation Babylift, and Kim's foster siblings Mai and Vinh, who were boat refugees. Besides these three, Miss Lien, a young woman who gives up her baby during the war, and American volunteers and Vietnamese nuns who also lived through the war-torn devastation, all render their experiences of the war on Vietnam soil. Through these stories, Phan renders a particular cross-temporal and cross-spatial correspondence between the mundane and the exceptional as a way of reflecting on the war and its afterlives. The particular way that *We Should Never Meet* remembers the war stems from the recognition that, to cite Cathy Caruth, "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 58.

Marita Sturken observes that America has remembered the Vietnam War by spatially and temporally enclosing its eventness into monumental architecture such as the celebrated Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Placing the war in the unmovable past and into the confined space of the physical memorial, this particular form of architectural memory seeks to recuperate historical injuries. Sturken aptly describes the operations of this spatialized form of memory:

Questions of public remembrance of the Vietnam War can be examined through the concept of the screen. A screen is a surface that is projected upon; it is also an object that hides something from view, that shelters or protects. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. both shields and is projected upon; the black walls of the memorial act as screens for innumerable projections of memory and history—of the United States’ participation in the Vietnam War and of the experiences of Vietnam veterans since the war. (44)

Sturken proposes the flattened screen, exemplified by the black stone wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial,¹⁵⁵ offers a distinctive form of memory that has dominated the public remembrance of the Vietnam War in America. As much as such objects are intended to reveal or display, the wall and the screen of architectural memory also hide something from view. The visibility that is sanctioned by a predominant form of memory preconditions a certain invisibility. If we recall that visibility is “a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness,”¹⁵⁶ then what Phan presents to us is the realm of the

¹⁵⁵ Sturken describes the black wall in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as follows: “The black stone creates a reflective surface, one that echoes the reflecting pool of the Lincoln Memorial and allows viewers to participate in the memorial; seeing their own image reflected in the names, they are implicated in the listing of the dead. The etched surface of the memorial has a tactile quality, and viewers are compelled to touch the names and make rubbings of them,” *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 46-7.

¹⁵⁶ Laura Kipnis, “Feminism: The Political Conscience of Postmodernism?” in *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 158; cited in Avery

disavowed and the disregarded that is foreclosed, but not entirely subsumed, by this particular form of wall/screen memory. If, as Lauren Berlant observes, the “pilgrimage” to Washington, DC and “contact with the monumental nation can turn a citizen’s infantilizing rage, anger, and crazy-making feelings of betrayal into a calm, stabilized, mature or adult subjectivity ready to ‘let the past go’,”¹⁵⁷ then the young adult adoptees/refugees in Phan’s stories have yet to cross the threshold to complete the becoming of fully “adult” citizens.

Sturken observes that the process of mourning through the Vietnam Veterans Memorial performs a dialectics of remembrance—remembering and rehabilitating the damaged Vietnam War veterans and American masculinity¹⁵⁸ on the one hand and forgetting the Vietnamese people and their ghostly presence and present on the other: “the memorial allows for an erasure of many of the specifics of history. It is rarely noted that the discussion surrounding the memorial never mentions the Vietnamese people. This is not a memorial to their loss ... Thus, remembering is in itself a form of forgetting.”¹⁵⁹ Not entirely exterior to the structure of architectural memory but instead maintaining a haunting relationship to it, Phan’s time and space in *We Should Never Meet* bespeak ghostly remains. Mediating the punctuality of the war and modes of survival afterwards, Phan creates a transhistorical domain interrupting the privileged form of

Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1997]), 15.

¹⁵⁷ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 33.

¹⁵⁸ On the Vietnam War and American masculinity, see Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁵⁹ Sturken, *ibid*, 82.

architectural memory, invoking Elizabeth Grosz's formulation of the "outside of architecture."

The stories of Kim, Vinh, and Mai that I focus on in this chapter expose disjunctive time and space countering the dominant architecture of memory through the figure of the "failed" gift. As a sign of disintegration, interrupting the sanctioned narrative of healing and recuperation, the obstructed gift in these stories articulates unsettling modes of remembrance and survival alienated from architectural memory. In dominant refugee discourses, the gift is often intertwined with and considered to be a synonym for the life and freedom that are *given* to the uprooted by the benevolent state of America. "Rescued" from the death and destruction caused by the war, the lives of Vietnamese refugees are considered to be secured by the gift of freedom granted by liberal empire. As a story of arrival and reform, the gift of freedom entails a particular economy of life-giving and life-receiving between altruistic America and grateful refugees after the war; but it also, at the same time, hides from view the protracted duration or effects of violence and death.

Mimi Thi Nguyen explains that the gift of freedom represents a logic of prolonged affective subordination of refugee figures to a universal time frame of reconciliation and forward-looking advancement. "The gift of freedom opens with war and death, but...it may obscure those other powers that, through its giving, conceive and shape life."¹⁶⁰ In the sense that it is basically a mandate dictating a particular logic of the

¹⁶⁰ Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

time of history, the gift of freedom is a recent manifestation of historicism—the same historicism that as an assemblage of liberal philosophies and political theories facilitated European colonization in the nineteenth century.¹⁶¹ What distinguishes the governing logic of the gift of freedom from its nineteenth century counterpart is that it is “less ‘a recommendation to the colonized to wait’ than the guidance of the (formerly) colonial other through the opened door into history proper.”¹⁶² In this generous gesture, the sign of the gift appears as a beautified language of protracted domination in the guise of liberalism’s benevolence, “the gift as a *power over*, and its duration *over time* ... the awesome power of the gift’s subjection.”¹⁶³ I discuss in the next section the moral economy operative in the gift of freedom in its relationship to Phan’s literary rendering of hesitancy, but here I would like to focus on the temporality of the gift of freedom, its peculiar and particular imperial timeline.

While gifts in Phan’s interlinked narrative appear as material objects exchanged by individuals in everyday encounters, such as a bracelet or a necklace, instances of dysfunction in gift-exchange interactions highlight their symbolic ramifications. The failure of the gift in Phan’s stories reflects her characters’ prolonged sense of loss after arrival, their unresolved yearning for intimacy, and the hard fact of assimilation, all of

¹⁶¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty defines historicism as follows in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000]): “Historicism enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century. Crudely, one might say that it was one important form that the ideology of progress or “development” took from the nineteenth century on. Historicism is what made modernity or capitalism look not simply global but rather as something that became global over time, by originating in one place (Europe) and then spreading outside it. This ‘first in Europe, then elsewhere’ structure of global historical time was historicist” (7).

¹⁶² Nguyen, *ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶³ Nguyen, *op. cit.*, 8.

which bespeak a radical fracture in the transformative logic of the desperate-turned-successful. The gift is not an abstract category of freedom or life, but a materialization of traumatic dislocation. Frictions of reciprocity not only demonstrate the deconstructed point of the “good” reciprocity, but also unsettle the belief in reform and transition at the heart of the gift of freedom.

In terms of the gift and temporality, Jacques Derrida provides an insightful conceptualization. While Nguyen focuses on Derrida’s formulation of the gift as an event of giving life and death and as a “surface on which power operates,”¹⁶⁴ I emphasize his formulation of the gift as a radical temporal break. Derrida proposes the figure of the gift as an ethical aporia or impossibility. This is the much-cited formulation of the Derridian gift as the impossible: as soon as a gift enters into the circle of reciprocity, exchange, and debt, it annuls itself as a gift. A true gift appears only when it destructs its phenomenology, symbolic system, and the affective circle of generosity and gratitude.

It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. If the figure of the circle is essential to the economic, the gift must remain *aneconomic*. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must *keep* a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is impossible.¹⁶⁵

For Derrida, the primary value of the genuine gift is the quality of foreignness to the circle, especially to the circle of time. If the act of giving creates a certain circuit of time

¹⁶⁴ Nguyen, op. cit., 8.

¹⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Given Time: The Time of the King,” *Critical Inquiry*, 18:2 (Winter, 1992), 166-7. This article was also published in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Chicago, IN: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 166-7.

during which the effect of a gift is maintained, then any possibility for something to be considered a true gift, if there can be one, begins with a reflection on the temporal dimension of the gift. As opposed to an annulled gift within the circulation of exchange, Derrida suggests a condition of possibility for trails of foreignness to interrupt the symbolic circle of the gift: “A gift could be possible, there could be a gift only at *the instant an effraction* in the circle will have taken place, at the instant all circulation will have been interrupted and on the condition of this instant.”¹⁶⁶

In this manner, for Derrida, the gift and the event share the same aporetic structure. As Pheng Cheah writes, “Just as a gift cannot be recognized, an event cannot be one if it is anticipated in advance, if we can tell when and from where it is or will be coming. The event is that which is or comes from the entirely other. Hence, it can be experienced only as an unexpected eruption, and absolute surprise.”¹⁶⁷ While Derrida’s deconstructive thinking renders the gift as an disruptive event or a coming of the other “that will have taken place,” Phan’s literary world displaces this scene of attendant, Derridian hospitality to allow the other’s arrival in a future to come (*à-venir*) with one of the complicated arrival and survival of the historically objectified other. Put differently, her stories are a reflection on what happens when the arrival of the other is not set in a future to come but is something that has already happened and has begun to express its own mode of being and belonging interrupting the normalized timeframe of anticipation.

¹⁶⁶ Derrida, *ibid*, 168 (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁷ Pheng Cheah, “The Untimely Secret of Democracy,” in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 75-6.

In *We Should Never Meet*, Kim, Mai, and Vinh each attempt to secure a future for themselves in the commodifying atmosphere of Little Saigon, but each of these attempts revolves around their vulnerability and leads to indetermination and uncertainty. Indeed, the eponymous story, “We Should Never Meet,” begins with vulnerability:

It was vulnerable. Hidden in the corner of an old strip mall several blocks from Magnolia, the edge of Little Saigon. (27)

“It” refers to a small gift shop located in the fringes of little Saigon that Phan describes as a “particularly depressing strip mall” (29). In this gift shop, Kim happens to meet a Vietnamese woman, the shop owner, and through their interaction comes to anticipate an intimate mother–daughter relationship with her that fails to come into being. Kim’s story begins with the both physical and emotional vulnerability embodied in that shop and ends with the imminent invasion of that fragile and precarious space by the street gang to which Vinh, Kim’s foster brother and ex-boyfriend, belongs. From one angle, the vulnerability of this shabby gift shop can be read as a spatial displacement and manifestation of these vulnerable youths’ psychic and physical disorientation and desolation. Just as with Kim and Vinh, this “particularly depressing strip mall” and the worn-out gift shop therein are isolated and damaged. They are insecure and in danger:

A cheaply built two-story building painted a bland cream and streaked gray from pollution... The bare parking lot was sparsely populated with thin, newly transplanted trees, wilting in their blacktop surroundings... There weren’t any cameras in the store. No detectors along the doors. Small gift shops like these never had them, making them such convenient targets. Like the others, it had more merchandise than shelf space, with porcelain and glass items stacked on top of each other, dangerously close to toppling over and shattering on the linoleum floor. (29-30)

From another perspective, vulnerability in this work can be seen as reflecting the condition of the affective intensity of entanglements and eruptions united in subjective, temporal, and spatial remains—remains that are lost and left behind in all the gestures of reconciliation and healing of the post-Vietnam War years’ movement toward historical closure. The old gift shop is vulnerable not simply in the sense that it is an easy target for gang members for robbery and invasion but also because it is an affectively charged space where feelings such as love, loneliness, pain, belonging, and vengeance pass through and intertwine. As with the excessive merchandise stacked higher than the shelves, “dangerously close to toppling over and shattering,” these isolated and injured characters are dangerously close to one another, sometimes expecting too much of the other and sometimes harming the other, unable to sustain the equilibrium of “good” reciprocity of the gift exchange.

This gift shop in the periphery stands in stark contrast to the growing center of Little Saigon. Kim’s dwindling sense of kinship with her foster sister Mai, who has settled into a stable foster home—unlike Kim and Vinh—and is now about to leave town for college, is spatialized in the changing landscape of Little Saigon, in particular in the impending disappearance of the old Pho restaurant where the two of them often met. If Mai embodies the post-Cold War neoliberal teleology from orphan to “successful” adoptee, from desperate boat refugee to “free” American citizen, then the urban renewal of Little Saigon is a spatial inscription of that developmental narrative.

Little Saigon was changing, outgrowing the pagoda-style shopping centers and replacing them with spacious indoor, multilevel malls. The newest one that opened last month boasted four levels and a giant concrete Buddha squatting

between two gleaming red pillars with a water fountain courtyard. Kim wasn't so impressed with the new development if it meant her favorite restaurant couldn't survive. They [Kim and Mai]'d been going to Pho Gia-Dinh for years, since they were to scrape together three dollars to share a bowl of pho. (47)

Separated from the developing center of Little Saigon and stuck in a temporal break emphatically at odds with the progressive timeline, the old gift shop is a spatial remainder where residual modes of being and belonging emerge and confront one another. Kim finds herself yearning for a deeper mother-daughter relationship with the shop owner after she is moved by the shop owner's unexpected generosity towards her attempt to steal from the store. But Kim's desire for this alternative kinship is interrupted when the shop owner refuses to lend money to her. While Kim views the bracelet that the shop lady gave to her as a birthday present as a sign of a growing rapport that would make it appropriate to ask for money, it is clear that this bracelet offers a slippery symbol of appropriate and inappropriate relationships onto which each side projects different meanings.

The woman's eyes narrowed. This is inappropriate. I can't give you any of that money.

Why not?

You're practically a stranger.

I am not.

Yes, you are.

Then why did you give this to me? Kim asked, holding up her bracelet. I know you only give this to family. Mothers to daughters, I know.

But the woman shook her head, her face located somewhere between confusion and disgust.

I gave that to you because I felt sorry for you, the woman said slowly, like she was talking to someone she hadn't been getting to know for the last three weeks. You kept staring at it so pitifully. That's all. (49-50)

In this instance, the emotional bond symbolized by the act of giving and receiving the bracelet does not enter the two parties into a moral contract. While Kim sees in the

bracelet a deeper and more palpable affective quality of motherhood, the gift shop owner uses the bracelet to convey her pity for a lonely girl. Asymmetrical misperceptions between donor and donee collapse the symbolic equilibrium of the gift economy, the endless circulation of reciprocity, and reveal a disquiet lurking in the figure of the gift. After Kim's disappointment and frustration at the woman's refusal to lend her money, this gift shop becomes a site of vengeance by Vinh and other gang members, who decide to attack the gift shop not just for Kim but also as a misdirected revenge for all the rejections and injuries they had experienced in their lives. As Kim says to herself, "They wanted to give back their pain" (53).

The old gift shop thus becomes a channel through which young adult adoptees and refugees' desires for belonging as well as their destructive impulses for vengeance circulate, intersect, and finally erupt. Put differently, the gift shop in *We Should Never Meet* is a spatial channel of affect as a force-field that, as Brian Massumi tells us, "momentarily suspend[s] the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future ... as temporal and narrative noise."¹⁶⁸ Instead of attempting to morally salvage those disturbed emotional responses of street vagrants or sentimentalize Kim's failed yearning for familial intimacy, Phan calls attention to a radical rupture unhinging the principle of "good" reciprocity at work in the logic of the gift. In displacing appropriate moral senses or rationalized decisions with certain delayed moments of action and with indeterminate

¹⁶⁸ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 26.

and equivocal feelings, Phan imbues the imaginative space of the gift shop with unqualifiable and incalculable registers of suspension and hesitation.

Indeed, “We Should Never Meet” ends with the trails of “dialing and waiting, dialing and waiting.” After she realizes that the gang could seriously injure the shop owner, Kim belatedly tries to undo what she has done by paging and calling Vinh again and again:

She sat on that bed, dialing and waiting, dialing and waiting, her hand slippery from its tight, sweaty grip on the receiver. Not yet, not yet, she thought, still convinced she could undo what was happening while she sat on the bed, waiting, waiting. (53-4)

Not knowing whether she will be able to reach him, Kim persists in trying. This unexceptional act of dialing and waiting is itself neither heroic nor redemptive, but it adds one more affective dimension to the old gift shop: the impulses of preservation and protection. In this last scene, in this desperate and repetitive shuttling of “dialing and waiting, dialing and waiting,” the shabby gift shop becomes an object to be protected rather than subjected to destructive impulses. In this manner, the figure of the gift shop emerges as a spatio-affective instance indexing entanglements and irruptions of underrepresented collective feelings and renders a sudden disjunctive time of social connectedness, a stuckness opposed to the rhetoric of willful progress. By linking and mediating the war in the past and its afterlives embodied in refugees and adoptees’ material and immaterial predicaments in the present, the gift shop in the periphery of Little Saigon becomes a transnational affective zone or field where unexpected correspondences among imperial power, imperial subjectivity, and architectural space

occur and generate affective intensities. The worn-out gift shop is not a static setting in which spatio-temporal homogeneity unfolds, but rather renders a spatial incarnation of heterogeneous time untranslatable to and incommensurable with imperialist ontology and epistemology. It is a spatial manifestation of traumatic temporality—the absolute collapse of linear sequences from the past to the future and, indeed, a time of haunting.

Considered against the backdrop of Derrida, we might say that Phan proposes a temporal model of foreignness countering the symbolic economy of the gift. Her version of temporal otherness appears in the guise of this old gift shop—a spatialized affective channel through which the failed reciprocity and unfulfilled wished-for belongings of young adult adoptees and refugees confront and intersect with one another. When the bracelet given to Kim by her mother figure as a birthday present fails to transcend its materiality to enter into the social and psychic contract of the gift economy, the desolate gift shop becomes a site where the forward-looking temporal impetus of desperate-turned-successful refugee figurations is momentarily paused in a scene of the eruptions of frustrated longings and belongings. In this way, Phan creates a version of what Bliss Cua Lim calls a “spatial palimpsest traversed by divergent temporalities”—an idea that Lim develops in her discussion of ghost films set in contemporary postcolonial Asian cities. Fictional space contains its own political unconscious to resist historical oblivion.¹⁶⁹

Crisscrossed by other times and spaces dauntingly intermingled with one another, the old

¹⁶⁹ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 156.

gift shop in “We Should Never Meet” is a spatial disturbance that agitates against historical amnesia.

Espiritu points out that recent cultural works produced by Vietnamese and Vietnamese American artists have offered “descriptions of the conflicting, ironic, and ambiguous nature of the “space between”—of lives that could or would have been, as well as lives that did emerge from and out of the ruins of war, and ‘peace’.”¹⁷⁰ As opposed to the teleological figuration of the “good refugee” as the grateful beneficiary of U.S.-style freedom, these cultural productions call attention to modes of living other than the processes of becoming the successfully incorporated rescued, to things “that are seemingly not there ... beyond the limits of what is already stated to be understandable”; that is, to “ghost stories.”¹⁷¹ Within this perspective, the old gift shop is a fable about a haunted house in which dissociated and dislocated remains of the past come to the fore through the collision of unresolved feelings of loss within a vulnerable and precarious suburban space.

Homi Bhabha argues for a third space where social differences introduce the disjunctive social time of dissonant and even dissident histories to transnational metropolitan centers.¹⁷² According to Bhabha, this third space is neither necessarily a material place nor necessarily limited to it; rather, the third space bespeaks the spatializing movements of the disjunctive temporalities that provoke and problematize

¹⁷⁰ Espiritu, “Thirty Years AfterWARD: The Endings That Are Not Over,” *Amerasia Journal* 31:2 (2005), xviii.

¹⁷¹ Espiritu, *ibid.*, xx.

¹⁷² Homi Bhabha, “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 303-337.

the established meanings of national culture. The third space is a space of in-between that creates and is created by the disintegrated time of the postcolonial in its conditions of contingency and contradictoriness, particularly when the Western metropole encounters ongoing imperial formations through postwar migrants and refugees. Bhabha's rendering of the third space stems from his critical reading of Fredric Jameson's argument of postmodern space characterized by the subject's cognitive incapacity to represent totality and the global network of capital.¹⁷³ Arguing that Jameson's claim of the non-representability of postmodern space stems from his disregard of social differences and the displacement of their seething presence with spatial distance (e.g., national allegory in Third-World cultural works), Bhabha addresses the third space as a postcolonial spatio-temporal model that dismantles the totalizing model of globalization.

In precisely the manner Bhabha describes, Phan reveals the gift shop as a third space translating and transforming the meaning of space into the discourse of time (and vice versa) through the interruption of postcolonial time into the suburban space of a Western metropolis. In this particular version of a third space, the spatialization of temporality takes the form of a vulnerability that is prone to the return of unresolved feelings of loss and that thus produces a site condensing alternative figurations of history. As Judith Butler observes, by way of Walter Benjamin's materialist critique of

¹⁷³ To cite Bhabha's critique of Jameson's view of postmodern spatiality, "Jameson dispels the potential of such a 'third' politics of the future-as-open-question, or the 'new world (b)order', by turning social differences into cultural 'distance', and converting interstitial, conflictual temporalities, that may be neither developmental nor linear (not 'up and down a temporal scale'), into the topoi of spatial separation. Through the metaphor of spatial distance, Jameson steadfastly maintains the 'frame,' if not the face, of the subject-centered perceptual apparatus which, in counter move, he attempts to displace in the 'virtual reality' of cognitive mapping, or the unrepresentability of the new international space" (314).

historicism, “spatialization . . . emerge[s] as a response to the loss of eschatology. History itself, on such a view, becomes a kind of catastrophe, a fall from which there is no redemption, the dissolution of sequential temporality itself.”¹⁷⁴ For Benjamin, this collapse of sequence into spatialization is history as the ruin. “In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay,”¹⁷⁵ he writes. The shabby gift shop in *We Should Never Meet*, serving as a channel for the wished-for belonging and unfulfilled yearnings of refugees, is that dissonant setting of decay; it exemplifies the dissolution of temporality into spatiality as a particular form of history that is estranged from chronology. The figure of the bleak gift shop thus bespeaks a spatio-temporal otherness to the particular form of euphoric narrative of the smooth transition and transformation from the desperate to the good and grateful refugee. The insertion of the temporal foreignness into the reciprocity of the gift economy is, to recall Derrida, the condition of possibility for the gift as the event (“an effraction in the circle”). That said, Phan’s gift shop, in the end, becomes a gift—a gift of disjunctive time pulling apart the normalized sequence of refugee metamorphosis.

¹⁷⁴ Judith Butler, foreword to *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 469.

¹⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 177.

Hesitation on the threshold

Mimi Thi Nguyen observes that when the teleology of the desperate-turned-successful meets the parable of the “good” rescuer and “good” rescued, there occurs a new logic of biopolitical domination that affectively binds and regulates Vietnamese refugees. In Nguyen’s analysis, the gift takes on an important role in the workings of U.S. liberal empire because it generates a prolonged indebtedness on the part of Vietnamese refugee figures and thus incorporates them into a protracted affective-moral economy between freedom-giving empire and indebted refugees. As such, the period of indebtedness at work in the gift of freedom recasts the developmental narrative of assimilation in terms of the enduring affective imprisonment of, rather than the empowerment of, the rescued or giftee. Hence, “the gift as a *power over*, and its duration *over time*”¹⁷⁶ circumscribes the regulating force of the gift of freedom, producing an imaginative pair of moral agents: liberal empire, possessed of generosity, benevolence, and apology, and refugees, with gratitude, indebtedness, and forgiveness. As Kennan Ferguson notes, when the symbolic economy of the gift starts to make its own loop, “when the economics of the objects are transcended, only the economics of relationship and affect endure. At the heart of the gift, then, stands the *act* of giving, not the need or pleasure of receipt. In the annihilation of the thing, the subjugation of the other is all that remains.”¹⁷⁷ The only way to escape the underdeveloped inhuman condition is to be

¹⁷⁶ Nguyen, *op. cit.*, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Kennan Ferguson, “The Gift of Freedom,” *Social Text* 25:2 (Summer 2007), 43.

subsumed and incorporated into this particular circuit of reciprocity and morality, into the passage of the universal human.

Repudiating the particular moral virtues and values such as forgiveness and gratitude that refugee figures appear to embody, Phan's work explores conjunctures that are incommensurate with the prolonged affective imprisonment of refugees to the symbolic order of liberal empire. Simply put, Phan's characters are not "good" refugees: they are not devoted to grand and sublime feelings such as forgiveness; they sometimes betray or hurt others with good intentions; they fail to appreciate the alleged intangible value that refugees are given, whether that be life or freedom, and they thus stand outside the moral, affective contract between liberal empire and its refugees. Put differently, what appears in *We Should Never Meet* is the realm of what is foreclosed from the symbolic narrative of the "good" perpetrator and the "good" victim. Not simply positing themselves as the outside or exteriority of the rationalized mutuality but rather deploying a certain implosive relationship to it, characters in Phan's stories display moments of dissonance within the moral economy of the gift of freedom. This does not simply mean that Phan's characters are "bad" refugees doing morally dishonest and hazardous things or entirely dismissing any possibility of historical reconciliation. Rather, their extraordinary figurations of *hesitancy* force us to reject the moral binary of "good" and "bad" and instead refer to these characters' ambivalent positions between traumatic injury and developmental reparation. Hesitancy provides an epistemological and ontological *situation* as an interruption in which we can confront the ethical realm of the

unrehabilitated, threatening facile projections of historical closure and exposing the other side of the moral economy.

As I argue above, the characters in Phan's work inhabit a suspended time, lingering in the space of transition from desperate to successful: an eccentric time and space fracturing the equilibrium of sequential progress. As a subjective counterpart to suspended time and space, Phan's characters' figurations of the state of hesitancy prompt us to consider alternative forms of refugee subjectivity that are neither static and unmoving nor entirely in the state of seamless reform and assimilation. This condition is structured by a motion that is constant, if not always willful and affirmative, in the aftermath of traumatic rupture. The ambivalent status of hesitancy, straddling and shuttling between punctuation and recovery, resonates with what Butler describes as the trajectory that new thought takes after loss: a "continuation [that] is founded and structured by [a] break, carries the break with it as the signature of its history."¹⁷⁸ Hesitancy interrupts repetition compulsion, the mimetic tendency of returning to the same traumatic scene, but it neither entirely liberates from damage nor moves forward without residues of injury. As a liminal state, hesitancy transgresses both the pathologization and the normalization of refugees and demonstrates the diffraction of the post-Cold War trope of the end of history.

Just like the stories of Mai and Kim, which render ambiguous endings and miscarried or incomplete correspondences, "Visitors," a story focused on Kim's foster

¹⁷⁸ Butler, *ibid*, 468.

brother and ex-boyfriend Vinh, leads us to scenes of floundering interaction and unresolved conflict. In this story, Vinh is supposed to shadow an elderly Vietnamese man, Bac Nguyen, as a target for his gang's next home invasion. In so doing, Vinh ends up helping Nguyen home with his grocery bags, during which he strikes up an unexpected conversation with the old man about the war in Vietnam and his ex-girlfriend and foster-sister Kim. After having an impromptu cup of tea at the elderly man's house, Vinh is given a gold necklace from the man's late wife's jewelry box. This "bold generosity" (99) of the old man in giving away a precious object to help a young man to show his love for his ex-girlfriend "throw[s] Vinh off guard" (105) and makes him waver from his mission for a moment.

Vinh had never hesitated on a home invasion before. He couldn't understand why he was stalling on this one. Senile old man. Why couldn't he just shut up? Why did he have to talk so long, wasting Vinh's time? And why did he stay to listen? (102)

While Kim in "We Should Never Meet" misinterprets the meaning of her gift to be greater than it is, resulting in the destruction of a "good" gift economy between Kim and the shop owner, Vinh in this story feels the sincerity of Nguyen's generosity, leading him to waver in his objective of harming the giver. In the end, however, Nguyen's "bold generosity," which generates a momentary intimate connection that causes Vinh to hesitate, is rejected violently. Vinh's commitment to his gang, particularly his reluctant obligations and debts to the other members, prompts him to betray the gift economy emerging with Nguyen. On the night of the intrusion with his gang members, Vinh decides to steal the Nguyen's jewelry box to give to Kim. In an interruption of the

otherwise smooth exit of the group, the jewelry box transforms in Vinh's hand into a weapon with which to strike the elderly man, who recognizes him in turn. The story ends with Vinh in a car with the old jewelry box:

The jewelry box was slick around the edges, Vinh realized, with the old man's blood. He opened the box carefully and the gold and jewels blinked at him in the light of the streetlamps. Precious. Beautiful. (112)

Just as Kim's bracelet fails to enter into the moral contract of the gift economy, the gold necklace given to Vinh by the old man fails to transcend its materiality as an object so as to obtain its own cyclicity as a gift—it both fails to create a “good” reciprocity between Vinh and the old man and also seems to threaten to fail to be transported or transformed (as had been intended) into a present for Kim. While Kim's overstepping in attempting to borrow money from the shop owner stems from her urgent need for money to escape Vinh and her desire to “change and be a completely different person” (51), Vinh's step back from his brief moment of connection with the old man is justified as an attempt to be faithful to his own community, in his belief that this choice will help him to leave the gang and get Kim back. When he decides to steal the jewelry box, Vinh says to himself,

The old man was right, though he yacked on for quite a while, it was the love, it was the connection that was worth more than wasting your life away for the community. He needed to show Kim she meant more to him than the boys. The necklace was a good first step. But any guy could give a girl one necklace. Vinh could do more than that. He pulled the larger box back out and located the marble jewelry box. (109)

In this scene, the jewelry box is in a moment of transition, transformed from its utilitarian function as a deadly weapon to a present that may or may not be given to Kim. Just as we are left unaware of the outcome of Kim's repetitive dialing and waiting in “We Should Never Meet,” here again we confront an opaque and ambiguous final scene that ends

suspended in motion and in transition. We are also reminded of the last scene of Mai's story, where she leaves the letter from Wellesley College and her birthday presents unopened. How might we read these lines of hesitation at the end of each story that generate neither an immediately qualifiable action/reaction nor recognizable consequences but instead create a certain mobility, however slight or trivial, and establish forces that are unassimilable to a legible and legitimate closure? Could we find in this state of hesitation, neither static nor completely stalled, a condition of possibility that rewrites the transformative logic of refugee subjectivity, the radical metamorphosis of the desperate-turned-successful?

Early refugee camp studies regularly depicted refugee figures as abject, abnormal, passive, and immobilized.¹⁷⁹ This particular portrayal of refugees as persons with mental illnesses, abnormalities, and other incapacities was associated with their symptoms of trauma. For example, temporal disassociation in trauma, in particular the repetitive compulsion of being drawn helplessly to the past, was understood as a problematic anachronism that the refugee is pathologically stuck in and that should be corrected and overcome in order to be attuned to the schema of liberal humanism. The frame of the desperate-turned-successful, in one sense, was a response to the generalizable state of

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, Gail Paradise Kelly, *From Vietnam to America: A Chronicle of the Viet-nameese Immigration to the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977); William T. Liu, Maryanne Lamanna, and Alice Murata, *Transition to Nowhere: Vietnamese Refugees in America* (Nashville, TN: Charter House, 1979); James Freeman, *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989); and John Tenhula, *Voices from Southeast Asia: The Refugee Experience in the United States* (New York, NY: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1991).

refugee abnormality, inflected by the trope of the “American dream.” Espiritu offers a succinct and insightful explanation of this discursive transition:

As a people fleeing from the only war that the United States had lost, Vietnamese in the United States have been subject to intense scholarly interest—they are an “overdocumented” population when compared to other US immigrant groups...Casting Vietnamese refugees as objects of rescue, this literature portrays them as “incapacitated by grief and therefore in need of care”—a care that is purportedly best provided in and by the United States. It is striking how the bulk of this literature locates the Vietnamese “problem” not in the violent legacy of decades of war and social upheaval, but within the bodies and minds of the Vietnamese themselves. At the same time, scholars have closely charted Vietnamese economic adaptation, with successful adjustment celebrated as the attainment of the “American dream.”¹⁸⁰

At the other end of the spectrum, following the Vietnam War, the concept of trauma evolved to include Vietnam War veterans under the banner of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). The experiences of Vietnam War veterans upon their return, particularly their symptoms of hyperarousal, intrusions such as flashbacks, and repetition compulsion, were a decisive factor in the inclusion of PTSD in the clinical and diagnostic category of the 1980 third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. With the idea that the experiences of American soldiers share a core of traumatic symptoms with war victims, this new diagnostic category created the figuration of “perpetrator as a victim.” Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman observe that the medicalization of PTSD has served to credit war veterans “with a residue of humanity evidenced by the traumatic memory they retained of their actions.”¹⁸¹ The same symptoms of trauma, which grant one group a dignified

¹⁸⁰ Espiritu, 2006, 410.

¹⁸¹ Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 95.

humanity, are displaced to pathologize other racialized groups and confine them to underdeveloped inhuman conditions. As Viet Thanh Nguyen notes, “Vietnamese bodies . . . must be dehumanized, derealized, in order to allow for the humanization of the American soldier and the substantiation of his body, and through it, of American ideology and culture.”¹⁸²

This paradoxical logic of humanizing a particular body by dehumanizing others also constitutes America’s solipsistic self-narrative as a victim of its own ideals in the war in Vietnam. As John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg observe, “We [Americans] have committed ourselves to the bittersweet work of mourning our loss: of the war, our national innocence, the lives of our sons and daughters.”¹⁸³ The well-worn narrative of the “rescue and liberation” of Vietnamese refugees also stems from this monodramatic storyline of a wounded America, a powerful performance of what Espiritu calls “conjur[ing] triumph from defeat—the ‘we-win-even-when-we-lose’ syndrome.”¹⁸⁴ In this light, the transformative teleology of the desperate-turned-successful refugee can be seen to rely on the benevolent figure of an America that rescues and liberates the Vietnamese people not simply from their communist homeland but also from their traumatized, disabled, and immobilized conditions. In this way, America transforms itself

¹⁸² Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.

¹⁸³ John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, “The Vietnam War and American Memory,” in *The Vietnam War and American culture*, eds. John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), 2.

¹⁸⁴ Espiritu, *ibid.*, 421.

from a perpetrator of war to a generous granter of new lives and freedom to uprooted refugees.

Perhaps the preeminent symbolic figure of the grateful and forgiving Vietnamese refugee is Phan Thi Kim Phúc, best known as the “napalm girl” since being photographed in the village of Trang Bang during the Vietnam War following a U.S. military attack on the area with napalm bombs. As a hypervisible figure that continues to be reproduced and circulated constantly, as, in Viet Thanh Nguyen’s formulation, an “emblematic victim”¹⁸⁵ of the war, the girl in the photograph has been consumed widely as an arresting image of the horror of the liberal war and the deceit behind of its promise of freedom. With this punctual testament to “the spectacular disaster of freedom’s bestowal,” Mimi Thi Nguyen juxtaposes the paradigmatic scene in which Kim Phúc visits the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1996 as a graceful forgiver:¹⁸⁶

More than twenty years later, the girl in the photo goes to Washington as a political refugee, and also as a solicitous mourner to the 1996 Veterans Day commemoration, at the polished, jet-black granite wall that is what war’s memorial to the American dead. The event, centering reconciliation, featured a former prisoner of war, who cited the soldier’s trauma in a bid for peace, and the most famous victim of that war. Addressing herself to “dear friends” from the stage, Phan Thi Kim Phúc turned away from the scene of the photograph—“I do not want to talk about the war because I cannot change history”—to forgive past transgressions... In their copresence, the traumatic past of war comes to be experienced as a shared ordeal, especially where the diagnostic concept of post-traumatic stress disorder comes to overdetermine the pathology of liberal war. For her part, Kim Phúc is framed as the personification of beatific grace, whose pardon absolves an empire of the criminality of war. The notion that pardon is a moral but also a historical necessity... (84-6)

¹⁸⁵ Viet Thanh Nguyen uses this phrase to describe writer Le Ly Hayslip’s double guise of her victimized body as object and subject in her “attempts both to speak about these conditions of collective oppression and victimization and to address and appease the concerns of the First World subject,” *ibid*, 112.

¹⁸⁶ Mimi Thi Nguyen, *op. cit.*, 84.

Kim Phúc is an emblematic figure of the good rescued, both graceful and grateful, possessed of an enlightened recognition and practice of the moral commonalities uniting a universal humanity. In the particular logic of moral reciprocity she embodies, forgiveness and apology represent agencies of the gift of freedom and are essential moral virtues and sensibilities for the necessity of human freedom and historical advancement. When her injury meets that of the veterans at the wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and sparks a moment of reconciliation and recovery,¹⁸⁷ when this mutual moral bond carves out a new chronology on the wall in the memorial such as “from the war in the past to the peace in the present,” Kim Phúc’s dramatic and drastic transformation from emblematic victim to emblematic forgiver constitutes a new form of the wall-and-screen memory hiding something from view. The architectural memory embedded in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial finally embraces the forgotten figures of the Vietnamese people and invites them into the sacred site—but only those who have entered the arena of human commonality. Kim Phúc’s story and its singularity can only hide from view those who fail to embody this peculiar grammar of the human toward world-historical progress.

Against the model of the transition from the traumatized (pathologized) to the normalized refugee who would be humanized enough to enter the calculable moral economy, characters in *We Should Never Meet* reveal the inadequacies and erasures of

¹⁸⁷ Kim Phúc speaks, “Even if I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him we cannot change history but we should try to do good things for the present and for the future to promote peace,” Nguyen, op. cit., 84.

rationalized mutuality. They demonstrate that reconciliatory reciprocity is always already fractured within, necessarily failing to incorporate all the illegible and inadequate ways of living to its wholesome bodies. In creating a middle ground of hesitancy, representing neither traumatized underdevelopment nor assimilated inclusion, Phan foregrounds the realm of the illiberal and insecure and provides an aesthetic situation through which to display and explore other pathways of living and thinking. As seen above, the gesture of rapprochement on the national level reveals its blind spot in everyday crises of kinship and reciprocity between refugee figures, crises that are materialized in Phan's stories in the conflicts and clashes within and around the gift shop. While the fissures of liberal moral consensus are, in most cases, mediated by affect and only indirectly commented on in Phan's text, they are occasionally verbalized outright. In "Visitors," for example, Vinh makes straightforward comments on American imperial tactics and practices during and after the war in his conversation with the elderly man.

They've taken so much from us, the boy said.
 Yes, the Communists were heartless...
 You misunderstand Bac, the boy said. I wasn't meaning the Communists.
 Oh, Bac Nguyen said, slightly confused, I just assumed—
 I was talking about the Americans...
 They destroyed our country, then they left. To ease their guilty conscience, they took some of us in. It's really simple. (94-96)

Vinh replaces America's benevolent gift of freedom with America's "guilty conscience." Simplistic as it appears, Vinh's unequivocal attitude might be said to be, in Jodi Kim's formulation, "productive unambiguity" as a necessary position for critiquing operations of liberal empire within the context of post-Cold War neoliberal triumphalism.¹⁸⁸ If the

¹⁸⁸ Kim, *ibid*, 222.

gift of freedom, as Nguyen observes, “emerges as a site at which modern governmentality and its politics of life (and death) unfolds as a universal history of the human, and the figuration of debt surfaces as those imperial remains that preclude the subject of freedom from being able to escape a colonial order of things,”¹⁸⁹ then Vinh’s unqualified criticism situates Vietnamese refugees outside of the colonial order of things, outside of the moral bondage and the enforcement of historical closure.

Equivocal and uncertain, hesitancy bespeaks a mode of escape from or resistance, however weak or passive, to the liberal colonial order of things; it represents a deferral of immediate action out of debt to the life-giving benevolence of liberal empire. Broken out of the circuit of commonality through the annulment of mutual moral recognition, young adoptee/refugee figures in Phan’s stories embody non-human traces that mark the uncommunicability of the general language of the human but that are not simply dehumanized by being portrayed as traumatized or immobilized. Instead, these non-human traces manifest their own impulses and modes of being and belonging in the form of hesitancy: they inhabit a universe of negativity to the time of historicism. Juliana Chang argues that the figure of the racial inhuman, presented as a deviation from human status, puts liberal citizenship into crisis and indexes the ethical claim of inhuman citizenship enacting “collective assumption of responsibility for the unconscious symptoms of the U.S. nation-state.”¹⁹⁰ In this light, hesitancy as encapsulated in the

¹⁸⁹ Nguyen, op. cit., 5.

¹⁹⁰ Juliana Chang, *Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 1-27. Chang formulates Asian American literature as a set of ethical acts by building on Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic ethics and Lowe’s formulation of immigrant acts as bespeaking “the *agency* of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans: the acts of labor, resistance,

figure of the suspended gift in *We Should Never Meet* is another version of ethical claim of non-human citizenship, a testament to the unconscious symptoms of liberal empire.

Instead of aiming to rise to this calculable mutuality, characters in Phan's literary world affectively articulate their incommensurability with such normalizing and universalizing endeavors and gestures. They live in the realm of the in-between, balancing the residual and the emergent, a state which Raymond Williams has dubbed as a particular expressive domain of those excluded from dominant social and cultural dimensions:

What has really to be said, as a way of defining important elements of both the residual and the emergent, and as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore *no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention*. This is not merely a negative proposition, allowing us to account for significant things which happen outside or against the dominant mode. On the contrary it is a fact about the modes of domination, that they select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice. What they exclude may often be seen as the personal or the private, or as the natural or even the metaphysical. Indeed it is usually in one or other of these terms that the excluded area is expressed, since what the dominant has effectively seized is indeed the ruling definition of the social.¹⁹¹

Williams proposes that the residual and the emergent, caused by and appearing through “*human practice, human energy, and human intention*,” are an unavoidable excess never exhausted by the dominant, hegemonic mode of culture. To the extent that they exceed the established and valorized forms of subjectivity and collectivity, the alterity of the residual and emergent is not subsumed into the “ruling definition of the social” and

memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification,” Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American cultural politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 8-9.

¹⁹¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 125 (emphasis in original).

instead expresses its distinctive modes of existence through “the personal or the private.” Likewise, hesitancy in *We Should Never Meet* offers a double take on the dominant representational matrix of reconciliation and historical closure: it is a remainder and reminder of the past (the residual) and, at the same time, a state of uncertainty and potentiality fraught with motion and vitality (the emergent). Put differently, hesitancy is structured by a traumatic break and the continuity across that break, invoking what David L. Eng and David Kazanjian call “a continuous double take on loss”: “one version moves and creates, the other slackens and lingers.”¹⁹² Neither simply flattening the remainders of the past to the present nor confining the bygone to the structure of fixed memory, Phan presents hesitancy as a new ontological and epistemological project: a mode of being that lives within but is not entirely subsumed to the proper temporal mode; a mode of thinking that pays careful attention to the uncertainties and indeterminacies that dominant knowledge structures would gloss over.

Indeed, hesitancy—construed as constant movement within a momentary break straddling the residual and the emergent—neither formulates a certain positive form of subjectivity nor allows for any aesthetic relief or catharsis. Instead, Phan’s rendering of hesitancy delivers its own mode of vitality, if not liberation, resonant with Massumi’s understanding of affect as intensity and constant motion: “It [intensity] is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonance. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically)

¹⁹² David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, introduction to *Loss: the Politics of Mourning*, eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

toward practical ends.”¹⁹³ In this quality of motion and its state of being not-yet-symbolized, hesitancy distances itself from established refugee inscriptions—as either immobile or normalized—and stretches towards alternatives yet to be fully articulated.

In mediating their own personal and relational crises as they implicate broader world-historical contradictions, Phan’s characters come to express their own mode of traumatic figuration. As I argue in my introduction, traumatic figuration is the working of melancholia (melancholia as a constant struggle with loss). Without discarding the vitality and persistency embedded in the concept of melancholia as a force for connecting to the world, traumatic figuration conveys both the sense of crisis (“trauma”) and the fuller constellated image of subjectivities and collectivities (“figuration”). In much the same way as Hagedorn and Trenka, Phan renders the present as a moment of urgency, of material and immaterial plight of peripheral subjects, in which traces of the past are animated and disrupt an otherwise mundane stillness. In this activated state of interruption, everyday experiences become an affective language to register traumatic transnational histories, in particular to excavate stories un- or underrepresented within the discourses of post-Cold War neoliberal triumphalism. In exploring instances of disconnection, Phan does not reiterate the conventional depiction of refugees as traumatized and thus as disabled and debilitated in terms of their exercise of liberal human capacities. Rather, in presenting everyday inter/intra subjective predicaments as a window to confront historical contradiction, Phan shows that stories of disconnection and

¹⁹³ Massumi, *ibid.*, 26.

discontinuity on the everyday level can represent a minor historiography recasting and rewriting the grammar of the desperate alien-turned-grateful guest.

Aesthetics of Hesitancy

As a counterpart to haunting and loneliness, hesitancy constitutes an affective register establishing a particular mood, energy, and attitude of the literary text. As I discuss in the concluding sections of preceding chapters, these structures of haunting and loneliness imply distinct aesthetic strategies and orientations for each text: haunting in *Dogeaters* functions as a way of addressing unnamed characters in fragmented pieces of narrative and of deploying unconventional expressions of their figural enactments (the latter especially in “Kundiman”); loneliness in *Fugitive Visions* appears as an aesthetic situation that bears the particular textual energy and ethical pedagogy of memoir. In *We Should Never Meet*, hesitancy constitutes an overall tone of the text. By “tone,” I mean what Sianne Ngai calls “a literary text’s affective bearing, orientation, or “set toward” its audience and world.”¹⁹⁴ Not simply an attitude of a narrative voice, tone defined this way bespeaks the particular way affective and formal aspects of literature are linked to social relations outside. A certain mood in a text is not simply personal and private, but refers to its “situatedness,” its being a part of the world. As an example of her formulation of tone, Ngai describes Anne Anlin Cheng’s writings: “Cheng speaks of a “melancholia”

¹⁹⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 43.

suffusing texts by Asian-American writers that points back to long histories of systematic racism in U.S. culture and national policy.”¹⁹⁵

By way of conclusion, I would like to ruminate briefly on hesitancy as an overarching tone of Phan’s stories. In particular, I would like to focus on the structure of “insufficient” endings that defines the tone of hesitancy and the way in which such endings reflect situations imposed on refugees that make it difficult to articulate affirmative or immediate counter-discourse to the either/or (pathological and assimilative) binary. An aesthetic choice to express the status of delayed action and not-yet-articulated new identity, the “insufficient” and somewhat abrupt endings of the stories of Mai, Kim, and Vinh do not provide any kind of aesthetic satisfaction or comfort: when we expect the results of Mai’s application, we only see Mai go upstairs with the letter from the college unopened; the climactic scene of erupting violence in the gift shop is hidden from view as the story ends with the figure of Kim “dialing and waiting, dialing and waiting” to undo what she has done; Vinh’s brutal betrayal of the elderly man’s generosity ends without any indication of narrative/character development, only with the image of the blood-stained jewelry for Kim being transited somewhere in his possession.

¹⁹⁵ Ngai, *ibid.*, 43. To cite other exemplary critical models that Ngai refers to, “It should be clear that by “tone” I mean less the dramatic “attitude” adumbrated by the New Critics than a global and hyper-relational concept of *feeling* that encompasses attitude: a literary text’s affective bearing, orientation, or “set toward” its audience and world. In other words, I mean the formal aspect of a work that has made it possible for critics of all affiliations (Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, historicist) to describe a work or class of works as “paranoid” (Mary Ann Doane on the Hollywood “woman’s film” of the 1940s), “euphoric” (Fredric Jameson on postmodern art and architecture), or “melancholic” (Anne Cheng on Asian-American literature); and, much more importantly, the formal aspect that enables these affective values to become significant with regard to how each critic understands the work as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations” (43).

Throughout all of these equivocal endings appearing at the cost of aesthetic relief, the aesthetics of hesitancy not only reflects the plight of representation of refugee experiences; it also, filled with small and weak scale of movement and good will, bespeaks a need for ethical reworking against sanctioned mutuality and epistemological/moral certitude.

Ngai explores a genealogy of weak and negative emotions posed by a general state of passivity and obstructed agency. By interpreting emotions or affects as “unusually knotted or condensed ‘interpretations of predicaments’,”¹⁹⁶ Ngai suggests that ugly feelings such as envy, irritation, and anxiety are interlinked with situations marked by affective and political equivocality: “The unsuitability of these weakly intentional feelings for forceful or unambiguous action is precisely what amplifies their power to diagnose situations, and situations marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular.”¹⁹⁷ Weak and negative feelings are diagnostic—they offer “unusually knotted and condensed interpretation” of situations in which particular forms of obstructed action find their expression. Ngai observes that ugly feelings of suspended agency, despite being unsuited to determinate action or willful affirmation, render their own mode of aesthetic and political response to “predicaments,” particularly in their own “*amoral and noncathartic*”¹⁹⁸ way. Ngai thus distances the “*amoral and noncathartic*” mediation between the aesthetic and the political from the “myth about the direct link between high

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 27.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 6 (emphasis in the original).

emotion and political effects”¹⁹⁹ found in the tradition of sentimental literature, perhaps in most exemplary fashion in the aesthetics of sympathy of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.²⁰⁰

While hesitancy is not an expressive emotion as a personal property, its extraordinary state of weak and vibrant motion enfolds an affective response to the “predicaments” that Vietnamese refugees confront when they tell their own stories. To veer away from the well-worn narratives of sentimentalism (as found in the trope of “hearts of sorrow”)²⁰¹ and the either/or binary of pathologization or incorporation, Phan chooses her own “amoral and *noncathartic*” aesthetics and politics—an aesthetics and a politics of hesitancy that do not release any cathartic aesthetic relief or political resolution but instead deploy continuous movement and motion despite and through moments of disconnection, dysfunction, and disruption, thereby forcing us to linger on unresolved endings. Traces of loss in *We Should Never Meet* hover over the figures of the suspended gift through which failures of kinship, reciprocity, and reconciliation are channeled and come to haunt ordinary scenes. Suggestions of movement to undo perceived failures and to start over, while we cannot know their outcomes, allow for what Cheng calls “the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 358 n13 (emphasis in the original).

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 1 (emphasis in the original). For Ngai, the text that prefigures the aesthetics of ugly feelings is Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street”—a fiction, as she describes, “in which the interpretive problems posed by an American office worker’s *affective* equivocality seem pointedly directed at the *political* equivocality of his unnervingly passive form of dissent.”

²⁰¹ “Hearts of Sorrow” is the title of the collection of oral testimonies of Vietnamese refugees. *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives*, ed. James M. Freeman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

murky spaces...the uneasy domain of *contagion* where conditions of objecthood merge into the possibilities of subjectivity.”²⁰²

Phan mobilizes the trope of the gift from the abstract idea of freedom given to refugees to the disruptive time and space marking traumatic dislocation. Phan also revises the particular and peculiar moral economy based on the mutual recognition of communal virtue that binds the perpetrator and the victim together within the rhetoric of willful progress. Hesitancy does not simply suggest an affirmative or alternative refugee subjectivity resisting or fracturing the prolonged affective bondage, the “good” reciprocity. Rather, it presents an ethical stance that Phan chooses to hold onto, at the cost of aesthetic comfort and catharsis, in order to shed light on moments of failures and dislocations in the circuit of the gift of freedom. If politics is always about decision and calculation, then ethics is a matter of undecidability and incalculability and sometimes leads us to the “murky spaces” of ontological and epistemological uncertainty and aesthetic discomfort. That said, hesitancy is, to borrow Cheng’s words, Phan’s aesthetic and ethical “decision to remain in the gift of discomfort.”²⁰³ Writing against the “good” fable of refugee metamorphosis, Phan thus shapes cracked time and the aesthetics of discomfort into extraordinary gifts.

²⁰² Anne Anlin Cheng, “Psychoanalysis without Symptoms,” *Differences* 20:1 (2009), 92 (emphasis in original).

²⁰³ Cheng, *ibid*, 93.

CHAPTER FOUR

Toxic Bodies and Traumatic Mimesis in Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*

The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature.

— Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,
Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature

Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998) presents multifarious forms of encounter and entanglement between ailing bodies. Afflicted by overlapping forms of domestic, capitalistic, environmental, and imperial violence, the novel's figures of suffering corporeality are linked together through a TV show promoting American beef to Japanese audiences. Critics have observed this interconnection of damaged bodies and have analyzed the novel's embodied linkages in terms of globalization, environmental issues, and Cold War politics in the Pacific. Both the transnational backdrop of the novel, which is set in the 1990s at the time the American meat industry began to target Asian markets, and its critical perspective on the hazardous effects of hormone-injected beef on gendered human/animal bodies have facilitated a wide range of discussions that cut across Asian American studies, transnationalism, ecocriticism, race and gender studies,

and affect studies.²⁰⁴ This chapter engages in these critical conversations by proposing a framework of mimesis and trauma that might enable us to understand the somatic affinity of the wounded as a relationship with the lingering effects of U.S. imperialism in the transpacific. Ozeki's characters' economic and affective interactions around selling and consuming meat represent scenes of traumatic mimesis involving a contagious transmission of trauma between injured bodies: toxic hormone-injected human and animal bodies come to mirror each other in a testament of slow violence.

In trauma theory, mimesis has been discussed as an experience of hypnotic and emotional identification with the traumatic scene or the other. Defined in this way, trauma is, writes Ruth Leys, "a situation of dissociation or "absence" from the self in which the victim unconsciously imitate[s], or identifie[s] with, the aggressor or traumatic scene."²⁰⁵ As, for example, with the World War I soldiers of Sigmund Freud's traumatic neurosis, who found themselves repetitively drawn back to terrifying scenes of war they had left behind in their dreams,²⁰⁶ the mimetic tendency in trauma is a situation of the repetitive immersion in the other, an endless loop of staging and acting out the traumatic

²⁰⁴ As for an analysis of race, gender, and Cold War politics in the novel, see Emily Cheng, "Meat and the Millennium: Transnational Politics of Race and Gender in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*," *JAAS* 12:2 (2009): 191-220 and Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 95-141.; For the intersection of ecocriticism and *My Year of Meats*, see Cheryl J. Fish, "The Toxic Body Politic: Ethnicity, Gender, and Corrective Eco-Justice in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and Judith Helfand and Daniel Gold's *Blue Vinyl*," *MELUS* 34:2 (Summer 2009), 43-62 and Julie Sze's "Boundaries and Border Wars: DES, Technology, and Environmental Justice," *American Quarterly* 58:3 (2006), 791-814; Shameem Black's analysis focuses on transnational feminism in the novel, "Fertile Cosmofeminism: Ruth L. Ozeki and Transnational Reproduction," *Meridians* 5:1 (2004), 226-256.

²⁰⁵ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8.

²⁰⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1961).

scene. In this chapter, I put the framework of mimesis in trauma and affect theories in dialogue with U.S.-led neoliberal dominance and with the embodied responses of minor subjects to invisible power in *My Year of Meats*. Mimesis has been theorized within trauma and affect studies in terms of the blurring of boundaries between external stimuli (such as accidents) and the autonomous subject; Ozeki's novel develops and complicates this model by displacing the scene of inter-penetration between the self and the event with a scene of the infiltration of U.S. imperial violence and neoliberal power into the everyday lives of marginalized bodies. Traumatic mimesis deploys the unconscious, repetitive return and assimilation to the event, but in Ozeki's novel, the fantasmatic identification of traumatic mimesis as a radical obscuring of the border between the external violence and the internal protective shield turns to the insidious workings of violence and dominance in the ordinary, not to the abrupt interruption of the event. Ozeki's characters enact two different kinds of mimetic-fantasmatic responses to penetrative U.S. neoliberal power as it intersects with its imperial legacy in Asia, what I will distinguish as "commodified mimesis" and "traumatic mimesis." Commodified mimesis appears in the virtually mediated affective identification of Japanese audiences with the image of euphoric multiculturalism on the TV show; traumatic mimesis involves an illusionary entanglement between human and animal bodies, mirroring each other in suffering the violence of toxic growth hormones and corporate abuses. In Ozeki's literary world, the scene of violence and power imbalance does not emerge as a marked site of accident to which the traumatized continues to return; it rather infiltrates everyday life in different guises and thus multiplies the landscape of traumatic mimesis, which in turn

comes to offer a new means of unveiling dominance and registering subjective responses to insidious power.

Commodified and traumatic mimesis in *My Year of Meats* constitutes a window into historical and structural violence's embeddedness in everyday lives, and in particular, allows us a means to trace the after-effects of U.S. imperialism in the Cold War transpacific. During the Cold War, the shadow of American empire shaped the overall reform and incorporation of Japanese nation-state and Japanese American subjects into the frame of liberal democracy and capitalism. Jodi Kim observes that the discourses of model minority (Japanese American subjects) and Cold War junior ally (Japan as a nation-state) follow the logic of racial mimicry and approximation in emulation of the white bourgeois ideal.²⁰⁷ In this transformation, from "enemy aliens" and "enemy state" in the WWII to model minority subjects and faithful partner state in the Cold War, the sign of America assumes the status of desirable standard against which the adequacy and commensurability of Japanese liberal reform is measured. As Kim notes, "Japan is an ally, but still miniaturized and rendered a diminutive junior ally, and Japanese Americans are a model, but still a minority." In this light, commodified and traumatic mimesis in *My Year of Meats* may be understood as a double response, respectively disclosing and undoing the homogenizing rationale of liberal/capitalist assimilation. Ozeki's characters not only stand at the scene of subjectification but also

²⁰⁷ Kim, *ibid*, 99.

point towards the traumatic kernel that interrupts and disrupts the desirable endpoint of progress.

Trauma theorists explain the mimetic tendency in trauma as a staging of the site of violence through the subject's compulsive return to, and absorption into, the scene of injury; in this mimetic fracturing of the boundaries between the inside and the outside, the dislocated subject recurrently and compulsively re-dramatizes the moment of damage. In *My Year of Meats*, Akiko, a Japanese housewife who lives in a Tokyo suburb, is fascinated with and feels connected to the image of the happy American family in the TV show. While Akiko's experience of domestic violence at the hand of her husband constitutes the immediate and concrete source of her physical and psychic distress, Ozeki shows how Akiko's mimetic-virtual identification with the figures of euphoric multiculturalism and American wholesomeness exposes another form of violence, in this case insidious and invisible: the dominance of neoliberal subject-making. In the first part of this chapter, I excavate the quality of Akiko's affective identification with the commercialized scene of happiness, what I call commodified mimesis. Placing Akiko's mimesis in dialogue with affect theory, I will show how the border-crossing and interpenetrative aspect of mimesis is extended to embrace the quasi-tactile virtual encounter of economic transactions, thus operating to uncover entrenched and emergent power structures. This fantasmatic interaction across the Pacific incites similar patterns of consumption and lifestyles around the image of happiness and euphoric multiculturalism. Akiko's commodified mimesis turns us to the site where the TV screen flattens the details and textures of history for the sole purpose of commodification, and thus presents the

promise of happiness within the structure of a directive power imposing the forgetting of the negative past.

Commodified mimesis reveals and relies upon the operations of American neoliberal power. Akiko's version of mimesis thus stages the sensuous contact with and assimilation into the insidious mechanisms of the construction of consuming subjects. At the same time, behind the flattened surface of the TV screen and in another story woven into Ozeki's narrative, there is another model for the mimetic breach of the boundary between inside and outside. It takes place on a different level, that of corporeal incorporation between contaminated human-animal bodies. While Akiko's commodified mimesis theatricalizes the workings of U.S.-led capitalist power, the story of the Japanese American director of the show, Jane, who lives with the legacy of having been poisoned by DES hormone as a child, traces a longer genealogy of U.S. imperial violence in Japan throughout the World War II and to the Cold War. In the second half of this chapter, I turn to Ozeki's depiction of Jane's own toxic familial and social genealogy. Poisoned bodies in the novel, to borrow a psychoanalytic term from Jacques Lacan, are the unassimilable site of the *real*, which disrupts and disturbs the smooth surface of reality and thus becomes itself the site of contradiction. In Jane's traumatic mimesis, the demarcation between human and animal, between different generations, becomes porous and penetrative. In her dream, Jane experiences becoming a poisoned cow and experiences the animal's miscarriage, a prefiguration of Jane's own loss of a baby as a result of her toxic familial inheritance later in the novel. In this interspecies and inter-

generational haunting, toxicity constitutes a displaced site of slow violence and evidence of the prolonged effects of U.S. imperialism in the transpacific.

Commodified Mimesis, Virtual Identification, and Multicultural Euphoria

Akiko, a Japanese housewife who lives in a Tokyo suburb, finds herself moved by the country music of Bobby Joe Creely, which she hears on a TV program called *My American Wife!*, despite the fact that she does not understand the English lyrics. An immediate fascination with this American Southern music prompts her to make a trip to Shibuya the next day to buy the artist's CD. Back home, with the music playing in the background, Akiko tries out the recipe for the Cajun-style Baby Back Ribs introduced in the TV show—"The small apartment was filled with the sweet, fragrant steam of the stewing meat and the happy, humid music of the bayou."²⁰⁸ Akiko's sentimental attachment to the singer, whom she has never met but who reminds her of the "Deep South" of America and of the "heat rising off a hard-packed country road" (79), occurs even in the absence of a literal translation of the song. In lieu of meaning and content, what draws Akiko to the song is the music's aural and vocal texture: "She liked Bobby Joe's voice, the way he grunted between verses" (79). The sensory resonance of a voice from thousands of miles away leads Akiko into a sequence of purchases; her affective identification with this music leads her to the meat as well as the CD.

²⁰⁸ Ruth L. Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998), 78. Pages in parentheses hereafter.

This virtual scene of transpacific encounter constitutes an affective communication between distant bodies. In an interaction occurring independently from and in despite of linguistic constraints, affective identification emerges in a process soon followed by acts of imitation and economic transactions. David Palumbo-Liu refers to this mode of interaction as the “affective contagion of Pacific oceanic feeling,”²⁰⁹ an affective transmission that links individual bodies and instills in them a need or a desire for commodities. Unfettered by any sort of dependence on linguistic communication, Akiko’s identification with Bobby Joe’s music and the purchases that follow her affective connection are the commercialized manifestation of the unbounded trajectory of oceanic feeling. Even without understanding the lyrics, Akiko feels connected with this music delivered to her through the medium of a TV show across the Pacific Ocean.

In this operation of oceanic feeling, the sign of America plays an essential, if not always visible, role representing the universal. In her work on the formation of middle-class Asian Indian and American subjects, Inderpal Grewal analyzes the way in which America produces extra-territorial forms of citizenship through multiple channels of neoliberal dominance, the “technologies—the strategies, the rationalities, and the subjectivities—contained within networks of deterritorialized and reterritorialized power.”²¹⁰ Promoting multiculturalism and diversity, America’s geopolitics and biopolitics become entangled with each other under the banner of neoliberal subject-

²⁰⁹ David Palumbo-Liu, *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 133-178.

²¹⁰ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

making and generate a transnational America “imbricated with a consumer citizenship that exceeded the bounds of the nation to become transnational.”²¹¹ With its reterritorializing of hegemonic power within and despite the deterritorializing of power of neoliberal capitalism, Grewal argues, America plays a central role in producing “transnational connectivities”²¹² within which cosmopolitan subjects, knowledge, and ethical practices are produced.

In *My Year of Meats*, transnational connectivities operate on the level of an affective identification with the image of America, in particular with the happiness of American multicultural families as displayed on the TV screen. It is when smiles are captured at an aesthetic and affectively resonant moment, “seal[ed] with a commercial break (181),” that Akiko is most moved and finds herself feeling the most intense relation to the people in *My American Wife!*. In this TV show, happiness is not simply a personal emotional status of fullness that comes along with positive views of the future but rather a political technology for conveying the optimism of American multiculturalism. It becomes a vehicle by which to educate and redirect audiences toward subjective transformation—as, for instance, when Akiko is deeply moved by an episode of a vegetarian lesbian couple, and then begins to fantasize about making her own family unit without her abusive husband. Indeed, *My American Wife!* has a pedagogical mission, revealed in the pitch for the program that Jane sends out to the TV production company in Tokyo:

²¹¹ Grewal, *ibid.*, 8.

²¹² Grewal, *op. cit.*, 3.

My American Wife!

Meat is the Message. Each weekly half-hour episode of *My American Wife!* must culminate in the celebration of a featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption. It's the meat (not the Mrs.) who's the star of our show! Of course, the "Wife of the Week" is important too. She must be attractive, appetizing, and all-American. She is the Meat Made Manifest: ample, robust, yet never tough or hard to digest. Through her, Japanese housewives will feel the hearty sense of warmth, of comfort, of hearth and home—the traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America. (8)

My American Wife! seeks to link Japan and the United States by delivering a sense of American "warmth, comfort, hearth, and home" from the American "wife of the week" to the housewives of Japan. A docu-commercial series sponsored by a national lobbying organization called Beef Export and Trade Syndicate (BEEF-EX), the program "sell[s] off the vast illusion of America to a cramped population on that small string of Pacific islands" (9). Ozeki's novel thus engages a moment of global capitalism and American hegemony when the issue of American beef exports to Japan first arose. After Europe banned the import of U.S. meat in 1989 due to the injection of growth hormones in production, America turned to the new market of Asia. As Jane writes in a note for her own documentary on the American meat industry, the search for a substitutive meat market finds its solution through the ongoing hegemonic power of the United States in Asia: "In 1990, as a result of pressure by the U.S. government, the New Beef Agreement was signed with Japan, relaxing import quotas and increasing the American share of Japan's red-meat market" (134). Although Japan was at that time rapidly rising in the global market and America was imbued with a strong Orientalist fear of the threat posed

by the Japanese economy,²¹³ the Cold War political grammar of imbalance that had structured U.S.–Japan relations since World War II still predominated in rerouting global circuits of meat.

My Year of Meats explores this historical moment and this process of creating consuming Japanese subjects by promoting images of American family values and meat intended to change the diets and habits of their target audiences. In the novel, this cross-national, cross-cultural encounter, motivated by the aim of increasing an export market and thus extending U.S. economic influence on Japan, is mediated through domestic affective transactions. In a period when modern technology and gadgets are have ceased to be impressive to Japanese housewives and when Japan is enjoying economic success and high competitiveness in the global market, what appeals to Japanese housewives is the idea of American wholesomeness promoted in the image of the happy American family. What matters is not simply providing “the vast illusion of America” but rather the practical question how to make that fiction *felt* by Japanese women through the medium of the day-in-the-life docu-commercial: they should “feel the hearty sense of warmth, of comfort, of hearth and home” of the fictional American family.

The pedagogical mission of *My American Wife!* as seeking to infiltrate the realm of what is lived and felt facilitates Akiko’s mimetic identification. Her embodied mimesis

²¹³ Cheng sketches America’s Orientalist fear as follows: “[A] climate of generalized fears of Japanese infiltration into the U.S. economy—for instance, with news media sensationalism of “trade wars” with Japan and fears of the incursions of Japanese corporations into U.S. markets and real estate taking hold in the 1980s. *Rising Sun*, the popular 1992 novel by Michael Crichton and the 1993 film adaptation, prominently circulated the Orientalist fear of takeover by Japanese business governed by collectivity and conformity,” *ibid.*, 192.

in response to the gestures and behaviors of the show's characters is pronounced and remarkable. From imitating the smile of the "wife of the week," buying the same ingredients, following the meat recipes exactly, and desiring a family similar to that which was depicted on the show, to eventually leaving for America to realize that dream, Akiko's response to *My American Wife!* consists of a series of physical and practical isomorphic actions. The most powerful impetus for Akiko's mimetic behaviors is the smile. She is impressed by and drawn to the smiles of the people presented on the show on an immediate and sensuous level:

"Rumpu rossuto," Akiko repeated to herself. "Notto Pepsi pleezu." She watched the television screen, where a sturdy American wife held an economy-size plastic bottle of Coca-Cola upside down over a roasting pan...Under her breath, Akiko pronounced the words again. She liked the sounds, the parallel Japanese *r*'s, with their delicate flick of the tongue across the plate, and the plosive *pu* like a kiss or a fart in the middle of a big American dinner...The woman laughed. Her name was Suzie Flowers. What a beautiful name, thought Akiko. Suzie Flowers laughed easily, but Akiko was practicing how to do this too...*She tried a smile again at Suzie, tried to feel happy-go-lucky.* (19-20; emphasis added)

Akiko's mimetic identification through virtual encounter again takes place without or regardless of linguistic translation. It rather involves the sound and texture of language, and it revolves, moreover, around mimicking the act of the smile. In this affective action of imitation, Akiko, also hoping to emulate the emotion that is associated with the act of smiling, tries to "feel happy-go-lucky." As the narrative proceeds, this remembered smile becomes a compelling instigator of desire for commodities (meat, music, etc) and for mimetic behaviors on the part of the spectator. Akiko does not simply mimic the smile as presented on screen, as she does with Suzie Flower, the first "wife of the week"; her acts of mimesis culminate in her cooking the recipe of the week (after having purchased the

meat, of course!) and in her finally leaving Japan for America. What cuts across this series of emotional and sometimes sentimental interactions that occur via media is a new mode of mimesis: a *commodified mimesis* that bears physical and behavioral mirrorings, which is mediated and promoted by networks of commercialized images and affective stimuli simultaneously connecting people, money, ideas, and lifestyles.

In this form of commodified mimesis emergent in this cross-cultural encounter, the TV screen becomes a fantasmatic interface through which the image of the happy family and euphoric multiculturalism is circulated, consumed, and transferred to the viewer. The TV screen captures and suspends the smile through the use of a commercial break, which thereby imposes and brackets the period of this very aesthetic happiness: “The *My American Wife!* theme song swells... confirming their joy with closure and *sealing it with a commercial break*” (181; emphasis added). In this particular mode of virtual relationality, the delightful surface circumscribing the euphoric world of *My American Wife!* establishes a version of what media scholar Lev Manovich calls the “aesthetics of continuity,” in which different components are morphed into “a single seamless whole” in contrast to the modern media aesthetics of montage.²¹⁴ What seals and secures the smooth whole of *My American Wife!* is the insertion of these commercial

²¹⁴ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). To cite a passage on the aesthetics of continuity, “In computer culture, montage is no longer the dominant aesthetic, as it was throughout the twentieth century, from the avant-garde of the 1920s up until the postmodernism of the 1980s. Digital compositing, in which different spaces are combined into a single seamless virtual space, is a good example of the alternative aesthetics of continuity; moreover, compositing in general can be understood as a counterpart to montage aesthetics. Montage aims to create visual, stylistic, semantic, and emotional dissonance between different elements. In contrast, compositing aims to blend them into a seamless whole, a single gestalt” (144).

breaks sustaining their intense moments of fascination. As the multifarious stories of each family dissolve into aestheticized commercialism and establish the virtual reality (not just the image) of the happy American family, the screen of *My American Wife!* eventually transforms into a fantasy interface exclusively circulating this fictionalized reality.

The moment of fascination that occurs before the interruption of the commercial break has its own peculiar quality of connection. The technical act of capture, with its capacity for containing and preserving a heightened affective status of happiness, offers a highly intimate and even tactile form of communication. In particular, the smiling gaze of the characters of the TV show promotes a quasi-tangible contact with the spectator. In the episode featuring the Bukowsky family, whose daughter was in a terrible accident involving a Walmart truck and was subsequently seriously injured and disabled, the smile of the girl in the wheelchair punctuates the remarkable ending of the episode, transforming the TV screen into a tactile body part, or what we could even call a *skin*:

The girl in the wheelchair struggled down a rutted dirt road toward the camera...When she reached some invisible mark, *she stopped, looked up, and smiled triumphantly*. She lifted the lap robe and revealed a domed platter underneath. She uncovered the platter and offered it up to the camera. It was the prettiest ring of Hallelujah Lamb Chops...*The girl looked steadily at the camera, her blue gaze melting the lens, penetrating its glassy barrier and capturing the hearts of housewives throughout Japan*. Then laboriously she maneuvered her wheelchair around, but before she went, *she shot one more heavenly smile back over her shoulder*. (140-41; emphasis added)

The smiling gaze of the girl pierces the screen and creates a quasi-tactile connection with the distant other: her gaze “melts the lens, penetrating its glassy barrier and capturing the hearts of housewives throughout Japan.” As a breach of the visual boundary that demarcates the division of the world over there from life over here, the affective force of

the girl's smiling gaze does not simply encroach upon the physical distance between the spectator and the reality on the other side of the screen; it also violates the spectatorial distance or "objectivity" inherent in the technology of the TV screen. In the appealing operation of the smiling gaze, and in its erotic-violent force of penetration, the TV screen in this moment seems to come to assume the qualities of a body part or skin inviting and producing intimate touch and contact; the TV screen itself is transformed into a quasi-tactile interface.²¹⁵

Concurrent with this quasi-bodily contact across the screen, however, is an aesthetic distantiation from the scene of smile imbuing the virtual encounter with a sense of surreality. If the quasi-tactile contact brings the spectator into a sensuous and near tangible space in which an assimilative embodiment occurs, then the aestheticization of the grin through effects such as the use of slow motion adds a fantastic and illusory character to the interaction. In this tension between tactile intimacy and aesthetic distance, the dimension of narrative is replaced with the image of the smile. This is the case as well in other episodes where the show's smile reappears: in the episode featuring the Martinez family, for example, their story as Mexican immigrants is condensed into and partly displaced by the alluring and illusory image of the little boy Bobby's smile as it is shot in slow motion alongside the savory figure of Texas-style Beefy Burritos. What moves Akiko most in this and other episodes is the highly aestheticized moment of the

²¹⁵ From a slightly different perspective, one might argue that Ozeki's depiction of this scene resonates with the phenomenological turn in spectatorship theory in film studies. For a film studies' approach to interface and new media, see Seung-hoon Jeong, *Cinematic Interfaces: Film Theory after New Media* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

smile, the imprint of the “warmth, comfort, hearth, and home” of the “heartland of America.” Like the other charming laughs throughout *My American Wife!*, Bobby’s smile is aesthetically pleasing and affectively unforgettable; it partakes of the surreal quality of the virtual connection:

We filmed them stepping out on Saturday night, and on Sunday afternoon after church, Cathy prepared Texas-style Beefy Burritos, made with lean, tender slices of Texas-bred sirloin tips. The burritos were the symbol of their hard-earned American lifestyle, something to remind them of their roots but also of their new fortune. Afterward, Bobby wanted to show us his 4-H project piglet. . . . He had given the piglet a bath and the animal was still wet, sending glistening droplets into the sunlight as it squirmed in his arms. *Bobby smiled at the camera, a little Mexican boy shyly offering his American Supper to the nation of Japan. Everything was in slow motion. It was a surreal and exquisite moment.* (61; emphasis added)

Through this particular virtual connection emerging from the dialectic between quasi-palpable intimacy and aesthetic distantiation, Akiko’s commodified mimesis emerges as a sensuous interaction between the viewer and the viewed. Akiko’s non-linguistic bodily mimesis occurs through the eccentric simultaneity of imitation and visceral contact, always already mediated by commodification. That is, by blending aesthetic work and technology, the TV screen of *My American Wife!* creates what anthropologist Michael Taussig calls “contact-sensuousity,” the corporeal and practical mimetic activity triggered by “the mimetic powers striven for in the advertising image.”²¹⁶ What is particularly striking about Akiko’s contact-sensuousity is that it effortlessly transcends cultural and linguistic differences and thus operates contagiously across physical distances.

²¹⁶ Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 23.

If, as Brian Massumi notes, it is through affect that distance is converted into intensity,²¹⁷ one might say that the geographical remoteness that separates Akiko from the TV show's characters is overcome through the audience's affective synchronicity. In the media pedagogy of *My American Wife!*, Akiko's embodied mimesis is an example of the "mimetic communication" that Anna Gibbs refers to as a process of affective contagion from body to body, the "synchrony of facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person, producing a tendency for those involved 'to converge emotionally.'"²¹⁸ Not just a representation of the other or a copying of the original, mimesis defined in this way is a form of communication that traverses individual bodies and spatio-temporal restrictions and thus allows for a temporary capture of shared form between participants: mimesis as mimetic communication is a "rendering—a relation between things in 'which, like a flash, similarity appears'."²¹⁹

Indeed, Akiko's reaction to the characters of *My American Wife!* resonates with the idea of affective contagion proposed by many recent critics working in affect studies as a way of establishing connection and communication between bodies.²²⁰ On the immediate and physiological level, when Suzie Flower smiles, Akiko cannot help but

²¹⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 14.

²¹⁸ Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, *Emotional Contagion: Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5; cited in Anna Gibbs, "After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 186.

²¹⁹ Gibbs, *ibid.*, 193.

²²⁰ See, Anna Gibb's "Panic! Affect Contagion, Mimesis, and Suggestion in the Social Field," *Cultural Studies Review* 14:2 (2008), 130-45 along with the article cited here; Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2004); Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

turn the smile back to the TV screen. As Gibbs notes, “At the heart of mimesis is affect contagion, the bioneurological means by which particular affects are transmitted from body to body . . . It is very difficult not to respond to a spontaneous smile with a spontaneous smile of one’s own.”²²¹ Concomitant with Akiko’s automatic and physical simulation of the smile, however, is her attempt at emulating the feeling contained in the grin—“she tried a smile again at Suzie, tried to feel happy-go-lucky” (20).²²² What is channeled in this mirroring affective contagion is not simply an automatic imitation of a facial expression and a subsequent reenactment of similar economic behaviors; Akiko is also practicing an emulation of an emotional stance.

What is transmitted beyond the smile is the affective situation it refers to and contains, one we might label “euphoria in multiculturalism.” Through her virtual encounters and interactions with “happy” American families, Akiko begins to dream of the joy of the “vast American landscape—‘Beefland!’” (181). What Akiko instantly grasps from the image of the smile and hopes to imitate and obtain is happiness. As the narrative continues, the precise form of her desired happiness begins to assume a concrete shape in the image of the multicultural, non-heteronormative family. Akiko’s

²²¹ Gibbs, *op. cit.*, 191.

²²² In the context of affective neuroscience, the core system that deals with this affective simulation is mirror neurons: “Mirror neurons are cells that fire when we perform an action or when we make a facial expression, and when we see somebody else performing the same action or the same facial expression. Thus, mirror neurons create an automatic simulation—or inner imitation, if the imitation is not overt—of the facial expressions of other people. By sending signals to the emotional brain centers in the limbic system, mirror neurons may allow us to feel the emotions associated with those facial expressions.” *Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences*, eds. David Sander and Klaus R. Scherer (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 255.

identification with this form of happiness reaches its climax when she sees a multiracial lesbian couple on the show:

The black woman sits on the couch, watching the white woman next to her. The white woman is nuzzling and calming the two coffee-colored little girls... The camera holds steady on the black woman's face. She falters, her voice cracks, and she frowns with concentration to control it.

"The one thing I wanted, *ever* wanted, was to have a woman to love and to make a family with. Even *I* thought that was crazy, let me tell you—impossible, loco...but look." The tears well up in her eyes...

She scowls through filmy tears at the white woman, who reaches over and gently touches her cheek. The two little girls throw their arms around her, kiss her, and she gives in to it all and starts to laugh. The *My American Wife!* theme song swells, a wave of sound that washes over them, confirming their joy with closure and sealing it with a commercial break...

Akiko stared at the television screen...As she watched the sun set on the vast American landscape—"Beefland!" the logo proclaimed—she realized that her tears had nothing whatsoever to do with John [her husband]. These were tears of admiration for the strong women so determined to have their family against all odds...She wanted a child; she'd never wanted John. (181; emphasis in original)

As Anne Anlin Cheng points out, if the dream of multiculturalism stands on a "utopian no-place where the pathologies of race and gender miraculously heal themselves" and fosters the narrative of "overridealization and euphoria in place of injury,"²²³ what Ozeki presents is a version of that fantasmatic no-place of euphoria manifested in the idealized happiness in *My American Wife!*. Akiko's awakening in this scene emerges neither from the dominant demand for sameness nor solely from her intrasubjective conflict or willpower. Instead, what leads to her epiphanic arousal is the specific fantasy of a happiness involving the commodified virtual reality of a multicultural, non-heteronormative American family. Put differently, through the interplay of mimesis, fantasy, and multicultural consumerism, Ozeki renders a form of transcultural and

²²³ Anne Anlin Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race," *Kenyon Review* 19:1 (1997), 51-2.

transnational encounter that instills a fantasy of euphoric multiculturalism in the distant cultural other. Captured in the affective stance of smile and aestheticized as a “surreal and exquisite moment” (61), the happiness of multiculturalism travels via the TV screen across national borders. It is a form of euphoria that is unbound by distance and that is contagious from body to body—it infects the cultural other with a desire for the same.

Mimicry has been an important trope in critical accounts of the ambivalence embedded in the colonized’s assimilation to colonial standards as well as in the operations of colonial power. In his foundational essay on colonial mimicry, Homi Bhabha observes that the ambivalence of mimicry reveals the inherent insecurity and built-in cracks in the command of the colonial power: “Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*” As a subjective and linguistic mode of repetition rather than re-presentation, colonial mimicry is a double strategy of reform, identity, and discipline on the one hand, and a sign of a difference, disturbance, and rupture in the colonial discourse on the other. The civilizing mission of the colonizer is “threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.” That is, the unfaithful and inappropriate copy testifies to the instability and partiality of the original: “The excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject

as a ‘partial’ presence ... The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.”²²⁴

Ann Anlin Cheng links the occurrence of colonial mimicry to the problematic of assimilation in the contemporary Asian American context. While Bhabha’s colonial mimicry is primarily concerned with its own disruptive potential as the discourse of the disciplined (but displaced) Other, Cheng shifts the focus of the realm of emulation to the psychic dimension of the racialized other when he/she strives to attain racial ideals. If Bhabha highlights the inherent failure of the always already incomplete imitation, moreover, Cheng moves the site of failure to the intrasubjective psychic conundrum that accompanies the endless cycle of comparison and measurement, the constant war with the self against the desirable original. In her reading of the female narrator’s entwined racial pathology and social assimilation in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1979), Cheng argues that the racial subject is the subject of hypochondria in that she/he is “endlessly preoccupied with his or her body’s signification, its legitimacy, and the origins of its failure ... [and] plagued by questions of its own authenticity and etiology.”²²⁵ Within this ceaseless, ailing interrogation of the adequacy and legitimacy of the self, pathology becomes the *form* of assimilation: “In the heart of every assimilative gesture lies the haunting anxiety of social failure ... hypochondria is the *form* of assimilation: an intersubjective movement outward

²²⁴ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004 [1994]), 123, 126 (emphasis in original).

²²⁵ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69.

that may result in, but is in fact already conditioned by, the anticipation of some kind of intrasubjective failure.”²²⁶

Where Bhabha sees a language of subversion, in other words, Cheng excavates a process of identification on the part of the racially differentiated subject. For Bhabha, the inherent failure of mimicry is itself a form of contestation because it disavows the stability of power; for Cheng, the anxiety of incommensurability integral to the racial-ethnic mimicry constitutes the condition of assimilation. Cheng’s extension of the critical discussion of colonial mimicry into the dimension of the complex intrasubjective and intersubjective dynamics around assimilation offers a particularly important avenue for the analysis of Asian American texts. In Cheng’s account, assimilation as hypochondria appears in Asian American literature as a particular mode of the Asian American experience in which “assimilation foregrounds itself as a repetitive trauma.”²²⁷ Due to their distinct immigrant and diasporic histories, Asian Americans assume an unstable position within the U.S. national imagination. Historically configured as either unassimilable aliens or as a hyperassimilated model minority, Asian American identity straddles imperfection and overachievement, both of which presume a standard which minoritized subjects are inevitably drawn to and measured against. In the context of the American social myth of integration and the optimistic narrative of the multicultural

²²⁶ Cheng, *ibid.*, 78 (emphasis in original).

²²⁷ Cheng, *op. cit.*, 67. Cheng provides a brief discussion of the trope of hypochondria in other Asian American texts such as David Wong Louie’s *Pangs of Love* (1992), Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1990), and Hisaye Yamamoto’s *Seventeen syllables and Other Stories* (1988). 67-7. For a discussion on the relationship between hysteria and gendered Asian American male subjects, see David L. Eng, “Male Hysteria—Real and Imagined—in *Eat a Bowl of Tea* and *Pangs of Love*,” in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 167-203.

melting pot, mimicry appears as both a social mandate and as a malady: “The condition of having to incorporate and encrypt both an impossible ideal and a denigrated self ... The most successful prospect of social integration may be just to be in the game at all: the point is not even to become the ideal other, but to be *able to act* against the paralysis of alienation, in the interest of becoming *comparable* with that ideality.”²²⁸

In *My Year of Meats*, Akiko’s commodified mimesis corresponds precisely neither to the subversive ambivalence of Bhabha’s colonial mimicry nor to Cheng’s ailing body preoccupied with the compulsion to measure up to the original. What Akiko presents is rather a transnational modality of embodied mimesis that occurs from a quasi-tactile virtual contact with the distant cultural other. In this case, the mimetic behavior does not assume the confrontational quality of colonial mimicry that defies the dominant grammar of the colonial power. This mode of bodily mimesis is rather mobilized by an intimate and fantasmatic virtual encounter inciting similar patterns of consumption and lifestyles around the image of happiness in multiculturalism (and thus also uncovering the workings of neoliberal subject-making). This peculiar combination of contact and copy, consumerism and mimesis, and global intimacy and affective contagion, constitutes the idiosyncratic character of commodified mimesis in *My Year of Meats*.

In casting happiness as a powerful technology for regulating migrant citizenship, Sara Ahmed suggests that “the promise of citizenship is offered as a promise of happiness” thus binding and redirecting migrants toward a certain moral goal. While

²²⁸ Cheng, op. cit., 72, 81(emphasis in original).

integration or assimilation remain the national myth and ideal, Ahmed argues, migrants are bound by “the happiness duty not to speak about racism in the present, not to speak of the unhappiness of colonial histories, or of attachments that cannot be reconciled into the colorful diversity of the multicultural nation.”²²⁹ That is, the promise of happiness contains a directive power that requires the forgetting of a negative past and negative emotions and that enforces an affective conversion of from (we could say) melancholia to happiness: “The freedom to be happy is premised on not only the freedom *from* family or tradition but also the freedom *to* identify with the nation as the bearer of the promise of happiness.”²³⁰ From this perspective, in Akiko’s version of American dream, in which she finally moves to America and becomes an immigrant, embodied mimesis appears as a desire motivated through a virtual encounter with euphoric multiculturalism seemingly emptied of the pathological dimension of assimilation that Cheng depicts.

When Fredric Jameson defines euphoria as an aesthetic situation of postmodernism, he links this new aesthetic mode with “an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our living possibility to experience history in some active way.”²³¹ In euphoria, there is a sense of temporal disorientation and disorganization that

²²⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 158.

²³⁰ Ahmed, *ibid*, 137 (emphasis in original). Ahmed finds the theoretical roots of empire-building and happiness in works of utilitarian thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, Henry Sidgwick, and John Stuart Mill. Ahmed provides a detailed reading of James Mill’s *History of British India* (1818), arguing that for Mill the civilizing mission is a happiness mission: “Colonialism is justified as necessary not only to increase human happiness but to teach the natives how to be happy. They must learn “good habits” by unlearning what is custom or customary ... happiness involves being “redirected,” or turned around ... The education of the native became a matter of morality, of teaching the natives the path to happiness as the path to civilization” (128-9).

²³¹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 21.

prevents the subject from transforming the passage of time into a coherent experience. Jameson's well-known formulation of the "waning of affect" in postmodern arts bespeaks this loss of historical sensibility that comes with "the end of the bourgeois ego ... [that] brings with it the end of psychopathologies of the ego."²³² Rendered through the sheer flat image of the simulacrum and the pastiche of the stereotypical style, euphoria as a peculiar postmodern affect "endows reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage."²³³ An example that illustrates the waning of affect, Jameson observes, can be found by way of human figures such as Andy Warhol's commodified and fetishized images of stars such as Marilyn Monroe or in Duane Hanson's life-size polyester statues. In these human figures that are transformed into their own images, "the world... momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density."²³⁴

In observing consumption-based configurations of the assimilation of racial-ethnic minorities, Jeffrey J. Santa Ana highlights euphoria and indifference as characteristic affects in the construction of minor subjectivity in the postethnic era of global capitalism. As commodified feelings of multinational capitalism, euphoria and indifference both deny modern depth and density (in which emotion represents an outward expression of inward feeling) and promote postmodern flatness and fragmentation (i.e., the collapse of the inside/outside binary in emotion). Through the

²³² Jameson, *ibid.*, 15.

²³³ Jameson, *op. cit.*, 21.

²³⁴ Jameson, *op. cit.*, 34.

celebration of decenteredness, discontinuity, and disconnection in the formation of subjectivity, Santa Ana argues, the affects of euphoria and indifference foreclose the material histories of minor identity, particularly those negative affective traces such as melancholia or pain that are inseparable from a sense of connection to the past. Devoid of any emotional affiliation with a collective history, “the euphoria and indifference of consumerism constitute a ‘mono-affect’ that removes painful and materially expressive emotions, such as shame and anger, from the experience of consumption-based assimilation... The shift into a transnational era of consumerism thus registers the postmodern move into an age of indifference in postethnicity: to desire a consumer subjectivity in this sense is to feeling postethnic.”²³⁵

In just this way, the families of the week in *My American Wife!* appear as alluring images of human figures that imbue the present with heightened sensations of jubilation and happiness. In the world of the euphoric docu-commercial, traces of the pathologies of gender and race are swept away by the delightful mandate of multicultural consumerism. What maintains the heightened status of happiness in the realm of the visual is the intervention of a commercial break: “The *My American Wife!* theme song swells...confirming their joy with closure and *sealing it with a commercial break*” (181; emphasis added). The intrusion of the logic of commodity subsumes and devours what might otherwise reveal the other side of the joy—it abruptly (and violently) seals and

²³⁵ Jeffrey J. Santa Ana, “Affect-Identity: The Emotions of Assimilation, Multiraciality, and Asian American Subjectivity,” in *Asian North American Identities Beyond the Hyphen*, eds. Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 23-4.

preserves the aesthetically motivated stance of happiness from disappearance. Thus, as we see in the scene of Bobby's smile, the paused instant of familial delight is marked by a sense of artificiality and irreality: "It was a surreal and exquisite moment (61)."

The TV screen in *My Year of Meats* regulates, confines, and homogenizes multiple stories and their concomitant emotions to the "mono-affect" that is aestheticized delight and euphoria. In chapter 2, I analyzed the image of the subway window in Trenka's adoptee memoir as an affective plane where unexpected intensities of connection among built forms, human feelings and bodies, and history take shape. When the image of a diasporic individual's mutilated body encounters and becomes entangled with the reflection of the city in a moving train window, this shifting surface becomes a supplementary historical realm as a disruptive affective assemblage—it offers an affectively charged screen where minor voices may emerge. While the subway window in *Fugitive Visions* renders a visualized alternative historical dimension by transforming its own ordinary materiality into something akin to an event resonant with affective historiography, the TV screen in *My Year of Meats* offers a hallucinatory glossy surface wherein the day-in-the-life-style documentary is blended with the directive of consumerism. If the conversion of the flat plane of the window into a space of depth and intensity in *Fugitive Visions* demonstrates a qualitative transformation from an everyday object to an embodied interface haunted by history, then the TV screen in *My Year of Meats* is a homogenizing and amalgamating glaze that squashes and levels the details and textures of life for the sole purpose of commodification. Indeed, as Jane reveals earlier in

the novel, the program of *My American Wife!* is designed for the insertion of optimal commercial spots for selling meat:

Each episode of *My American Wife!* carried four attractive commercial spots for BEEF-EX. The strategy was ‘to develop a powerful synergy between the commercials and the documentary vehicles, in order to stimulate consumer purchase motivation.’ In other words, the commercials were to bleed into the documentaries, and documentaries were to function as commercials. (41)

Akiko’s mimetic identification with the image of the multicultural happy family constitutes, and is conditioned by, fantasy as an interface: a screen that makes a desirable and pleasurable reality appear (via technological distantiation from the real) and enables one to feel touched and penetrated by the other (through its tactile gaze of smile). In other terms, one might say that the TV screen that lights upon Akiko’s mimetic sensuality functions as a Lacanian psychological space—as a screen of fantasy that interfaces between the world of the imaginary (i.e., the sensory, pictorial, non-linguistic), the symbolic (i.e., the linguistic, semiotic) and the inaccessible real (i.e., the material, traumatic). As Lacanian psychoanalysis teaches us, the structure of the imaginary is based on a built-in distance or difference between the self and the other, and the misrecognized identity between the self and its reflection constructs the “virtual unity” of the ego and of reality.²³⁶ In a similar vein, Akiko’s affective connection with the desired

²³⁶ Lacan writes, “The entire dialectic which I gave you as an example under the name of the mirror stage is based on the relation between, on the one hand, a certain level of tendencies which are experienced let us say, for the moment, at a certain point of life—as disconnected, discordant, in pieces—and there’s always something of that that remains—and on the other hand, a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that the subject knows himself for the first time as a unity, but as an alienated, virtual unity.” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York, NY: Norton, 1991), 50. For a spatial reading of Lacan’s mirror stage in its relevance to cyberspace, see André Nusselder, *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 81-98.

object, as I have suggested, revolves around a virtual reality, a world that stands on the pleasurable surface of the imaginary, governed by the logic of fantasmatic identification with the projected image. We might say that the virtual reality on the TV screen with which Akiko identifies also operates within a Lacanian realm of fantasy, a world that is distant from the real and that is fed by the oblivion of the gap between illusion and the real.

Lacan's domain of fantasy is always under the threat of the real, which disrupts and disturbs the smooth surface of this virtual unity: "[I]t is in relation to the real that the level of fantasy functions. The real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real."²³⁷ As the realm of the inconsonant in the psychic system, the real returns in the form of trauma: "[as] the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin."²³⁸ When Ozeki's Jane begins to investigate the other side of the meat industry and comes upon a scene of American cows being injected with toxic hormones, the dimension of the real that has been veiled behind the frame of the TV in the novel returns as embodied trauma. This unassimilable site of the real appears through the figure of contaminated bodies, both human and animal. In the next section, I explore the extraordinary mode of the return of the repressed that Ozeki depicts in Jane's shooting trip to Colorado, which I will

²³⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Norton, 1981), 41.

²³⁸ Lacan, *ibid.*, 55.

call *traumatic mimesis*, as it emerges as a bodily entanglement between toxic human and animal bodies.

Traumatic Mimesis, Becoming-Animal, and Toxic Transmission

Jane's journey to Colorado emerges from her growing interest in and suspicion about the hidden side of the American wholesomeness that *My American Wife!* promotes. After she meets the vegetarian lesbian couple Dyann and Lara and has a chance to read their research articles on the hazards of the meat production system, Jane begins to question her role as a documentarian, the lives of the wives of the week she has met, and the ambiguous genre of docu-commercial to which *My American Wife!* belongs. On the opposite side of Akiko's epiphanic identification with Dyann and Lara, there is Jane, the director standing behind the camera observing a recorded reality, knowing that "there is another heart-wrenching documentary moment at hand, being exquisitely recorded" (175). But the novel also presents another aspect of this Jane as wrestling with lingering thoughts of her inattentiveness to the women on the show, of the violence of the camera, and of the mixed genre of the program. In the novel's editing room scene, inserted between the episode featuring Dyann and Lara and Jane's subsequent trip to Colorado to film the next installment of the show, Ozeki depicts a Jane who oscillates between a sense of accountability to her filmed subjects and occupational duty.

Jane is haunted by and feels accused by the female characters whom she left behind. For example, Jane avoids any further engagement with Suzie Flower after *My American Wife!* prompts the unexpected revelation of her husband's affair; despite

establishing a sincere connection with Helen Dawes, Jane ends up not shooting her family, contrary to Helen's expectations:

Suzie Flowers. Miss Helen Dawes. Certain women stuck to me, flickering around the edges of thought. In the dim, inchoate hours of the morning, when I woke up to pee, they'd insinuate themselves like tapered ghosts into my sleep-addled brain. Once there, they worked like ammonia, delivering a jolt of clearheaded dread. My skin prickled, my pores leached sweat. In Japan, ghosts have no legs. Often they are wronged women who are not even dead yet, whose extremity of suffering forces the spirit from the body to torment their oppressors. Living ghosts. Neither here nor there. I can defend myself; that's not the problem... But the fact is that I forced my way into her [Helen's] life, overcame her reservations, and I will never forget her wistful acquiescence when I called to cancel the shoot. And it wasn't my fault, either, that Suzie Flower's pipe-fitting husband was bonking the cocktail waitress... Still, the worn fabric of her life tore like tissue under the harsh exposure of my camera. (176)

This scene of the revelation of haunting is interrupted by Jane's turn to continue editing the episode featuring the vegetarian couple, despite her discomfort with the fact that they don't know anything about the sponsoring of BEEF-EX or about the overall design of the show as a campaign for selling meat. Jane decides to send a "white mother" copy to Dyann and Lara, a version without the titles or the commercials: "And so I continued, taking out the stutters and catches from the women's voices, creating *a seamless flow in a reality that was no longer theirs and not quite so real anymore*" (179; emphasis added).

While the nightmarish interruption of disregarded figures appears at first to have a capacity for disruption—"A crack in consciousness is a dangerous thing. The slightest tremor can turn it into a gaping abyss" (177)—it is soon contained for the sake of the flawless unity of the show. It is only later when Jane prepares for her trip to Colorado and begins to conduct research on the meat industry by reconnecting with Dyann and Lara to ask for their articles on the topic that she becomes honest with them about the nature of

the program; soon, she begins to vacillate wildly about whether she should remain at *My American Wife!*. In a fax sent to her boss Ueno titled “Documentary Ethics,” Jane writes:

There are a couple of things that have come to light in my researches that I think you should know about. I have inadvertently discovered an unsavory side to the meat industry. I am talking about the use of drugs and hormones in meat production, which are being blamed for rising rates of cancer, sterility, impotence, reproductive disorders, as well as a host of other illnesses and harmful side effects. These drugs are routinely given to the cattle that end up as steak on the plates of the Japanese television viewing audience. I am concerned about the ethics of representing either the Blatziks or the Dunns in a wholesome manner, knowing what I now know about the health hazards of meat production. (211)

What seems to prefigure Jane’s experience in Colorado is thus the sign of toxicity as urgency that threatens the well-being of living things as well as the ethics of re-producing the image of wholesomeness. Indeed, Ozeki opens up Jane’s shooting trip to Colorado with a sketch of plutonium plants and nuclear installations that were used for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their after-effects of contamination revealed in disabled human/animal bodies on American soil. In doing so, Ozeki suggests that connections between the series of poisoned bodies that Jane will soon confront—the five-year-old girl Rose’s premature puberty induced by DES hormone poisoning, the abandoned aborted fetus of a cow injected with an illegal growth hormone, and her own DES-linked miscarriage and dream of becoming-animal—have a resonance with the particular toxic historical event whose delayed effects are also manifested in injured bodies:

Colorado is one of the most beautiful states in the country... The westernmost town of any size is Grand Junction, once a thriving uranium production center in the years following WWII. When the mines closed, the Atomic Energy Commission allowed the radioactive mill tailing to be used in over six thousand housing structures and school foundations... Just outside Denver was the Rocky

Flats plutonium plant. It was closed in 1989 after two major fires and numerous accidents and leaks led to charges that the plant had seriously contaminated the surround countryside, *causing a significant rise in cancers among Denver area residents and a veritable plague of mutations, deformations, reproductive disorders, and death among farm animals*...[W]e'd reached the perimeter of the 570-mile nuclear city that produced the plutonium for "Fat Man," the bomb that leveled Nagasaki...*Often these landscapes hide underground bunkers, but on the surface they are rich with flora and fauna that have flourished, protected from families with fat-tired recreational vehicles, grazing cattle, and other ruminants.* (245-7; emphasis added)

In this passage, Colorado's wild landscapes appear as concealing the remainders of war and the ruins of the toxic violence. In other words, it is a contaminated land. In opposition to the conventional American ideology of nature as a wild and untouched frontier and a promise of freedom, Ozeki renders the wilderness as a surface that covertly buries the residues of destruction and intoxication, "a veritable plague of mutations, deformations, reproductive disorders, and death."²³⁹ The American wholesomeness that *My American Wife!* seeks to render through the family of the week is presentable only under and through the shadows of the poisoned ground. Its assertion and manifestation of euphoric health depends upon the disguising of intoxicated soil, the veiling of disease.

Foregrounding the recognition of toxicity in what is presumably the last episode of *My American Wife!*, Ozeki comes to pose the question of how the poisoned bodies of marginalized subjects become displaced sites of the structural violence that stems from

²³⁹ Robert T. Hayashi provides an insightful critique of the field of ecocriticism for its absence of discussion on labor and race in his essay, "Beyond Walden Pond: Asian American Literature and the Limits of Ecocriticism," *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, eds. Annie Merrill Ingram et al, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 58-75. To cite a key passage, "The inclusion of Asian American and other nonwhite perspectives provides a necessary critique of the historical class and racial positioning of canonical writers and the traditionally narrow concerns of American environmentalism they have espoused. Considering their writings leads to a questioning of ecocriticism's investment in equating the environment with nature and opens new avenues to explore the connection between the social world and the natural world in both abstract and material terms" (68).

nation-states and global corporate powers. In this imagining of a linkage of contaminated bodies, different forms of violence and power are transformed into the shared somatic debility of human and animal figures. As Ozeki reveals in an interview, the broad-reaching interconnectivity between structural dominance and intimate life-worlds is an overarching theme of her novel: “I see our lives as being a part of an enormous web of interconnected spheres, where the workings of the larger social, political, and corporate machinery impact something as private and intimate as the descent of an egg through a woman’s fallopian tube.”²⁴⁰ In this particular, idiosyncratic linkage of the intimate and the global, the personal and the global, toxicity in *My Year of Meats* is manifested in bodily forms. Put differently, contaminated bodies in the novel appear as, to borrow Nan Enstad’s words, a sign of “a sneaky triumph of capitalist logics at the most daily and personal level.”²⁴¹

As Emily Russell writes, Ozeki deploys the contaminated body “as the site of revelation for corporate abuses.”²⁴² Disability in *My Year of Meats* “performs as symbol, an embodied warning against corporate shortcuts and a reminder of the body’s vulnerability.”²⁴³ However, Ozeki does not simply depict the disabled figure as a site that embodies the return of the repressed debunking and unveiling the violence of capital and empire. Rather, by presenting a *shared form* joining meat, human, and animal—the form

²⁴⁰ “A Conversation with Ruth Ozeki,” appendix to *My Year of Meats*, 8.

²⁴¹ Nan Enstad, “Toxicity and the Consuming Subject,” in *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies*, eds. Russ Castronovo and Susan Gillman (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 57.

²⁴² Emily Russell, *Reading Embodied Citizenship: Disability, Narrative, and the Body Politic* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 147.

²⁴³ Russell, *ibid*, 149.

of having been contaminated—Ozeki presents a model of mimetic linkage that renders disabled figures continuous and analogous to one another. If Akiko's mimesis involves a fantasmatic identification with the image of euphoric multiculturalism, the no-place that smooths over the other side of the happy diversity, then Jane's trip to Colorado for her documentary on the meat industry depicts mimesis as an active entanglement and a blurring of the boundaries between human and animal bodies through their physical condition of contamination. In other words, Jane's shooting trip to Colorado extends the ramifications of mimesis from Akiko's commercially mediated affective contagion to include the permeability of boundaries between human and animal. In Jane's dream of becoming-animal after her visit to a feedlot where she sees the dead fetus of a cow, miscarriage is recast as a shared form of disability between human and animal.

In the dust lay a slimy, half-dried puddle containing a misshapen tangle of glistening calf-like parts—some hooves, a couple of bent and spindly shins. It was an aborted fetus, almost fully grown, with matted fur, a delicate skull, and grotesquely bulging eyes. Suzuki rotated the lens into a telephoto setting, but even without it, through the swarm of flies, I could see that the eyes of the calf were alive with newly hatched maggots...

We drove to the motel...I kept imagining what the dust must contain, the microscopic particulates of toxic powder, dissolving in my sweat, now leaching back through my pores, and the thought made my skin prickle and flush and sweat some more. (267-8)

That night I dreamed it was time to give birth. It was odd, because my stomach was still taut and concave around the hipbones, and Ma laughed and pointed to my chest and said it couldn't be time since I still didn't have any *oppai* to feed my baby with, and she handed me some small white pills to make them grow bigger. But I knew she was wrong because this is America and she just didn't know, so I went out behind the milking barn...As I stood there with my legs spread, it started to emerge...It was wet, a misshapen tangle, but I could see a delicate hoof, a twisted tail, the oversize skull, still fetal blue, with a dead milky eye staring up at me, alive with maggots. (277)

The mimetic connections between human, animal, and meat stem from the injection of the illegal hormone DES. In this dream sequence of Jane giving premature birth to the figure of the cow-fetus, Ozeki draws a line of continuity from the DES-poisoned cow to DES daughter Jane's own later miscarriage, which results from the hormone poisoning caused by her mother's misinformed consumption of DES to prevent miscarriage.²⁴⁴ Following her witnessing the abandoned and aborted fetus of a cow in Dunn's feedlot and her exposure to the toxic powder, Jane experiences a dream-like process of becoming the cow, crossing the boundaries between human and animal and thereby copying and restaging the traumatic scene of the animal's premature labor. In this mimetic relation occurring through the *acting out* of the other animal's pain, the interconnectedness between human and non-human disabled figures goes beyond manifesting the mere imitation (of copying the original) or even the bespeaking of that connectivity itself (which highlights homologous disabled figures as chains of signifiers). This mode of mutual imbrication refers to an intimate and contagious aspect of mimicry emerging not from the personalized desire of the colonized who seeks to emulate the original, but through the impersonal affective forces of encounter.

This model of inter-species encounter and entanglement recalls Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's formulation of "becoming-animal." In their poststructuralist approach to an alternative system of subject and thinking, Deleuze and Guattari propose

²⁴⁴ Later in the text, the doctor tells Jane that "In the case of a missed abortion—that's what it's called when a nonviable fetus is expelled—it's almost impossible to determine the cause of fetal death. Possibly your uterus was too small and failed to enlarge rapidly enough. Possibly the placenta failed—maybe it was too low in the uterus or didn't get sufficient blood. The miscarriage would have happened anyway—sooner or later nature takes its course. The accident might have helped it along a little" (298).

becoming-animal as a mode of “drawing lines of flight” beyond the mandate of the normal and beyond established dualisms and institutionalized hierarchies. Distinct from a mere imitation of the immutable and fixed substance of animality (becoming-animal does not simply refer to the literal transformation of the human to an animal form), becoming-animal connotes the creative process *per se* that is the blurring of boundaries between human and animal, the extraction of shared elements from each other: “becomings-animal are basically of another power, since their reality resides not in an animal one imitates or to which one corresponds but in themselves, in that which suddenly sweeps us up and makes us become—a *proximity*, an *indiscernibility* that extracts a shared element from the animal far more effectively than any domestication, utilization, or imitation could: the Beast.”²⁴⁵

For Deleuze and Guattari, what characterizes becoming-animal is the alliance between minoritized figures, rather than any alliance defined by hereditary filiation; this alliance constitutes a communicative and contagious connectivity between heterogeneous groups. It propagates by contagion rather than by following a line of genealogy or classification. This non-generic alliance betrays sexual reproduction as well: “This is a far cry from filiative production or hereditary reproduction, in which the only differences retained are a simple duality between sexes within the same species, and small modifications across generations.”²⁴⁶ Understood as an unbridled power external to the

²⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 279 (emphasis in original).

²⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, 242.

order of institutions such as family and state, becoming-animal is a form of minor politics allowing the sheer transfiguration into something else in the contagious contact with the animal:

There is an entire politics of becomings-animal, as well as a politics of sorcery, which is elaborated in assemblages that are neither those of the family nor of religion nor of the state. Instead, they express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions...If becoming-animal takes the form of a Temptation, and of monsters aroused in the imagination by the demon, it is because it is accompanied, at its origin as in its undertaking, by a rupture with the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established.²⁴⁷

Likewise, mimesis in Jane's dream of becoming-animal participates in the violation of fixed borders and in the radical transformation of each side: Jane becomes a mother cow who gives premature birth to a dead calf; the fetus of the cow in turn prefigures Jane's stillborn baby. In this repetitive and recursive scene of traumatic miscarriage, Jane's becoming-animal also disrupts the familial order of sexual reproduction. While Deleuze and Guattari differentiate becoming-animal from mimicry by dismissing the latter for its conceptual adherence to the frame of binarity and representation,²⁴⁸ Jane's becoming-animal is an active *acting out* of the animal-other's suffering rendering a different sense of mimesis as a mode of minor-minor communication—mimesis as an intimate form of relationality sharing a similar, particularly disabled form inflicted by corporate and imperial violence. In the Deleuzian version of becoming-animal, what is at stake is complete freedom from the normative system of meaning. It presumes a place of an

²⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *op. cit.*, 247.

²⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari bluntly write that “mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature,” *op. cit.*, 11.

absolute exteriority and involves the transformative process that is “drawing the lines of flight” from the structure of Oedipal symbolic order: “Becoming does not belong to history.”²⁴⁹ That is, Deleuzian becoming is a mode of minor politics that celebrates and promotes a line of weightless escape that can never be caught or tamed. In *My Year of Meats*, however, Ozeki seems to present a different mode of becoming-animal, which I suggest we must approach through the lens of trauma.

In *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Ruth Leys suggests that the history of the concept of trauma has involved a balance between the double structure of mimesis and antimimesis. While the mimetic approach understands trauma as “an experience of hypnotic imitation or identification...that immerse[s] the victim in the traumatic scene so profoundly that it preclude[s] the kind of specular distance,”²⁵⁰ the antimimetic stance seeks to draw a strict line between the external trauma and the cognizant subject. That is, while the mimetic model involves a blind immersion in the traumatic scene and its repulsive repetition, the antimimetic tendency concerns a verbalization in which the traumatic scene is recounted and worked through in the patient’s full consciousness. In simple terms, mimesis as a process of acting out of the scene of trauma in a mode of emotional identification is

²⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994). To quote the following passage, “Becoming does not belong to history. History today still designates only the set of conditions, however recent they may be, from which one turns away in order to become, that is to say, in order to create something new ... Without history, becoming would remain indeterminate and unconditioned, but becoming is not historical. Psychosocial types belong to history, but conceptual personae belong to becoming. The event itself needs becoming as an unhistorical element” (96).

²⁵⁰ Leys, *ibid*, 8-9.

counterbalanced by antimimesis as a conscious action of recollection and distancing from the traumatic scene.

From this perspective, Jane's traumatic mimesis participates in the process of hypnotic-mimetic identification with the other and the traumatic scene. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen writes, in hypnosis, "far from replying, then, to the discourse of the other, the hypnotized person quotes it in the first person, acts it out or repeats it ... He does not submit himself *to* the other, he *becomes the other*, comes to be like the other."²⁵¹ In her dream sequence of becoming-animal, Jane performs an affective identification with the other-animal's suffering, a mimetic process that denies spectatorial distance. In other terms, what is happening in this eccentric scene of bodily assimilation is what Mel Y. Chen calls "improper affiliation" as a queer intimacy, where "an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces [are] located outside of the heteronormative."²⁵² In this radical mode of transcending specific boundaries, humans and nonhuman animals constitute a particular "ontological fold in which they are sometimes admitted to belong."

In Ozeki's novel, the mimetic intertwinement between toxic bodies that results from slow violence is revealed in Jane's familial history as well. Slow violence, to follow Rob Nixon's observation, is a violence "that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space."²⁵³ Relatively invisible and

²⁵¹ Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Freudian Subject* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 229-31; cited in Leys, op. cit., 39n34.

²⁵² Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 104.

²⁵³ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

less bounded by time and space, slow violence is “incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales.”²⁵⁴ In the novel, Jane’s familial origin is a traumatic inheritance in which the history of the post-WWII Japan-U.S. relationship lurks as a toxic residue manifesting itself in a crisis of human bodies. Or as Jodi Kim puts it, the “U.S. imperial genealogy intersects with Jane’s own familial genealogy.”²⁵⁵ While Jane’s hormone poisoning comes directly from her Japanese mother’s misinformed consumption of DES, the biological transmission of toxicity from mother to daughter echoes her father’s experience of Hiroshima in WWII and his mysterious death afterwards: “Dad was a botanist in the army. They sent him to Japan as part of a team of scientists doing research in Hiroshima. They were kind of checking up on their handiwork . . . to see if we should drop an A-bomb on Korea. Dad died of cancer and I’ve always wondered whether there’s some connection” (235). Jane’s family history takes the form of transmitted toxicity, in which seemingly separate and distant historical scenes—the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in WWII, waves of Asian immigration, and the recent phenomenon of the export of hormone-injected American beef to Japan—are intimately and transgenerationally interlinked. If parental transmission of repression to children constitutes a form of traumatic inheritance, as Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok tell us,²⁵⁶ then Jane’s peculiar version of

²⁵⁴ Nixon, *ibid.*, 2.

²⁵⁵ Kim, *op. cit.*, 138.

²⁵⁶ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994). As Abraham and Torok write, “Should a child have parents with ‘secrets,’ parents whose speech is not exactly complementary to their unstated repressions, the child will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge—a nescience—subjected to a form of “repression” before the fact. The buried speech of the parent will be (a) dead (gap)

transgenerational spectral inheritance in *My Year of Meats* takes place on the level of corporeal toxicity, rather than on that of the unconscious.

Just as the traumatic traces of the atomic bomb persist in and permeate contaminated human bodies and environments—despite willful acts of forgetting of the state powers of Japan and the United States—the meat industry now serves as a site where the violence of corporate power and U.S. imperialism reveals its effects in ailing and disabled human and non-human bodies. As Donald E. Pease observes, Hiroshima has assumed an eccentric temporal status as an anachronistic event in the U.S. Cold War national imaginary: “Not Hiroshima the actual, the historical event that took place on August 6, 1945, at the conclusion of the Pacific campaign and resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians, but Hiroshima as the *possible* fate of U.S. citizens if Soviet imperialism remained unchecked.”²⁵⁷ Devoid of its actual historical referentiality, Hiroshima becomes the Cold War’s “transcendental signifier” referring to a *possible* future event that would have or will have taken place, should the United States fail or have failed to deal with the nuclear threat of Soviet imperialism. Within this framework, any attempts to recollect the historical actuality of Hiroshima are deterred or silenced: “The name of the always already displaced event which every other cold war event at once deferred yet anticipated, Hiroshima held the place of what might be called

without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions. Its effect can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line” (140).

²⁵⁷ Donald E. Pease, “Hiroshima, the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, and the Gulf War: Post-National Spectacles,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 562.

the cold war's transcendental signifier ... Hiroshima had turned the entire U.S. social symbolic system into the afterimage of a collectively anticipated spectacle of disaster."²⁵⁸ This particular form of historical amnesia is undergirded by the U.S.–Japanese Cold War alliance, in which Japan undergoes a process of “domestication from a former enemy to a proper Cold War junior ally.”²⁵⁹

From this perspective, Jane's familial and interspecies toxic genealogies constitute a critical response to the prolonged effects of Cold War violence. As Kim demonstrates, if the euphemistical brand of Cold War Japan–U.S “cooperation” is understood as a process of rehabilitation that reforms and incorporates Japanese and Japanese American subjects into the frame of liberal democracy and capitalism,²⁶⁰ what Ozeki puts forth is the figure of unrehabilitated bodies that are themselves sites of contestation prefiguring the end of empire. While the discourses of model minority and Cold War junior ally follow the logic of racial mimicry and approximation, Jane's genealogy of minor mimesis as an active bodily entanglement presents different lines of identification persisting across a prolonged time span and revealing the accretions of slow violence.

²⁵⁸ Pease, *ibid.*, 563–4.

²⁵⁹ Kim, *op. cit.*, 108.

²⁶⁰ Kim, *op. cit.*, 95–142.

Minor Historiography

As I discussed in my first chapter, urban hustler Joey's haunting in *Dogeaters* constitutes a traumatic awakening into implication in the forgotten figures of embodied labor. As I showed, there is a kind of contagious effect in his haunting, a transmission of suffering from one to another. In *My Year of Meats*, minor–minor entanglement takes place in the form of traumatic mimetic contagion: Jane experiences and acts out the animal's suffering through her own body, and Jane herself undergoes miscarriage later on. While Joey's body functions as a mediator or an affective zone through which disregarded figures are channeled, Jane's mimetic entanglement with the poisoned cow is marked by repetition and reenactment of the other's suffering. I would like to end this chapter with a brief speculation on the status of Jane as a documentary filmmaker and her traumatic mimesis in its relationship with the methodology of minor historiography. In my analysis of *Dogeaters*, I argued that Joey's role is limited to a mediator whose narrative voice does not assume a single channel of meaning, but rather vanishes near the end, paving the way for the unnamed dead to emerge eventually in an experimental and poetic concluding literary form. In the last chapter of *My Year of Meats*, in contrast, we hear Jane's meta-commentary on being a documentarian who works with facts and fictions, with stories “never reported” (360).

I had started my year as a documentarian. I wanted to tell the truth, to effect change, to make a difference...

I am haunted by all the things—big things and little things, Splendid Things and Squalid Things—that threaten to slip through the cracks, untold, out of history...

In the Year of Meats, truth wasn't stranger than fiction; it was fiction. Ma says I'm neither here nor there, and if that's the case, so be it. Half

documentarian, half fabulist... Maybe sometimes you have to make things up, to tell truths that alter outcomes. (360; emphasis is added)

Jane is haunted by things that “threaten to slip through the cracks, untold, out of history.” In these stories from the cracks, truth is sometimes more unreal and outlandish than fiction. Or, to put another way, in writing a story out of these cracks, truth requires the vehicle of fiction. After quitting *My American Wife!* following her the trip to Colorado and her dream of traumatic mimesis, Jane creates and releases her own documentary on illegal hormone poisoning in the meat industry, described as getting “a small but critical piece of information about the corruption of meats in America out to the world” (360). As her nightmarish experience of the slaughterhouse and her subsequent dream of becoming-animal both prefigures a reality (her miscarriage later on) and offers a base for her own documentary, facts and fictions interfere and penetrate into each other.

As I discuss in my introduction, the writers I explore in this dissertation are minor historiographers, whose works offer critiques of narratives of identity, linearity, and universality as well as figurative labors working within and beyond dominant discourses of history. Michael Foucault argues that every discourse, including literature, is motivated by a will to knowledge, which “ceaselessly multiplies the risks, creates dangers in every area...breaks down illusory defenses... [and] dissolves the unity of the subject.”²⁶¹ Attending to sites of interruption and disruption, these writers reveal and resist the impulses and manifestations of the construction of the unified global citizen in

²⁶¹ Michael Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984 [1971]), 95-6.

the Cold War transpacific, membership within which produces and relies on optimism, flexibility, and consumerism. Without imagining a facile flight from historical burden, these cultural productions unfold moments of disquiet within and beyond confining structures, gestures “threaten[ing] to slip through the cracks, untold, out of history.”

Through a unique mix of fact and fiction, of historical reality and imaginary fabrication, Ozeki puts forth literature as a theory of socio-historical reality. In rendering the particular intertwinement of Jane’s traumatic mimesis with the creation of her own critical piece of documentary, Ozeki displays a model of minor historiography in which a return to or an imaginative identification with the traumatic scene or the other may expand the critical horizon. For Ozeki, traumatic mimesis is not only an experience of bodily haunting, as with Joey in *Dogeaters*, but also appears as a condition of writing a minor text—whether literary or cinematic. As I argue throughout this chapter, the mimetic tendency in trauma defies spectatorial distance from the site of damage, referring to an attitude or disposition of being drawn to the scene repetitively: it is an immersion in the other and an exercise of/in becoming at the same time. While melancholia bespeaks an unending return to loss, traumatic mimesis enacts a repetitive and theatrical return to the traumatic scene, the rupturing instance. For writers of traumatic mimesis, a cultural text does not always guarantee a “working through” or “catharsis” promising resolution or comfort. Instead of adopting a (falsely) curative or redemptive gesture, they must simply *do* the toilsome work of repeating damage anew and returning constantly to the repressed.

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