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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PUBLIC RELATIONS:

DIASPORA, MEDIA, AND THE STATE(S) OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

BY

NATHAN A. JUNG

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2015

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is public property, which is to say it bears the imprints of more people and places than I can ever adequately acknowledge. However, when I look back on its past lives, Dr. Rebecca Walkowitz deserves special mention for setting me on the path to its completion. As my thesis advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr. Walkowitz inspired me with the depth of her scholarly curiosity and commitment, and without her confidence in my work, I would have never completed a dissertation in any form or field.

Past lives notwithstanding, *Public Relations* is unmistakably the product of five years in the English department at Loyola University Chicago. In previous programs, I refined my skills; at Loyola, I found my critical voice. This voice draws deeply from the stimulating cross-currents of Loyola's English department, and the university as a whole. As a result, I would like to thank the English graduate student community, our department administrators, and the many faculty members who pushed us, encouraged us, and treated us as colleagues with our own important contributions to offer the profession.

I am especially grateful for the support of my dissertation committee. *Public Relations* would still be a loose collection of research intuitions had Dr. Badia Ahad not agreed to serve as its director. Her direct, incisive, and always-supportive comments helped me locate the identity of the project. More than this, though, our conversations over the last two years helped me locate my identity as an academic. Dr. Paul Jay's

research was a major factor in my decision to enroll at Loyola. Having now worked with him as a committee member, teaching mentor, and placement officer, I can say that he fully embodies the clarity, rigor, and generosity I first found in his scholarship. Finally, Dr. Steven Jones provided invaluable assistance in shaping the style and substance of the dissertation, especially regarding the nuances of media theory. Serving as his research assistant and taking his course on Media and Culture genuinely changed my scholarly agenda, and *Public Relations* is the better for it.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Michelle Jung, for her unwavering support during this long and often-difficult process. Now, when I read through the chapters of *Public Relations*, I associate specific sections with our marriage in November 2011, and with the birth of our son Joseph in September 2014. For these associations alone, as a reminder of our life together, I will always be proud of this project.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Allen Jung & Karen Willman-Jung.

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CHAPTER ONE

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Like any good public relations campaign, this dissertation aims to offer a

persuasive interpretation of certain key facts. The facts, as I see them, are as follows:

first, a great number of contemporary novels and poems explore the personal and social

consequences of diasporic migration. Second, these texts, along with their print and

electronic paratexts, share a pervasive interest in media. And third, these works are rarely

read in conversation with one another, despite their mutual concern for migration and

media. Owing to this last point in particular, scholarship has failed to fully address the

broader media theories developed in and across these works, and failed to fully pursue

how these media theories respond to, and critically comment on, the prospects for

deliberative democracy in an age of globalization.

To confront this gap, my project addresses the following question: "What is a

diasporic public sphere?" I first encountered this question while rereading Arjun

Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) for

my doctoral field examinations. In his introduction "Here and Now," Appadurai suggests

that the global dissemination of electronic images "create[s] diasporic public spheres,

phenomena that confound theories that depend on the continued salience of the nation-

state as the key arbiter of important social changes" (4). This argument offers a valuable

template for analyzing how transnational circuits of media and migration unsettle theories

of modernity that culminate in the "epoch of the nation-state" (19). However, while

Appadurai reuses the phrase "diasporic public spheres" several times,[1] and while he

invokes Benedict Anderson and Michael Warner by way of explanation,[2] he does not

sufficiently clarify his use of "diaspora," "public sphere," or "diasporic public spheres."

Readers are left to grapple with several questions: how do such spheres interact

with extant nation-states? Do diasporic public spheres share the same political function as

earlier public spheres? And finally, how do the electronic media that create such spheres

relate to older (and arguably more globally pervasive) media, like the mass-produced

books associated with diasporic literature? By provoking such questions, *Modernity at

Large* provides a useful, albeit rough, sketch of the public sphere during another moment

of structural transformation. At its core, *Public Relations* aims to fill in this sketch. It

works at the same intersection of media and migration as Appadurai, but develops in far

greater detail the breadth and depth of the media practices[3] underwriting diasporic public

spheres. I argue that diasporic media practices constitute a critique of public sphere

theories as currently formulated; and yet, I claim that this critique ultimately seeks to

recover the resources of such theories, and redeploy them in a global context.

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[1] See pages 4, 10, 11, 21, 22, 36, 147, 159 and 196 of Appadurai's *Modernity at Large*.

[2] See pages 33 and 36 in Appadurai's *Modernity at Large*.

[3] Throughout this project, I use "media practices" in the sense employed by W.J.T. Mitchell, who writes that he "assumes that no theory of media can rise above the media themselves, and that what is required are forms of vernacular theory, embedded in media practices (10). As a phrase, "media practices" intends to balance consideration for the capacities of specific media with their various employments by different social actors.

The key move I make in developing this argument is to situate "diasporic public spheres" within a critical lineage inaugurated by Jürgen Habermas. Habermas' path-breaking *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) draws together group identity, media, and political agency in ways that prove foundational to the concerns of diasporic authors, even as his model of the public sphere serves as their primary object of critique. First, I will outline the strengths of Habermas' theory of the public sphere. I will then describe the several ways it invites such a critique. Habermas' major scholarly innovation was to historicize the concept of "the public" in relation to developments in communications technology.

While media are implicit in earlier theories of the public sphere by John Dewey and Walter Lippman, and while the public sphere is implicit in earlier theories of media by Harold Innis, Lewis Mumford, and Marshall McLuhan, Habermas' study was the first to directly and convincingly combine the two components. In it, he develops the idea that media facilitate certain types of historically determinant political expression, which should form a counterweight to the arbitrary exercise of state power. Lisa Gitelman describes this line of thinking as follows:

> As Jürgen Habermas first proposed and subsequent scholars have elaborated, the extrinsic or cultural logics of print media and public speech are particularly important historically because beginning sometime in the seventeenth century, they doubled as the cultural logic of the bourgeoisie public sphere. That is, the same assumptions that lay behind the commonsense intelligibility of publication and public speaking as such also helped to 'determine how the political arena operates,' locating an abstract social space for public discussion and opinion, in which some voices, some expressions, were legitimate – and legitimated – while others were constrained… (*Always Already New* 13).

Gitelman's discussion of legitimation and constraint foreshadows the problem of sufficient inclusivity raised by such a model; for the time being, however, it is important to note that Habermas' idealized understanding of representative democracy inextricably intertwines political and communicative structures. He argues that the self-consciousness defining the bourgeois class in England and France as a coherent public (as opposed to isolated individuals or private households) was generated through discursive arenas like coffee shops, but also through print media like letters, novels, political pamphlets, and trade newspapers. These technologies, he argues, allowed for the rational discernment of collective interest, and eventually created the "institutional criteria" (*Structural Transformation* 36) for a public display of the values of the bourgeois private sphere.

For the purposes of my project, the exact nature of these values is less important than the mechanisms guiding their development and expression. *Public Relations* thus draws on Habermas in three ways: first, as previously noted, the trialectic relationship he develops between media, group identity, and political agency forms the core of most theories of the public sphere, including the diasporic "public relations" described in this dissertation. Second, in many ways, my project represents a continuation of his effort to historicize changes to the composition and function of the public sphere over time. This effort embeds the public sphere in specific political and technological circumstances, and in the case of my own research, it produces the enabling assumption that theories of the public sphere may prove adaptable to the contingencies of contemporary globalization. And finally, the normative-ideal element of Habermas' theoretical approach (which seeks transformative modes of critique) also factors into my project, as *Public Relations* tries to

imagine, along with the authors in question, politically inclusive and actionable communication structures which are not, at present, fully or even partially realized.[4]

Despite these contributions, Habermas' model also provokes the diasporic critique explored in this project. This critique responds to the distinctly nationalist tenor of his work. Habermas' public sphere, at its most idealized, empowers citizens to recognize and voice their collective desires to a national government, which acknowledges their sovereignty and, as a result, promotes such desires through policy. In the fifty years since the publication of Habermas' study, however, the increasing porosity of state borders has challenged the practice, and certainly the utility, of theorizing public spheres in exclusively national terms. As a result, the nationalist limitations of Habermas' theory are more visible, and more questionable, than ever before. And yet, at the same time, his promotion of active citizenry and accountability in governance remains relevant. It may, in fact, be *more* relevant than in the recent past, as governments, even at their most responsive, are increasingly underequipped to represent their citizens against exploitation by transnational corporations, environmental catastrophes, and other cross-border concerns. Given the expansive reach of such concerns, Nancy Fraser notes that it is now "plausible" to discuss the possibility of "transnational public spheres." However, she quickly raises the dominant problem shadowing such a proposition: the Habermasian public sphere (and its many descendants) work from a deeply embedded "Westphalian

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[4] For a discussion of the ambiguity shadowing Habermas' public sphere as both a normative ideal and historically determinant formation, see page 183 of Michael Keith Baker's essay "Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas."

political imaginary," which assumes, in Fraser's words, "the frame of a bounded political community with its own territorial state" ("Transnationalizing" 10).

The possibility of enacting a diasporic public sphere therefore depends on the possibility of transgressing the "Westphalian political imaginary" of public sphere theory. This dissertation understands diasporic literature as participating in such a transgression; its means and ends, however, deserve more explanation. Given the historical circumscription of public sphere theory within the "frame" of the nation-state, Fraser argues that it is not enough to simply expand current public sphere theories across wider geographic space. By failing to address the nationalist roots of such theories, this expansionist approach would simply re-inscribe their "Westphalian political imaginary" over more extensive territory. Against such thinly veiled imperialism, Fraser argues that "the task…is to reformulate the critical theory of the public sphere in a way that can illuminate the emancipatory possibilities of the present constellation." In order to transnationalize the public sphere in this way, she suggests that "it will be necessary to return to square one, to problematize public sphere theory." Along these lines, Fraser describes the overall task of transnationalizing the public sphere in the following terms:

> In general, then, the task is clear: if public sphere theory is to function today as a *critical* theory, it must revise its account of the normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion. No longer content to leave half the picture in the shadows, it must treat each of those notions as comprising two analytically distinct but practically entwined critical requirements. Thus, the legitimacy critique of existing publicity must now interrogate not only the 'how' but also the 'who' of existing publicity. Or rather, it must interrogate parity and inclusiveness together, by asking: *participatory parity among whom*? Likewise, the efficacy critique must now be expanded to encompass both the translation and capacity conditions of existing publicity. Putting those two requirements together, it must envision new transnational public powers, which can be made

accountable to new democratic transnational circuits of public opinion ("Transnationalizing" 33).

Fraser argues that public sphere theory, at present, must address questions of normative legitimacy and political efficacy. In other words, it must expand its criteria for inclusiveness to include multi-state communities, and in addition, it must seek forms of publicity that can eventually translate into political agency. Given the extent of the ties Fraser identifies between public sphere theory and the nation-state, some critics may discount the prospects for transnational public sphere theory entirely. Against this, I argue that the public relations developed in diasporic literature respond to Fraser's imperative: they return to "square one," and problematize the foundations of public sphere theory as a precursor to its transnational redeployment.

Any such "square one" critique must address the media component of the trialectic described above; indeed, three of the six Westphalian assumptions Fraser finds embedded in Habermas' public sphere theory directly concern media.[5] In his treatment of media, Habermas shows his roots in the Frankfurt School, especially in the determinist reading of mass media's pernicious effects on public culture that dominates the second half of his study. Despite his attention to mobile mercantile classes and trade newspapers, Habermas' conception of mass media largely builds from the Frankfurt School's culture-industry model, which circumscribes media and culture within a bounded and ultimately

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[5] Fraser outlines these assumptions in points 4, 5, and 6 of her essay. First, she states that Habermas "implicitly assumed a national communications infrastructure, contained by a Westphalian State" (12); second, discussing language, she writes that "tacitly presupposing a single shared medium of public communication, Habermas effectively assumed that public debate was conducted in a national language" (12); and finally, with a nod to Benedict Anderson, she notes that "...Habermas grounded the structure of public sphere subjectivity in the very same vernacular literary forms that also gave rise to the imagined community of the nation" (12).

state-based economic system. As a result, I argue that diasporic critiques of public sphere theories arrive via a more direct critique of the nationalism embedded in their treatment of media. Media can certainly consolidate the authority of the nation-state; Benedict Anderson, for instance, has famously defined a "nation" as "an imagined political community" (6), which relies on "print capitalism" to spread modern notions of statehood across distanced populations.[6]

However, media can also consolidate communities that baldly contradict the governing logic of the nation-state. To this point, Michael Warner describes how public spheres are defined not by political legitimation on the part of the nation-state, but instead by specific media practices, to the extent that the "notion of a public enables a reflexivity in the circulation of texts among strangers who become, by virtue of their reflexively circulating discourse, a social entity (11-12). By suggesting that public-formation attains "a kind of systematicity," Warner suggests that public spheres have an observable basis in "reflexive circulatory" media usage. This usage, he notes, may coalesce any number of publics, for any number of reasons:

> Publics are essentially intertextual, frameworks for understanding texts
> against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all
> interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a
> reflexive circulatory field in the mode of address and consumption. And
> that circulation, though made reflexive by means of textuality, is more
> than textual — especially now, in the twenty-first century, when the texts
> of public circulation are very often visual or at any rate no longer
> mediated by the codex format" (16).

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[6] Anderson's "imagined community" has, of course, been adapted to many non-national contexts. Susan Stanford Freidman, for instance, has explicitly reapplied this term to diasporic communities: "an imagined community of the scattered held together by their shared sense of a distinct history and culture as a people and by obstacles to full assimilation in diverse host countries" (268).

Warner's perspective indicates how distanced individuals (strangers, essentially) can

form coherent social entities by virtue of their mutual enmeshment in patterns of media

production and consumption, patterns which extend far beyond the codex.

This perspective on the public sphere has clear implications for diasporic

populations. The geographic dispersion characterizing diasporic migration almost

intuitively requires long-distance communications to maintain ties across diverse

national, social, political, and cultural contexts. Diasporic scholarship would thus seem

naturally companionate to media studies in this respect, with robust implications for

contemporary theories of the public sphere. And yet, there is a major scholarly disconnect

between the two disciplines. Writing from the position of media studies, Julian Murphet

elaborates on this disconnect:

> The term *diaspora* appears in not one of the indices of the major textbooks
> in the field, and this despite the fact that diaspora studies has been
> generating research that is both cutting-edge and innovative with regard to
> media studies for some 15 years. It is a situation begging for theoretical
> critique, and if we cannot offer that here we can at least sketch out the
> outlines of a conceptual fieldmap to explore the *méconnaissance* between
> diaspora and media studies (55).

Murphet describes the lack of engagement between migration studies and media studies

as "begging for theoretical critique," and offers the idea of "historical tectonics" to

describe interactions between media and diaspora, the latter of which he describes as "the

media of media systems" (56). These tectonics illuminate how diasporic dispersion

recalibrates systematized media hierarchies in the host-land, by transplanting disjunctive

media assumptions and practices. Murphet ends his analysis on a note of ambivalence;

echoing the Frankfurt School, he states that any effort to promote the visibility of

underrepresented diasporic populations must engage media systems whose corporate origins ultimately serve to reify and defang diaspora as a collective political project.

Public Relations responds to this ambivalence by situating Murphet's tectonics within a framework of public sphere theory. I follow Murphet in seeing diaspora studies as ideally situated to explore media's role in modulating group identity, by virtue of its dual concern for involuntary migration and the maintenance of homeland ties. By adopting the frame of public sphere theory, however, my dissertation also addresses Murphet's above "dilemma" (66). I argue that diasporic literature displays far more agency in its response to this double-bind than suggested by Murphet. Viewing diasporic literature as a media-centered critique of public sphere theory views such texts as directly confronting the risks of reification inherent in any mass media engagement. My reading of diasporic media practices (especially as a form of public sphere critique) suggests that detailing the affordances and limitations of media platforms constitutes a highly political gesture on the part of diasporic authors. In developing this argument, I build on the work of three notable theorists (Stuart Hall, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Alexander Weheliye) who approach diasporic identity through methodologies informed by media studies. Together, these theorists advance perspectives on diaspora that emphasize the situated, rhetorical agency of the term, and detail how this agency extends from media practices of "encoding/decoding," "translation," and "sonic Afro-modernity," respectively. My project draws on each of these theorists in different ways, while also reorienting their overall work toward a discussion of migration, literature, and public sphere theory.

Hall articulates his understanding of diaspora in terms informed by poststructural linguistics, which link gaps in meaning-making to the deferral of fixed and autonomous selfhood. While he acknowledges that certain forms of cultural essentialism (including, for example, homogenizing homeland discourses) can have a strategic political function, he ultimately conceives diasporic identity in terms of the irreducible hybridity resulting from historical displacement: "The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined… by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 235). In my reading, Hall's media theory offers a materialist reiteration of the poststructuralism informing his work on diaspora, and for this reason, I consider his work in both fields as complementary. In the essay "Encoding/Decoding," Hall outlines a communications circuit wherein messages inherit a 'complex structure of dominance' from their production origins in institutional power-relations. However, he also maintains that such messages are always-already open to limited interventions, or strategic misreading, on the part of receivers. In his work on media and diaspora, Hall therefore displays sensitivity to the ways in which diverse identities and oppositional political practices develop "through, not despite" powerful historical and technological systems that are never entirely monolithic or determinist.

Hall's subtle location of political agency amidst powerful historical and technological systems is highly applicable to this study. However, my project also strives to attend more closely to the interactive features of specific media. Brent Hayes Edwards and Alexander Weheliye have produced valuable work to this end, while also furthering Hall's treatment of situated political intervention. Edwards argues that diaspora achieves

a "difference within unity" (12) through acts of articulation and translation. He sees such

acts as forestalling abstraction, and disclosing the "décalage," or artificial props, holding

up a given culture's supposed in-group unity. Edwards' focus on diaspora as an evolving

"practice" allows him to understand the concept as a "prosthetic" that speaks to the

interests and needs of specific communities, at specific times:

> Is it possible to rethink the workings of 'race' in black cultural politics
> through a model of décalage? Any articulation of diaspora in such a model
> would be inherently décale or disjointed by a host of factors. Like a table
> with legs of different lengths, or a tilted bookcase, diaspora can be
> discursively propped up (cale) into an artificially 'even' or 'balanced' state
> of 'racial' belonging. But such props, or rhetoric, strategy, or organization,
> are always articulations of unity or globalism, ones that can be mobilized
> for a variety of purposes but can never be definitive: they are always
> prosthetic (65-66).

Edwards' effort to historicize "diaspora" through archival analyses of specific networks

of print culture proves foundational to the concerns and methods of my project.

Finally, Alexander Weheliye describes his aversion to the suggestion that "Afro-

diasporic" subjects are "inherently Luddite and therefore situated outside the bounds of

Western modernity" (2). In response, he identifies "specific instances in the technological

and social histories of sound recording and reproduction as they cut across twentieth-

century black cultural production in order to suggest that the interface of these two

discourses provides a singular mode of (black) modernity" (3). Weheliye's readings of

sound in black diasporic texts ranging from Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* to

recordings by The Fugees provide insight into perspectives on citizenship in "Sonic Afro-

modernity." He grounds his readings in the material features of sonic media platforms,

such that "sound technologies are a vital element of the musical text rather than

supplementary to it" (2). Weheliye's attention to the material affordances of sound technologies and their subsequent impact on diasporic identity influences my effort to explore diasporic literature as a public sphere critique.

In both his media theory and work on diaspora, Hall's strength lies in delineating the possibilities for both hybridity and strategic coherence always-already present in practices of cultural representation. Edwards' focus on archival studies and print culture helps ground diasporic identity in media circulation; and finally, Weheliye's attention to the material affordances of sound technologies offers a robust example of non-print media analysis. In addition, each theorist concentrates on the evolving forms of political agency inherent in diasporic media practices. However, their research concerns specifically black diasporic culture, and does not broach the field of contemporary literature. In addition, these scholars do not address theories of the public sphere, despite the considerable overlap between such theories and their own aims and methods. As I will demonstrate, the widening semantic breadth of "diaspora" requires critical approaches capable of exploring connections between media usage across multiple diasporic communities. As a result, there is a significant opening to discuss diasporic literature in terms of both comparative diaspora studies, and comparative media studies.

This is the opening that my project seeks to occupy. The authors discussed in this dissertation (including, in order, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Fred Wah, Aleksandar Hemon, Teju Cole, Michael Chabon, Junot Díaz, Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, and Colum McCann) published their works between 1983 (at the earliest) to 2014 (at the latest). They also relate diverse migration histories, which link the United States to countries

extending from Korea (in the case of Cha) to Ireland (in the case of McCann). However,

despite such differences in time and context, the formal and thematic continuities

observed in these texts demand critical approaches capable of reading them as engaged,

in different ways, in a shared project. These authors explore migration experiences that

do not easily conform to narratives of cultural assimilation.[7] Their perspective is largely

multi-polar, or split between multiple states and histories. It is therefore crucial to

understand them within a comparative framework of "diaspora," as a way of

acknowledging their ambivalence toward (or even outright rejection of) the possibility of

assimilation.[8]

My understanding of "diaspora" therefore follows the lead of Kevin Kenny, who

suggests that "diaspora is best approached not as a social entity that can be measured but

as an idea that helps explain the world migration creates" (1). Treating diaspora as an

"idea" versus a "social entity" highlights the term's rhetorical elasticity. Historically, it

referred to "the body of Jews living outside of Israel," and thus presented few difficulties

in the way of definition. "Diaspora" in this sense presented a narrative of involuntary

migration, which described one population's exile, suffering, and (projected) return to a

promised homeland. However, diaspora's extended use in the twentieth century applies to

a much wider range of populations. This expansion of application presents significant

problems and opportunities for researchers grappling with a term that is, as I am fond of

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[7] For a broad overview of the complicated migration narratives I have distilled into "cultural assimilation," see: Gordon, Milton. "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality." *Daedalus* 90.2 (1961): 263-285. Web. 30 January 2014.

[8] In her article "The Turn to Diaspora," Lily Cho discusses such ambivalence as a form of "turning back" (15) toward the past. This "turn" results from an interpellation into diasporic subject-positions that occurs in response to exclusionary host-cultures.

telling my students, "a very old new thing." This usage associates diaspora with a much

wider range of population dispersions, as noted by Khachig Tölölyan:

> In my own work as a scholar and as editor of *Diaspora*, I have come to
> accept, with many misgivings, the increasing collapse of the distinction
> between diaspora and dispersion. When ethnics, exiles, expatriates,
> refugees, asylum seekers, labor migrants, queer communities, domestic
> service workers, executives of transnational corporations, and
> transnational sex workers are all labeled diasporas, the struggle to
> maintain distinctions is lost, only to resume in another guise
> ("Contemporary Discourse" 648).

Tölölyan is not alone in having "many misgivings" about such re-appropriation; Rogers

Brubaker, too, has argued persuasively that the term's semantic dispersion significantly

weakens its use-value as an empirical descriptor of specific forms of migration, which

hew much more closely to the term's Jewish origins in their emphasis on involuntary

dispersal and homeland orientations:

> The problem with this latitudinarian, 'let-a-thousand-diaspora-bloom'
> approach is that the category becomes stretched to the point of uselessness
> (Sartori 1970). If everyone is diasporic, then no one is distinctively so.
> The term loses its discriminating power – its ability to pick out
> phenomena, to make distinctions. The universalization of diaspora,
> paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora" (3).

Despite their wariness about diaspora's widening inclusivity, however, neither Brubaker

nor Tölölyan seem comfortable dismissing the reality of this terminological dispersion.

They both, for instance, view attempts to demarcate "authentic" diasporas with suspicion.

Their work instead inches toward a position similar to Kenney's, insofar as they view

diaspora as a primarily heuristic, or even outright rhetorical device.[9]

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[9] Brubaker, for instance, suggests that in diaspora research, "it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on" (13).

My project adopts a similar position; given the term's recent expansion, *Public Relations* develops a comparative framework that can accommodate its widening usage. Since the mid-1980s, comparative diaspora studies have developed in several directions as a way to grapple with the term's evolution. The first "sociological" stage of diaspora research includes work from Gabriel Sheffer, William Safran, Robin Cohen, and James Clifford. Despite their differences,[10] these theorists work from the baseline position of a split between homeland and hostland populations, and the relative maintenance of a homeland-oriented identity despite distance and changed context. A second, "cultural" turn in comparative diaspora studies deemphasized the maintenance of fixed homeland identities *in absentia*, and understood diaspora as a uniquely hybrid identity resulting from displacement. The theorists associated with this second-phase, culture-centered methodology (including Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Paul Gilroy, Kobena Mercer, and several theorists associated with border culture[11]) explore diaspora through readings of cultural works ranging from Letters of Paul (Boyarin) to rap (Gilroy). In so doing, they move away from the "bordered" diasporic identity associated with previous diaspora studies, and toward a more fluid interest in the workings of what Clifford has famously described as "travelling cultures."

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[10] Sudesh Mishra, for example, describes how Clifford "shows resistance to the territorial certitudes informing Safran's conception of the social-psychological attributes that define diasporic identity and consciousness" (78).

[11] I am thinking specifically of the following works: Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's *Diasporic Meditations: Between Home and Location* (1996); Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities (Gender, Race, Ethnicity)* (1996); Vijay Mishra's "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora" (1996); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World" (1996); and Alan Sinfield's "Diaspora and Hybridity: Queer Identities and the Ethnicity Model" (1996).

My comparative model incorporates both sociological and cultural methodologies. While there are real differences between these orientations, I find that such differences are often overstated, insofar as they both work from several core characteristics that distinguish diasporic migration from other forms of dispersal. In my reading of diasporic literature, these categories include group migration, involuntary dispersal, and homeland orientation. To the first category, while the primary texts in my dissertation often adopt internalized narrative voices, these voices are typically multiple, and juxtaposed against one another. My understanding of these novels as "diasporic" thus results from their emphasis on group migration, and their suggestion, as a corpus, that the subjectivities of individual characters are always linked to broader populations movements. To the second category of "involuntary dispersal," none of the novels in this study concern voluntary migration. I do, however, leave the "involuntary" nature of diasporic migration open enough to include the subtler violence of a crippling lack of opportunity, or personal imperatives that nonetheless directly relate to broader histories of involuntary migration. Finally, my emphasis on involuntary migration raises the third category of "homeland orientation." Drawing on the involuntary circumstances of diasporic dispersal, these texts explore populations that maintain a sense of historical continuity with a shared homeland that binds them together across diverse locales.

These three categories produce a comparative framework for describing the particular stances toward migration that draw together the novels and poetry of this project. In addition to its background in comparative diaspora studies, *Public Relations* also employs comparative media studies to describe the collective interest in media found

in its primary texts. From the two-reel film depicted in Cliff's *Free Enterprise*, to the

handwritten journals of Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé*, to the smudged photographs of

Cha's *Dictée*, these texts invite sustained commentary on their highly diverse and highly

detailed media practices. I draw on the work of Katherine Hayles and Lisa Gitelman in

developing such a commentary. Hayles argues that we think "through, with, and

alongside media" (*How We Think* 1) and that our tendency to see new media through the

prism of older media tends to essentialize such technologies. As a result, she advocates a

CMS approach, which employs cross-platform analyses to avoid this tendency towards

essentialism: "Needed are approaches that can locate digital work within print traditions,

and print traditions within digital media, without obscuring or failing to account for the

differences between them. One such approach is advocated here: it goes by the name of

Comparative Media Studies" (*How We Think* 7). My project also aims to de-essentialize

media by exploring the situated uses of media observed in diasporic literature.

Lisa Gitelman reinforces the difficulty of writing "media histories" when media

themselves are "historically reflexive objects." Given the way such objects consequently

implicate themselves in their own study, she defines media as follows:

> I define media as socially realized structures of communication, where
> structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols,
> and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of
> different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular
> ontologies of representation (*Always Already New* 7).

Gitelman's detailed readings of media technologies lead to an argument that proves

critical to this dissertation: "Media and publics coevolve" (*Always Already New* 13).

Phonographs and other inscriptive forms, for example, "helped question authors and

readers as subjects and modify the experience subjectivities of speakers, performers, publishers, and literates. In doing so they kept intervening into dynamic constructions of private and public, community and difference" (*Always Already New* 13). Gitelman gestures towards how such an analysis of phonographs applies to contemporary conditions of globalization: she writes that presently, media "organize and reorganize popular perceptions of difference within a global economic order," such that "one's place is not so much a matter of authentic location or rootedness but one's relationship to economic political, technological, and cultural flows" (*Scripts, Grooves and Writing Machines* 338). Gitelman and Hayles thus attend to the many media practices which shape the parameters of public identity at different points in time.

These dual comparative approaches provide a template by which to address the question that began this introduction: "what is a diasporic public sphere"? Diasporic public spheres are multimodal, transnational print cultures defined by their reflexive critique of publicity. As with previous public sphere models, diasporic public spheres entail communicative exchanges that aim to discern collective interests. However, they depart from previous models in their insistence that for transnational communities, discussions of "collective interests" must entail a theoretical critique of public identity itself. This critique responds to the close association between the public sphere and the nation-state, and the modes of visibility enabling this association. By enumerating how media impact the form and function of civil society, diasporic public spheres challenge these modes of visibility, and by extension, the assumptions governing political participation in the public sphere. The incredible semantic expansion of "diaspora" is

only comprehensible in the context of such a dynamic, evolving critique of publicity, which further multiplies the sometimes-paradoxical connections between diasporic communities. These connections suggest new ways of articulating collective interests that are no longer exclusively defined by single-state citizenship.

This is the main sense in which my title employs "public relations:" as a metaphor to describe how diasporic literature responds to the prospects for political action based on authentic deliberation across multiple nation-states. This usage means to evoke the "strategic communication process[es]" associated with public relations as a profession, while also drawing on the multiple definitions associated with each term. "Public," for instance, denotes the visibility associated with "publication,"[12] visibility that forms a precondition for its secondary meaning of a self-conscious "community" or "nation." Similarly, "relations" describes "an instance of relating or narrating something; a narrative, an account, a statement," while also outlining connections between people, and between states. By so closely associating visibility (publication, narration) with social identity (community, nation), "public relations" encapsulates my broader argument that diasporic literature responds to past and present displacements by exploring how media shape diasporic subjectivity across states that range from the affective to the national.

Public Relations therefore responds to Craig Calhoun's call for a "critical public discourse" ("Tiananmen" 21) which "escapes the limits of face-to-face interaction," and finds "ways to make the space-transcending mass media supportive of public life" ("Introduction" 68-69). Building on the need for such discourse, I view diasporic

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[12] All cited definitions in this dissertation are taken from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

literature as a public sphere critique that explores the basic mechanisms of transnational

community-formation. Moreover, I understand diaspora *itself* as a uniquely self-reflexive

public sphere (i.e. a public sphere defined by its own immanent critique). Diasporic

"public relations" draw on the resources of media to advance and/or contest the shape of

extant and imagined public spheres, emphasizing both the practical underpinnings and the

political consequences of media practices. In making such an argument, this dissertation

draws from fields including diaspora studies, media theory, and public sphere theory.

And yet, despite this interdisciplinary breadth, my main intervention lies in producing a

comparative framework for reading texts whose formal and thematic similarities have

gone largely unremarked. *Public Relations* thus aims to address the current "state(s)" of

American literature, by recovering the multiple writing and reading publics collected

under this heading.

I have arranged this dissertation as a communications circuit. In so doing, I want

to suggest the full breadth of media practices in diasporic literature. The particular circuit

I have adopted combines models developed by Robert Darnton and Thomas Adams and

Nicolas Barker, while also alluding to the decoding agencies explored by Stuart Hall.[13]

The four remaining chapters of *Public Relations* each correspond to a specific link in the

following chain: "Production," "Circulation," "Reception," and "Survival." They follow

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[13] Hall proposes a theory of communication that includes four stages: production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction. Power relations defined at the point of production will then loosely fit power relations at the point of consumption, resulting in a circuit that reproduces pattern of domination; however, while the "denotative level of the televisual sign is fixed by certain, very complex (but limited or 'closed') codes" ("Encoding/Decoding" 513), the connotative level, "though also bounded, is more open [and] subject to more active transformations, which exploit its polysemic values" ("Encoding/Decoding" 513). As a result, it is possible at certain times to "decode the message in a globally contrary way" that "detotalizes the message…in order to retotalise the message within some alternative framework of reference" ("Encoding/Decoding" 517).

the trajectory of media in this order, from production to survival.[14] However, while each chapter addresses its corresponding link as directly as possible, their overall arrangement is largely heuristic. As a result, I would encourage readers to resituate the primary texts outside the local concerns of their respective chapters. For instance, my fifth chapter reads archival theories in Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, and Colum McCann in terms of the "survival" node of my communications circuit. However, this chapter could just as easily have discussed Aleksandar Hemon, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Michael Chabon, and more, all of whom exhibit similar archival interests.

Moving to the circuit's beginning, my second chapter "Public Works: Genealogies of Media in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Fred Wah" examines textual production. This chapter reads the intermedia work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Fred Wah as representative of a diasporic avant-garde that addresses questions of authorship, textuality, and national origin. I contend that these authors address the production-end of what Nancy Fraser describes as a "national communications infrastructure" implied in Habermas' public sphere theory. Cha's *Dictée* (1982) and Wah's *Sentenced to Light* (2008) employ avant-garde aesthetics to explore diasporic migration in print objects that stretch the boundaries of the book medium. Through their attention to the material features of print, these authors reframe diaspora as a non-linear sequence of collaborative authorship, the marks of which are inscribed on the surface of their texts. In this way, Cha and Wah trace diasporic public spheres that are always-already historicized through

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[14] This organization may imply that I advocate a linear transmission model, in the mold of Shannon and Weaver. This is not the case; the organization is purely pragmatic, and intends only to streamline the project and gesture towards the depth and variety of the media theories advanced by these texts.

the instruments of their own dissemination: i.e., through their shaping media. Against the sender/receiver media models criticized by Stuart Hall, then, these authors view diasporic publicity as a collaboration between persons and media, and experiment with new ways to communicate this collaboration.

The project's third chapter, "Public Space: Assembling Diaspora in Aleksandar Hemon and Teju Cole" explores media circulation in the multimodal narratives of Hemon and Cole. These authors, I argue, exploit the interactive properties of print, photography, web design, and social media to critique the spatial logic of the nation-state. When read together, these platforms become media assemblages that experiment with transnational social ontologies, or ways of communicating local spatial experience across distance. Such ontologies, I suggest, unsettle the abstraction characterizing "state space." Hemon and Cole accomplish this in different ways; Hemon deploys "time geography" to reinsert the category of time into the space of the state, while Cole's use of photography and Twitter frames diasporic spatial transgressions as an ethical imperative.

My fourth chapter, "Public Speech: Reading the Language of Media in Michael Chabon and Junot Díaz" examines "diaspora literacy" in the novels of Michael Chabon and Junot Díaz. It has three major concerns: multilingualism, mass media, and the idiosyncratic reception theories characterizing diasporic public spheres. I demonstrate that Chabon and Díaz draw parallels between multilingual "code switching" and a broad spectrum of transnational reading practices. Chabon and Díaz understand diaspora as an interpretive practice comprised of what I call "sociocultural code switching," as opposed to nostalgic land-claims. These authors draw connections between immediate speech acts

and more obviously mediated forms of communication, whose importance grows in tandem with the distance characterizing diaspora. Their model of code switching negotiates the power dynamics embedded in the transnational co-presence of multiple languages, cultural registers, images, and texts. Ultimately, I demonstrate that these authors' sociocultural code switching constitutes a multivalent, media-savvy diaspora literacy, which seeks to reformulate the reception-end of public sphere theory.

The project's fifth and final chapter, "Public History: Archival Interfaces and the Past Publics of Diasporic Literature," argues that novels by Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, and Colum McCann construct alternative, diasporic models of historiography. Diasporic historiography engages the limited and largely state-directed nature of most public sphere historicism, a commentary which is based on the relationship between archival practices and the production of "past publics." I argue that the novels under analysis use formal characteristics including genre (historical fiction), theme (archival theory), and style (non-linear narrative) to create "archival interfaces." These interfaces read archival media as material registers of social elision, and develop innovative archival practices to extend public history beyond state borders. In particular, I read Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* as a validation of "ambiguous archives" which return to the site of archival inscription as a way of decoupling state narratives from documentary records. Next, I examine Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* as an attempt to conceive "archival erotics" as the basis for new political coalitions. Finally, I explore Colum McCann's meditations on archival endurance in his novel *Transatlantic*.

Addressing a new century with new migration imperatives, *Public Relations* explores how diasporic print culture publicizes new versions of the public sphere. As noted by Donald Pease, diasporic populations, which affiliate across borders and hold significant attachments to homes that are perpetually 'elsewhere,' are often, in nation-state models, subject to "states of exception" (7) that render them invisible anomalies to the general rule of the national public. In other words, diasporic populations are represented neither politically *nor* discursively in environments where publics form the face of coherent nations. The present project aims to modestly contest such invisibility by, first and foremost, refusing to "exceptionalize" diasporic literature outside the boundaries of defined national publics. By treating the "state(s)" of American literature, *Public Relations* emphasizes that American literature cannot be adequately understood without engaging reading and writing publics extending to the Dominican Republic, Canada, Nigeria, Korea, and more. It addresses how diasporic populations shift from invisible anomalies to visible publics, and how this shift influences our understanding of public spheres as both models of communication and theories of political representation. This gesture pluralizes the histories and migratory practices underwriting "American literature," a project that is especially important given the continuing potency of the "melting pot" migration metaphor in American cultural history.

CHAPTER TWO

PUBLIC WORKS: MEDIA GENEALOGIES IN THERESA HAK KYUNG

CHA AND FRED WAH

In April of 2000, the photographer Alice Attie captured a series of images of

Harlem which were later collected in the volume *Harlem on the Verge* (2003). Attie

showed these photographs to the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who,

in response, wrote an essay titled "Harlem" for the winter 2004 issue of *Social Text*.

Eight years later, Seagull Books combined a revised version of Spivak's essay and

selections from Attie's photographs to create a handsome, seventy-four page hardback

book called *Harlem*. On the cover of *Harlem*, authorship is attributed to Spivak, "with

photographs by Alice Attie."

For *Harlem*, Spivak writes that she "asked Alice to select photographs that had

inscriptions, no live figures" (3). As a result, *Harlem*'s images linger on the unsigned

writings scratched and splayed across Harlem's depopulated storefronts, and give

architectural weight to Spivak's excursive meditations on the ties between contemporary

development and historical displacement. The book, Spivak writes, embodies a joint

effort to explore "the hyphen between…African and American" (11), and its relationship

to Harlem's past, present, and rapidly gentrifying future. In her words, it attempts a

"telepoiesis" that reaches "towards the distant other by the patient power of the

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imagination," and enacts "a curious kind of identity politics in which one crosses identity as a result of migration or exile" (11).

Despite its seeming abstraction, telepoiesis actually entails a highly materialist engagement with media. For Spivak, the fragile anonymity of the graffiti captured in Attie's photographs conveys a broken communication circuit, or failure of interpellation, which traces a disjuncture between past and present publics just prior the latter's final erasure by the forces of gentrification. At its core, then, *Harlem* pursues the following question: "who sends, and who receives, when messages assuming collectivities are inscribed?" (7). For Spivak, Attie's photographs confuse definite categories of sender and receiver. And in so doing, they comment on the processes by which individuals cohere in political bodies, and the public speech acts[1] that facilitate such coherence.

Harlem exemplifies a uniquely diasporic approach to media production which, as I contend in this chapter, blurs the distinctions between "sender" and "receiver" associated with transmission models of communication.[2] Against such models, *Harlem*

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[1] My use of "speech act" in reference to graffiti is derived from Rafael Schachter's discussion of the street artist Escif: "They are a means of research and exploration, a speech act transferred to the communal space of the street" (315).

[2] These assumptions are grounded in the "transmission" model of communication associated with Claude Eldwood Shannon and Warren Weaver. This model contends that communication works in a tripartite sequence that sends information from a source, through a medium, to a receiver. However, as Daniel Chandler notes, "participants are treated as isolated individuals" in this model, which promulgates the sense of autonomous selfhood underlying the bourgeois subject. In such a model, private interests generated within isolated households are directed, without distortion, to a public sphere comprised of other autonomous individuals, who receive such messages intact, and who assess them against their own private interests. In diasporic culture, however, the boundaries between public and private, receiver and sender, and message and meaning, are much more porous. And the involuntary nature of diasporic dispersion - which produces asynchronous, but foundational, relations between homeland, hostland, and diaspora populations - proves directly responsible for such porousness. Dispersal of this kind provokes powerful forms of boundary maintenance and homeland orientations, both of which operate explicitly at the level of community. Therefore, against other forms of migration (and despite the widening of its semantic field), diaspora remains distinguished largely by its collective nature. Whether this nature manifests through shared trauma, common culture, return movements, heritage tourism, or economic remittances, diaspora

frames diasporic communities (or "collectivities," in Spivak's words) as evolving

products of collaborative authorship. By focusing on how media convoke, or attempt to

convoke, street-level onlookers into a broader black diaspora, *Harlem* explores a public

sphere model whose authority does not derive from ethno-absolutism,[3] "primordialism,"[4]

or any foundational ethno-national identity.[5] Instead, everything about its photographed

inscriptions, and everything about *Harlem* itself (from its Works Cited page,[6] to its visual

layout,[7] to its matte finish[8]) complicates questions of provenance. Readers must therefore

ask: does the text originate with Spivak, Attie, Seagull Books, the anonymous inscribers,

or some combination of these agents? And moreover, why does its provenance matter?

Nancy Fraser criticizes Habermasian public sphere models for assuming "a

national communications infrastructure, contained by a Westphalian state"

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implies sustained group interpellation over distance. Therefore, it is difficult to conceive as a system of discrete exchanges between private individuals. The communication models in diasporic texts thus display less definite barriers between senders, media, and receivers.

[3] Gilroy, Paul. "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism." *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson & Paula A. Treichler. London: Routledge, 1992. Print. 187-198.

[4] Geertz, Clifford. "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States." *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa*. Ed. Clifford Geertz. New York: Free Press, 1963. Print. 107-113.

[5] See: Smith, Anthony. *National Identity*. London: Seagull Books, 1991. Print. See also: Smith, Anthony. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. London: Wiley, 1991. Print.

[6] Two pages in length, the works cited page draws together a predictably diverse range of primary materials.

[7] The text often refers to pictures that are relatively inaccessible to viewers at the moment of their reference, as they occur on out-of-view pages. There are also sections that are clearly meant to immerse readers in pure image (without text), which ultimately (perhaps intentionally) break the line of logic developed in Spivak's essay. In these senses, *Harlem*'s text and images sometimes generate friction between themselves.

[8] One of the most forceful impositions of Seagull Books and the bindery, the matte finish projects a sense of luxury very much at odds with Attie's photographs, in particular.

("Transnationalizing the Public Sphere" 12). What Fraser doesn't discuss in detail is the extent to which such a communications infrastructure (and its assumed function of standardizing national culture) relies on production models inherited from the Frankfurt School. These models locate production forces within a discrete national economic base; by exploring culture as an "industry," they assume a dominant, hierarchical relationship between active producers and passive receivers. This chapter reads the intermedia[9] work of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Fred Wah as representative of a diasporic avant-garde that disrupts this assumed relationship. I argue that Cha's *Dictée* (1982) and Wah's *Sentenced to Light* (2008) employ avant-garde aesthetics to explore diasporic migration through print objects that stretch the boundaries of the book medium. By foregrounding the sociomaterial[10] conditions governing their work, these authors reframe diaspora as a non-linear sequence of collaborative authorship, the marks of which are inscribed on the surface of their texts. In this way, Cha and Wah trace diasporic public spheres that are always-already historicized through the instruments of their own dissemination: i.e., through their shaping media. Against the sender/receiver media models criticized by Stuart Hall in "Encoding/Decoding," then, these authors view diasporic identity as a collaborative practice that interweaves public identity and media production.

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[9] In this chapter, I frequently employ the term "intermedia" as used by Dick Higgins to describe the mixture of media forms expressed in the texts under analysis. Other words – including "multimedia," "media assemblage," and "media ecology" – might also be used. However, for this particular chapter, I have adopted "intermedia" because of its roots in discussions of the avant-garde.

[10] For a discussion of this term and its usefulness in bridging the gap between social constructivism and technological determinism, see: Orlikowski, Wanda. "Sociomaterial Practices: Exploring Technology at Work." *Organization Studies* 29.9 (2007): 1435-1448. Web. 27 January 2015.

Diasporic Avant-Gardes

Like Spivak, Cha and Wah foreground how media production relates to public sphere production. And like Spivak, they pursue production models suited to the multiple histories engendered by involuntary displacement. Cha and Wah, however, work from a more explicitly avant-garde orientation, with several related effects: first, this orientation complicates notions of original authorship; second, it implicates media in the creation and maintenance of categories "sender" and "receiver;" and finally, it grants authorship roles to successive readers. Together, these effects invoke complex timelines that revise paradigms of linear cultural transmission in diasporic literature, art, and scholarship.

Critics such as Leslie Fielder, Hilton Kramer, and Judith Russi Kirschner, have described the avant-garde as a historically discrete failure that lived and largely died in early twentieth-century Europe. James Harding, however, makes a persuasive argument in favor of extending the avant-garde movement outside of Europe, and beyond the early twentieth century:

> Rather than heralding the death of the avant-garde, the processes of globalization call for a rethinking of the contexts to which the avant-gardes respond. At the most basic level, those processes suggest the need to rethink stagnant notions of consumerism or of bourgeois society, such as those associated with the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and those criticized and negated within some of the most famous avant-garde expressions of the early and middle twentieth century (181).

Building on Harding's argument, I suggest that Cha and Wah respond to such "processes of globalization" by invoking avant-garde aesthetics, while at the same time, developing more nuanced approaches to media production than those available in top-down Frankfurt School paradigms. The European avant-garde, in other words, has an extant

formal legacy that can help contextualize diasporic authorship in Cha and Wah with

regard to public sphere theory. This legacy positions the avant-garde as more than a

generalized, cyclical reaction to prevailing cultural norms, in the sense developed by

Renato Poggioli.[11] Instead, the stance toward artistic production associated with the

European avant-garde resonates directly with diasporic media practices.

In particular, Cha and Wah share an avant-garde sensibility that uses material

form to illuminate the social backdrop of artistic production. This sensibility is a common

thread in critical theories of the avant-garde. In "Avant Garde and Kitsch," Clement

Greenberg writes that "In turning his attention away from subject matter of common

experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft" (6). Hans

Richter also discusses this reflexive concentration on form and medium, as does Peter

Bürger, who finds avant-garde art encapsulated by montage forms, which foreground

their surface-level materiality.[12] Finally, Jürgen Habermas writes that in avant-garde art,

"the colors, lines, sounds, and movement ceased to serve primarily the cause of

representation; the media of expression and the techniques of production themselves

became the aesthetic object" ("Modernity Versus Postmodernity" 10). Theorists thus

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[11] Poggioli's work views the avant-garde as a cycle of "fashion," wherein dominant norms are challenged by subversive artistic techniques, which in turn become dominant and subject to challenge by future avant-gardes.

[12] Bürger describes the importance of montage for defining the avant-garde in the following terms: "A comparison of the organic and nonorganic (avant-gardiste) work of art from a production-aesthetic point of view finds essential support in the circumstance that the first two elements of Benjamin's concept of allegory accord with what may be understood by 'montage.' Artists who produce an organic work...treat their material as something living. They respect its significance as something that has grown from concrete life situations. For avant-gardists, on the other hand, material is just that, material. Their activity initially consists in nothing other than in killing the 'life' of the material, that is, in tearing it out of its functional context that gives it meaning" (70).

largely agree that the avant-garde took as its object what Habermas calls "media of expression" and "techniques of production."

They also agree that the avant-garde, by taking such "techniques of production" as its primary object, addresses the broader production forces dominating bourgeois society. Such theorists disagree, however, on whether such formal self-attention can ever constitute an effective (i.e. transformative) critique. For most, the answer is "no," and as a result, the avant-garde is often seen as exhausting art's social relevance. In such accounts, the avant-garde is less a reflexive critique of capitalism, and more a final capitulation to market forces. Greenberg calls attention to the connection between anti-mimesis and aesthetic solipsism in the avant-garde:

> Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. 'Art for art's sake' and 'pure poetry' appear, and subject matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague (5).

Habermas echoes this sentiment, and summarizes the endpoint of avant-garde aesthetics as follows: "The radical attempt to negate art has ended up ironically by giving due exactly to these categories through which Enlightenment aesthetics had circumscribed its object domain" ("Modernity Versus Postmodernity" 10).

And yet, despite such persuasively defeatist accounts, the avant-garde's emphasis on modes of production proves enduringly relevant to cultural works in the contemporary period. This is especially true for diasporic critiques of the production practices of public sphere theory. These critiques, I argue, draw on arguments that find the avant-garde's formal abstraction, far from disengaging with the public sphere, is actually in dialogue

with it. Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984) argues that the avant-garde

managed to disclose art as a commodity in bourgeois society, but failed to stimulate any

action based on this observation. My reading contests Bürger's claims regarding the

death of the avant-garde; however, I think his analysis of avant-garde artistic production

is insightful. Bürger argues that the avant-garde sought to explode the status of art in

bourgeois society. The avant-garde, Bürger writes, sought to disrupt practices of

production and consumption through its emphasis on material form. He describes the

movement's attempt to transform modes of production through art as follows:

> We have seen that the production of the autonomous work of art is the act
> of an individual. The artist produces as individual, individuality not being
> understood as the expression of something but as radically different...In its
> most extreme manifestations, the avant-garde's reply to this is not the
> collective as the subject of production but the radical negation of the
> category of individual creation (51).

Bürger sees the "extreme manifestations" of the avant-garde as focusing attention on the

material conditions enabling and structuring artistic objects, and working towards the

negation of individual creation. He locates this project in the representative form of the

avant-garde collage, or "montage."[13] The avant-garde's deliberate incorporation of "non-

organic" or external materials like newspaper clippings, Bürger argues, constitutes its

major innovation in social critique:

> The avant-garde not only negates the category of individual production but
> also that of individual reception. The reactions of the public during a dada
> manifestation where it has been mobilized by provocation, and which can

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[13] Bürger seems to use "montage" and "collage" interchangeably; I have stuck with the latter, to avoid
suggesting that the texts in this chapter are filmic. His emphasis on the collage-form, and his language of
"organic" versus "inorganic" art, are outlined in the following statement: "What Lukács calls 'covering'
here is nothing other than the creation of the appearance (Schein) of nature. The organic work of art seeks
to make unrecognizable the fact that is has been made. The opposite holds true for the avant-gardiste work:
it proclaims itself an artificial construct, an artifact. This extent, montage may be considered the
fundamental principle of avant-gardiste art" (72).

range from shouting to fisticuffs, are certainly collective in nature....This represents not only a polemical attack on the individual creativity of the arts; the recipe is to be taken quite literally as suggesting a possible activity on the part of the recipient (53).

The formal characteristics of avant-garde practices ranging from collages to dadaist manifestations therefore address production practices that would locate a singular "author" as the fountainhead of artistic creation. Against this, the avant-garde foregrounds its own imbrication in what Paul Mann describes as "a wide range of apparently ancillary phenomena – reviewing, exhibition, appraisal, reproduction, academic analysis, gossip, retrospection – all conceived within and as an economy, a system or field of circulation and exchange that is itself function of a larger cultural economy" (7). What some critics read as formal self-involvement, then, can also be seen as an effort to emphasize the production residues of the art object, and by extension, to critically examine the structuring power implied by such residues. By virtue of their so-called insularity, in other words, avant-garde works actually invoke a wide range of social "ancillary phenomena," and thereby suggest not only the production histories and material networks underwriting themselves as specific media objects, but also the close association between community production and cultural production. Timothy Yu makes a similar point when he writes that in the avant-garde,

the aesthetic and the social are inseparable. An avant-garde is an aesthetic and a social grouping, defined as much by its formation of a distinctive kind of community as by its revolutionary aesthetics. As such, it can serve as a corrective to essentializing views of any kind of artistic community (2).

Yu describes how the avant-garde is defined as much by the creation of self-conscious communities (what I call publics) as any specific program of "revolutionary aesthetics."[14]

Cha and Wah's avant-gardism is thus rooted in the relationship between media and community. Their aesthetics respond to the social dynamics of media production and address the origins of the public bodies associated with a "movement" like the avant-garde. In this way, they self-consciously reinforce Lisa Gitelman's argument that "media and their publics co-evolve" (13). Cha and Wah's attention to socialization-through-form contests the association of origins with national provenance. By indicating the mutual circulation of several actors and agencies on a given page, Cha and Wah develop a genealogical approach to media production in diasporic culture. Michel Foucault used the metaphor of "genealogy" to describe a methodology for reconstructing alternate histories of the subject. The term (against previous metaphors like "archeology") responds to the difficulty of developing a non-teleological approach to history. It is appropriate for this discussion of Cha and Wah, for three reasons. First, genealogy is media-conscious: "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 76). Second it is concerned with questions of origins, addressing what Gary Gutting describes as the "complex, mundane, inglorious origins [which are] in no way part of any grand scheme of progressive history" ("Michel Foucault"). And third, it suggests the highly genetic language and concern for

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[14] Yu's overall analysis is also deeply useful in pointing out connections between avant-garde formations and American racial discourse: "after 1970 the question of race became central to the constitution of any American avant-garde" and that "American writers of color can themselves best be understood in the terms we have developed for the analysis of the avant-garde" (1-2).

reproduction, transmission, and mutative change witnessed in these texts. For these

reasons, my use of "media genealogies" suggests the intertwined and unpredictable lines

of descent between persons, communities, and media drawn together by Cha and Wah.

The media genealogies developed in *Dictée* and *Sentenced to Light* explore

political collectivities that are neither the product of state consolidation (citizenship), nor

the inevitable inheritance of a recoverable genetic origin (ethnicity). Instead, they

comment on the interstitial place occupied by diasporic public spheres through an

imminent critique of media production. Rather than locating public identity in linear

progressions from geographical, historical, or cultural origins, they foreground the less

obvious (but more agential) effects of mediated cultural transmission. In so doing, they

frame transnational affiliation as ongoing processes of collaborative re-creation, which

nevertheless bear the marks of their own history. Foucault expresses this sense of

"descent" in a further commentary on his genealogy:

> Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map
> the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of
> descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to
> identify the accidents, the minute deviations — or conversely, the
> complete reversals — the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty
> calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have
> value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of
> what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.
> ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 81)

Media genealogy thus proves historically conscious; and yet, through its emphasis on

production, it offers a way of reading diasporic culture that is both interventionist and

"situated" with respect to its multiple histories and conflicting agendas. By negating the

originative category of "author," I suggest that the avant-garde forms employed by Cha

and Wah negate fixed origins more generally. Instead, they experiment with collaborative media productions that incorporate multiple "origins" into public sphere discourse.

"Non-Linear Recording" in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was born in Korea in 1951, and moved to San Francisco with her family in 1964.[15] After graduating from high school, she completed a semester at the University of San Francisco, and then enrolled the University of California, Berkeley, in 1969. At Berkeley, Cha's courses combined art studies, comparative literature, and film studies, the latter of which eventually took her to the Centre d'Etudes Américain du Cinéma in Paris. Despite her admiration for Stéphane Mallarmé and Samuel Beckett, her attraction to semiology and minimalist aesthetics stem largely from her interest in film theory. In particular, she was drawn to the relational dynamic that film, as a medium, creates with its viewing audience. Cha understood this dynamic in terms of the so-called "flicker effect" of the cinematic apparatus, which some film theorists argue produces unusually receptive psychological states in the viewer.[16] These states allow for the mental recombination of moving stills into a cohesive assemblage, such that film is actually, to a large extent, assembled in the mind of the viewer. Cha underscores this point in these lines from her work "Audience Distant Relative:"

> you are the audience
> you are my distant audience
> i address you
> as I would a distant relative

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[15] Much of my biographical information is drawn from the following essay: Lewallen, Constance. "Introduction: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha - Her Time and Place." *The Dream of the Audience: Thersa Kak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)*. Ed. Constance M. Lewallen. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2001. Print.

[16] For a description of the "flicker effect," see: P. Adams Sitney. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. Print.

> as if a distant relative
> seen only heard only through someone else's
> description (10-11)

In this passage, Cha expresses an interest in the relationship between media and audience that carries over to rest of her work. Audience, in Cha's usage, often incorporates the public production of imagined intimates, which are, for Cha, interpellated through specific forms of mediated address ("seen only heard only through someone else's / description").

In 1980, Cha moved to New York to continue her work with performance and visual art. At this time, she discussed a print project called *Dictée* with her collaborator Reese Williams. She worked on *Dictée* over the course of the following year, and completed it shortly before her tragic murder in 1982. Roughly two weeks after her death, Tanam Press released the first edition of *Dictée*. While the text was, at first, largely unknown outside of the avant-garde circles of New York and Berkley, it has since become her most well-known work. *Dictée* is, in fact, often regarded as Cha's magnum opus; as Constance Lewallen notes, this status likely results from the fact that *Dictée* deftly synthesizes the many elements characterizing Cha's other productions: "*Dictée*…combines family history, ethnic consciousness, autobiography, stories of female martyrdom, poetry, and images. In this one book Cha explores all the major themes of her work: language, memory, displacement, and alienation" (11).

Dictée's growing status outside of avant-garde circles results largely from its incorporation into Asian-American studies canons.[17] In tandem with the text's own

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[17] Timothy Yu's chapter on Cha ("Audience Distant Relative: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Experimental Asian American Poetry") provides a comprehensive overview of this reclamation.

idiosyncrasies, then, the multiple claimants shaping *Dictée*'s reception history ("avant-garde" and "Asian-American") have resulted in its status as a canonized outlier text which holds together seemingly irreconcilable parts. *Dictée*'s mixture of prose, poetry, visual art, fiction, historiography, and biography is thus largely discussed in terms of division, contradiction, and paradox, all of which forestall traditional critical approaches. Timothy Yu, for instance, calls *Dictée* a fundamentally divided text (103), whose first half invites the "historical and biographical" readings associated with "Asian-American" literature, and whose second half takes an experimental turn "in order to return to a 'home' that can only be located in writing" (108). Elaine Kim, too, describes *Dictée* as "a contradictory text" with "paradoxes rooted in Cha's location in the interstitial outlaw spaces between Korea and America, North and South, inside and outside" (21). Finally, in *Immigrant Acts* (1996), Lisa Lowe writes that *Dictée* cannot be reduced "to a single classification or preoccupation, for it resists such determinations" (36).

By contrast, my reading suggests that the well-documented indeterminacies in Cha's text are, in fact, surface-level expressions of a diasporic mode of media production. *Dictée* is not, in this reading, the indirect expression of essential experience described by some critics.[18] Instead, *Dictée* pursues diasporic identity through media genealogies that trace a very literal model of collaborative publicity. *Dictée*'s avant-garde intermedia ultimately represent diasporic subjects as the products of specific media histories. These histories communicate the lines of descent that shape diasporic publics out of globally

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[18] Along with Elaine Kim, this stance is perhaps best articulated by Laura Hyun Yi Kang's essay "The 'Liberatory Voice' of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictée.*"

dispersed populations. At the same time, however, viewing diasporic cultural texts as sequences of mediations foregrounds the many emendations made to such texts over time. *Dictée*'s collage-work thus suggests a communications circuit; this circuit interpellates readers as collaborators in a diasporic production chain embodied by the text itself. Some critics, including Timothy Yu and Eric Hayot,[19] have opened the way for such an argument by focusing on avant-garde theory and *Dictée*'s interest in media, respectively. However, my approach differs in that I emphasize *Dictée*'s use of intermedia, and connect this intermedia usage to a production-side media theory.

This approach is best served by approaching *Dictée* as an "artist's book." Such an orientation redirects attention away from its frankly minimal narrative elements, and further emphasizes its use of materialist semiotics. Stephen Bury defines "artists' books" as follows: "books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself" (1). Johanna Drucker notes a constitutively self-reflexive quality to the genre's material formalism; she also warns about the genre's capacious nature, and as a result, defines it only as a (now familiar-sounding) "space of activity" (*The Artist's Book as Idea and Form* 15). This "space" returns us to the fundamentally social concern of the physical artistry typifying artist's books. While critics like Julianne Spahr have discussed *Dictée* in ways that invoke this tradition, their focus on language ultimately restricts the full

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[19] Eric Hayot has described how Cha's "investment in the physical form of linguistic or representational transmission" participates in *Dictée*'s "powerful, incomplete making." (607). However, I push back against his assertion that the text employs a "complex but unified narrative voice" (605). At times, voices in the text appear stable; however, there are also sections with highly different tones, which should caution us away from artificial continuities. What this suggests is a complicated line of transmission that affects our understanding of diasporic origins.

range of Cha's intermedia interests. Reading *Dictée* in context with this genre is the best

way to understand its use of avant-garde tropes, and the best way to demonstrate how

these tropes have historically commented on production practices. Rereading *Dictée* as an

artist's book entails revisiting Cha's background in mixed media and film, and reviewing

her particular association with Tanam Press. As noted in the production materials for the

documentary film *Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: A Dream of the Audience*, Tanam first

published *Dictée* in 1982:

> During the late 1970s, Tanam Press began to publish artist's books. Rather
> than consider artist's books as highly refined visual objects, the idea of the
> press was to treat the medium as carriers of information that could be
> made inexpensively and circulate with all the other paperbacks. The press
> gave artists free reign to design all aspects of the books and some unusual
> works were developed as a result ("dictee").

Much like *Harlem*, *Dictée* emerges from a unique congruence between press and artist.

This congruence both highlights the conditions enabling such a text (in the hands of

another publisher, *Dictée* may have been a fundamentally different animal) and suggests

the considerable degree of control Cha wielded when shaping *Dictée*. Interestingly, Cha

responded to such a surplus of control with an extended statement about the collaborative

nature of diasporic media. Instead of emphasizing her total mastery as author-figure, Cha

employs layout, typography, visual elements, and other features to foreground the

multiplicity of voices structuring her text. In a press circular she wrote to promote *Dictée*,

she describes the project as follows:

> *Dictée* is a cumulation of narratives in nine parts. A non-linear recording;
> tracing of names, events and biographies of nine female persons. The
> personages and their accounts are derived from non-fictional and
> mythological sources. Established as a constant throughout the book is the
> self-reference to the act of writing, the act of making speech; inherent in

its function that which simultaneously subverts, silences the very act ("dictee").

Note the fluid movement between writing to speech in this passage, and in particular, the tortuous syntax of the last clause following the semicolon. The referent for the pronoun "its" is ambiguous; however, Cha's press circular seems to argue that the very "act of writing" and the "act of making speech" both subvert and silence themselves. In some ways, this represents a fairly straightforward reiteration of postmodernism's interest in exploring and exploiting the instabilities accompanying signification. However, this description, while certainly valid, gains valuable nuance when put into conversation with Cha's description of *Dictée* (from the same passage) as a "cumulation of narratives," and especially as a "non-linear recording."

This latter phrase is perhaps the best baseline descriptor for my critical assessment of the text. "Non-linear recording" suggests how *Dictée* employs the formal properties of avant-garde collage to record and make available to readers the many constitutive agents and activities involved in its own production. This focus on the text's "production history" may evoke images of a stemmatic tree finally rooted in an authoritative text; and yet, *Dictée* represents its production stages through an idiosyncratic sequence that refuses to reinforce straightforward lines of descent, whether textual (in its arrangement of images, text, and documentary reproductions) or national (in its arrangement of homeland narratives). Moreover, by emphasizing "recording" over "writing," Cha invites readers to extend *Dictée*'s interest in speech and writing to a wider context that includes the many media it collects and binds, and further, the many social forces that shape *Dictée*'s textual body. Cha's language of narrative "cumulation" and

biographical "tracing" in "non-linear" time positions the book as emblematic of a

diasporic model of media production. This model comments on the emergence of

diasporic communities through shared production practices, practices which critique the

assumptions about national origins underlying state-based public sphere theories.

    Dictée immediately calls attention to such practices. It begins with two images:

first, the book's cover depicts a depopulated desert landscape strewn with monumental-
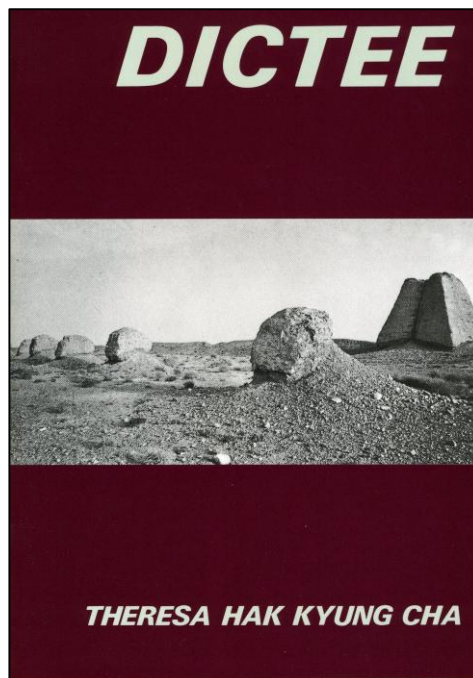
Figure 1. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. New York: Tanam Press, 1982. Print.

looking ruins (see figure 1).[20] And second, before its title page, *Dictée* offers a

photocopied reproduction of Korean text. This text was inscribed by Korean slave

laborers on the surface of a Japanese tunnel during World War II (See figure 2). The

latter text translates as "I miss my mother. I'm hungry. I want to go to my

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[20] As described in the conclusion to this section, later editions use different cover images.

hometown/homeland." [21] In this way, *Dictée* clearly announces its interest in collecting and juxtaposing temporally distant diasporic "recordings." However, the utter lack of
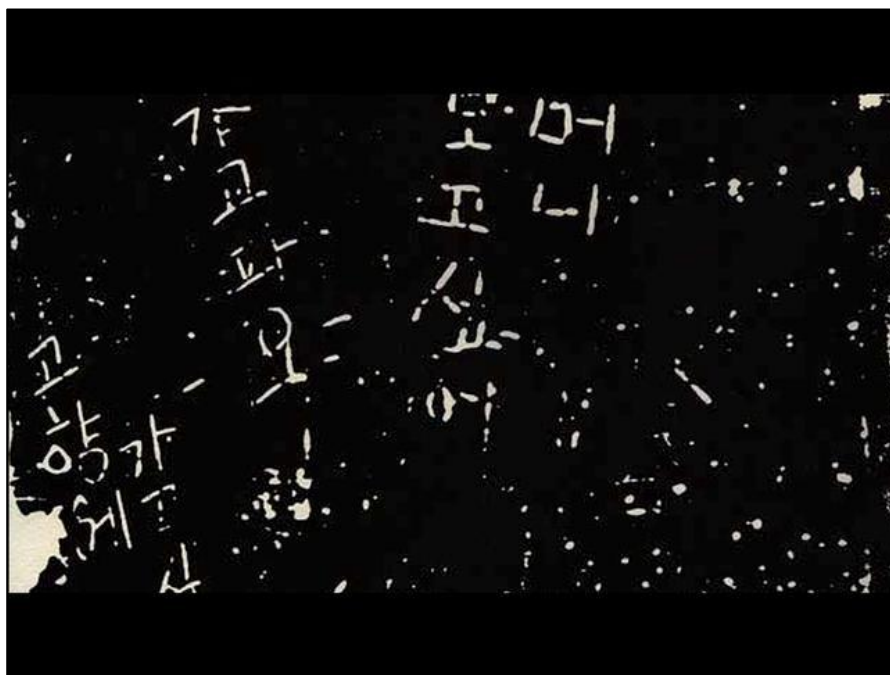
Figure 2. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. New York: Tanam Press, 1982. Print.

context for these images, including basic attribution, proves most striking; the Korean text, for instance, does not announce itself as authored by slave laborers during the Second World War. While readers of Korean would perhaps be able to roughly date and time-stamp these inscriptions based on guesswork prompted by *Dictée*'s later sections, the jarring absence of attribution for both images foregrounds the collagist sensibility of the text. This sensibility pulls documentary records into the orbit of clearly creative, abstract pieces like the text's cover image. Readers are thus given to understand that such

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[21] This translation is taken from Stephen Joyce's essay "The Link and the Chain: The Individual and Communal Self in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictée" (2008).

images come from elsewhere — that is, from 'outside' the text, and in some cases from

different authors — while at the same time, they approach these images with new

interpretive stances generated solely by their mutual inclusion in *Dictée*.

In addition, this avant-garde juxtaposition demands that readers scan such images

(and particularly the latter image of Korean text) in terms of their reproduction within this

invented collagist context. The fairly high level of abstraction associated even with the

deeply contrastive black-and-white image of writing on the tunnel wall is never complete

enough to challenge its status as a reproduced photograph. The image is clearly

photographic in origin, but is also quite obviously a reproduction in *Dictée*. Instead of

representing a "degraded" image whose qualities are somehow recoverable in a pristine

original, its particular form of abstraction-by-reproduction constitutes a hybrid media

category, which is neither exclusively photograph, nor text, nor etching. The uniqueness

of this category ultimately testifies to the false efficiency often attributed to mechanical

reproduction,[22] and urges readers of *Dictée* to take reproduction processes themselves as

un-credited authorial agents of the text. As mutual collage elements, these framing

images suggest an effort to frame *Dictée* as a singular object built from multiple sources.

This first instance of Cha's diasporic "reproduction history" connects the plight of

displaced Korean laborers to later Korean migrations via collage elements that imply an

irregular sequence of transmission, which is made expressly visible in the coarse grain of

the second image's highly contrastive black and white.

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[22] I am thinking in particular of Walter Benjamin's arguments on this point in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," which do largely assume homogeneous production standards for mass-produced goods.

By drawing together the accidents, contingencies, and agencies contained in such reproductive practices, *Dictée* suggests the multiple roles reproduction plays in shaping past and present diasporic collectivities. A project of this kind, which connects media histories to the shifting outlines of diasporic group identity, recalls the non-teleological interpretive method of Foucault's genealogy. By focusing so insistently on this first instance of mechanical reproduction, I am pursuing a similar genealogy, by connecting cultural production to public sphere discourse via media genealogies. However, *Dictée*'s subsequent dedication "To my mother to my father" establishes another genealogical basis for the kind of production-centered media theory inaugurated by these first images. Its cover photos and dedicatory preface establish two related understandings of genealogy (genealogies of family and genealogies of media) prior to the body text. In so doing, *Dictée* exemplifies the multiple temporalities associated with diasporic collage work, wherein external elements assembled from multiple historical trajectories are drawn into an interpretive relationship. However, *Dictée*'s avant-gardist montage insists that every external element bears the traces of its previous production forces, including authors and reproductive mechanisms. This observation helps orient readings of *Dictée*'s "non-linear recording," and offers insight into the communication circuit created by the text's amalgamation of intermedia. This circuit promotes a mode of diasporic public discourse that maintains a resolutely anti-colonial politics, while at the same time, avoiding the familiar, and often troublingly equivalent, position of oppositional nationalism.

To develop the nuances of these politics, I will explore *Dictée*'s idiosyncratic communication circuit in further detail. *Dictée*'s first page (which appears without title,

after an ambiguous table of contents) remediates a language primer. In particular, I want

to highlight the use of full words in place of punctuation on this page. This substitution

(i.e., "There is someone period from a far period." [1]) draws readers' attention to the

book's status as a printed object by foregrounding the gap between inscriptive practices

and spoken language. *Dictée*'s first section interposes choral elements ("O Muse, tell me

the story" [7]), highly interiorized reflections on Catholic mass, and more instructional

descriptions of the catechism of the Catholic Church. These elements provide backing for

Dictée's foundational concept of "diseuse," which immediately follows the language

prior to the titled section, and which reappears throughout the text, culminating in a

highly nuanced, but ultimately agential understanding of diasporic media production. In

this first section, "diseuse" clearly describes a highly physicalized struggle to speak on

the part of an unnamed female subject. This section has been covered in significant detail

by critics, like Nicole Cooley, who are interested in the text's concern with "voice" and

the difficulties of claiming expressive agency under colonial occupations. Working from

this scholarship, I draw out the media theories involved in *Dictée*'s movement from silent

"diseuse" to expressive agency, and finally, suggest the consequences for its public

sphere commentary.

The first section positions the drive-to-speech witnessed in "diseuse" within a

communications circuit that connects *Dictée*'s focus on speech back to the text's framing

images: "Voice. Assign. Hand it. Deliver it. Deliver. She relays the others. Recitation.

Evocation. Offering provocation. The begging. Before her. Before them" (4). This circuit,

which is defined by Gertrude Stein-like transformative repetitions ("Deliver it. Deliver."),

collaborative impulses ("She relays the others") and obscure but insistent chronologies ("Before her. Before them") offers a broader critique of transmission models of communication, which depend on the isolation of categories like "sender" and "receiver." While clearly critical of the violence of imposed colonial languages, "diseuse" also suggests that such languages can be transformed, and even appropriated, through repetition/reproduction. Similarly, "diseuse" suggests that foregrounding collaborative production practices encourages the circulation and transformation of such reproductions in wider public spheres. Cha's juxtaposition of "diseuse" with the language primer and introductory images extends this agential repetition-in-speech to include media reproduction more generally. This connects to the argument, posed by Anne Cheng, that Cha's intertextuality performs repetitions that are the only possible mode of resistance when the compulsion to speak comes from outside. Such repetitions apply to every aspect of *Dictée*. Furthermore, this broader application is the entire point of the insistent textual materialism underlying Cha's avant-garde aesthetics. This repetition is embedded in the relay developed in these early sections, which finds both "senders" and "receivers" intermingled in the context of *Dictée*'s visual, typographical, and textual fragments.

The relevance of such a mixed production model for diaspora is elaborated in the following poem, which concludes the unlabeled introductory section, and provides a kind of capstone to the struggles elaborated in "diseuse":

> From A Far
> What nationality
> or what kindred and relation
> what blood relation
> what blood ties of blood
> what ancestry

what race generation
what house clan tribe stock strain
what lineage extraction
what breed sect gender denomination caste
what stray ejection misplaced
Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other
Tombe des nues de naturalized
what transplant to dispel upon (20)

This poem poses a series of questions about origins ("blood relation," "ancestry," etc.) that follow from the interrogative pronoun "what." The poem, in fact, concludes on a question ("what transplant to dispel on"); however, Cha refuses to grant each line the conclusive power of a question mark, leaving them open to interpretation as hybrid questions/affirmations. As noted, the above lines concern collective origins – framed in various terms including "lineage," "race generation," "caste," and so forth – until arriving at the "third element" of Tertium Quid, which denotes "Something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things, but distinct from both." In no uncertain terms, then, "diseuse" resolves in the production of something new from known elements, privileging the creative aspects of lineage over forms of strict descent. This position both reinforces the text's collage elements, and complicates diasporic collectivities, or publics, which "take root" in the several fallacies associated with fixed national-genetic origins. Against such fallacies, *Dictée* shifts the terms of diasporic affiliation away from dispersed "organic" unities (drawing on Bürger's description of montage) towards "inorganic" collage arrangements. This shift evokes a communication model that generates variations on the collective interests of "diaspora" with every successive instance of non-linear recording involved in the creation, circulation, and reception of textual objects. Such variations include overlapping (and often-contested)

categories like "Asian-American," "Korean-American," and/or "diasporic" literature, all of which claim *Dictée* as a canonical touchstone. *Dictée* suggests that the media underwriting diasporic public spheres speak to their own origins and ends. Cha's text makes such histories ever-present, mutable, and aggregative; it accomplishes this by evoking the influence of multiple authors, multiple media, and multiple production forces, all of which attempt in different ways to reimagine transnational political collectivities.

Collectivities of this kind are defined as much by the kinds of public interpellation seen in *Harlem* as any absolute historical or ethnic belonging. This is not to deny the historical realities of displacement, racism, and xenophobia; instead, describing the interpellative forces behind such collectivities acknowledges that such historical realities do not, in themselves, create transnational social bodies. This is especially true given the geographic and temporal distances of diaspora: dispersed populations might separately endure privation, racism, or assimilation in their respective hostlands without forging any particular connection to a diasporic homeland. And yet, the production practices of diasporic media provide a basis not only for defining diasporic publics, however temporarily, but also for directing their anti-colonial politics.

This is nicely signaled by *Dictée*'s second section (the first section with a title: "Clio/History"), which opens with another unmarked photograph on the verso page. Meanwhile, on the recto page, readers encounter the sparse biographical details of the Korean freedom fighter Yu Guan Soon, who organized the March 1st resistance movement against Japanese colonial rule. In addition to her photograph, "Clio/History"

relates information about her birth ("By Lunar Calendar, 15, March 1903") and death (12, October, 1920. 8:20 A.M."). Note the intense specificity of these details, which precede another terse statement of fact that reachers back to *Dictée*'s dedicatory preface: "She is born of one mother and one father." While chapter headings like "Clio/History" invite complicated allegorical readings, this introduction to Yu Guan Soon showcases *Dictée*'s stark literalism, which often receives little attention. *Dictée* challenges this literalism in various ways, but the indexical nature of the relationship posited on this two-page spread (which develops connections between text, image, and person) suggests that we read the full range of *Dictée*'s material textuality as equal indices to its range of productive forces.

This textuality inscribes connections between readers, authors, photographers, booksellers, and historical figures like Yu Guan Soon. *Dictée* applies such trace connections to its representation of Yu Guan Soon, and to the Japanese occupation of Korea that originates the traumatic dispersion shadowing its known figures. Following Soon's photograph, biographical details, and a two-page spread of Korean ideograms, the unknown narrator of "Clio/History" describes how Soon, in her eventual martyrdom to the cause of Korean independence, "makes complete her duration. As others have made complete theirs" (28). The narrator then describes how Soon ("she") invokes other female revolutionaries including Jeanne d'Arc and Ahn Joong Kun. This section balances an admiration for such figures with a concern for the ways in which they are, in their mediated after-lives, invariably "rendered incessant, obsessive myth" (28).

The narrator worries that representing such revolutionary figures as stable signifiers participates in the same structures of oppression underlying the colonial

regimes against which they fought. These structures position "one nation against the other entire nation" (32), in acts of violent generalization that can only function when "The enemy becomes abstract. The relationship becomes abstract" (32). In this way, the iconography of martyrdom returns us to transmission model of communication, wherein "sender" and "author" map onto to singular, originative entities like nations and national heroes: "Japan has become the sign. The alphabet. The vocabulary. To this enemy people. The meaning is the instrument, memory that pricks the skin, stabs the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure, that rests as record, as document. Of this enemy people" (32).

As noted, *Dictée* is often more literal than its reputation may suggest. This literalism goes largely unremarked, however, due to its arrival through "…the flesh, the volume of blood, the physical substance blood as measure" that define *Dictée*'s textual body. *Dictée*'s collage of historical fact and poetic fiction creates a relay system which highlights the circuits of cultural production that deliver fully-formed images of martyrs. Cha's text encourages the creative reproduction of such martyrs myths by highlighting their histories of transmittal. In order to highlight such histories, *Dictée* presents the many social sediments burned, typed, scratched, and pressed onto its present guise. To this end, in the same section, the narrator writes of Yu Guan Soon's letter of protest, and by extension, of her own writing, that "This document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: the word. The image" (33).

For the narrator, when the channels through which content disseminates (i.e. media) become transparent, audiences are left "neutralized to achieve the no-response, to make absorb, to submit to the uni-directional correspondence" (33). Receiving messages through the "same channel without distinction" heightens divisions between sender and receiver, divisions which ultimately naturalize the discursive regimes producing categories of "active" agents (who produce media) and "passive" recipients (who consume it). In response, the collage-form employed by *Dictée* foregrounds the material re-appropriation of media as a mode of multi-agential, multi-directional correspondence. The widening circulation of this correspondence tentatively holds together diasporic public spheres across time and space. *Dictée* thus aims to "extract each fragment by fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (33). As if to underscore this point, the section "Clio/History" concludes with an unmarked photograph of martyrs, and a two-page spread of remediated handwriting, which presents in script what previously appeared as typography. My reading here departs from critics, like Srimati Mukherjee, who take *Dictée's* use of Yu Guan Soon as an unproblematic drive to reclaim absolute ethnic belonging. While the text clearly opposes the forceful imposition of language upon a colonized people, it is important to be more exact about how *Dictée* resists the essentialisms inherent in any blanket description of an "ethnic self." To do so, I would like to advance to *Dictée's* later sections, which best demonstrate how its modes of textual production perform a diasporic critique of the public sphere.

There is much to discuss in the public gathering visualized at the start of "Elitere/Lyric Poetry," or the incised, abstract surface that follows its ominous conclusion ("the ink spills thickest before it runs dry before it / stops writing at all" [133]); or the discussion of multi-directional, multi-temporal journeys that follow the image of Demeter in "Thalia/Comedy;" or the remediated letter in the same section, which again appears in both handwritten and typed versions. However, I will close this particular circuit with a reading of *Dictée*'s final section "Polymenia/Sacred Poetry." This section cements the text's unusual return narrative, which moves from silence to speech. In the text's vocabulary, this return narrative moves from "diseuse" to expressive agencies that are related to its idiosyncratic understanding of "home." On page 154, *Dictée* presents a series of untranslated ideograms, which again appear on page 173, this time in translated alphabetic script.[23] The approximate nature of these translations mirrors the transformative nature of mechanical reproduction discussed in this chapter. And yet, "translation" does not adequately encompass the broad range of media involved in an artist's book like *Dictée.* Given new contexts, these media mutate in the same manner as the reappearance of the Chinese characters above, while also (like those characters) retaining traces of their prior iterations.

As I have suggested, *Dictée*'s collagist aesthetic foregrounds such traces. Cha's text also, by focusing on these multiple agencies, highlights the social role played by such objects, which continually define and direct diasporic group identification. Ultimately,

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[23] The connection between these ideograms and their reappearance as alphabetic script was pointed out to me by the following article: Stalling, Jonathan. "Pacing the Void: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictée." *Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. Print.

Dictée presents its textual corpus as a genealogy of media, which acknowledges its own production histories, but also makes prior interventions legible. *Dictée* provides an appropriate image for this kind of genealogy in its repetition, on an otherwise blank page, of the following line: "Tenth, a circle within a circle, a series of concentric circles" (176). These circles retranslate the Chinese ideograms mentioned earlier, such that every successive circle, or textual edition/addition, effectively "reproduces" the diasporic public it interpellates, while also grounding this public in a fungible lineage. This retranslated line then leads, on the next page, to the following stanza, which "returns" readers to the silent stones of *Dictée*'s first image:

> Words cast each by each to weather
> avowed indisputably, to time.
> If it should impress, make fossil trace of word,
> residue of word, stand as a ruin stands,
> simply, as mark,
> having relinquished itself to time and distance (177)

This poem relates *Dictée's* words to the immobile monuments arranged around its cover photograph. Such "monuments" are alternatively "ruins," and in this sense, the poem proves cautionary: it suggests that forms of monumental reasoning generate the sense of origins underlying both colonial power-structures and the media production practices that disseminate and reinforce such power-structures. In both cases, origins are seen as "monumental," in the sense that they are pre-given and lead to the present in a direct line. *Dictée* presents this view of origins in terms of transmission models of communication.

Against such models, *Dictée* puts its constructed-ness on full display as a broad critique of "origins" (textual *and* national) in the public sphere. It ends with a brief "notes" page, which lists three reference materials, and thus reinforces its collaborative

impulses. These impulses manifest in collage forms that present textuality as an artefact

of production processes; *Dictée* in turn demands to be read as a commentary on such

processes. The debates surrounding diasporic identity, Cha suggests, are inscribed in and

perpetuated by the media objects that communicate such identity. To conclude, I will

argue that *Dictée*'s materialist agenda proved especially prescient in this regard. For

instance: note how, in figure 1, the cover for *Dictée*'s original edition stages avant-garde

abstraction up-front. More recent covers, however, display either Cha's mother Hyun

Soon Huo (see figure 3), or even Cha herself (See figure 4), while reproducing the
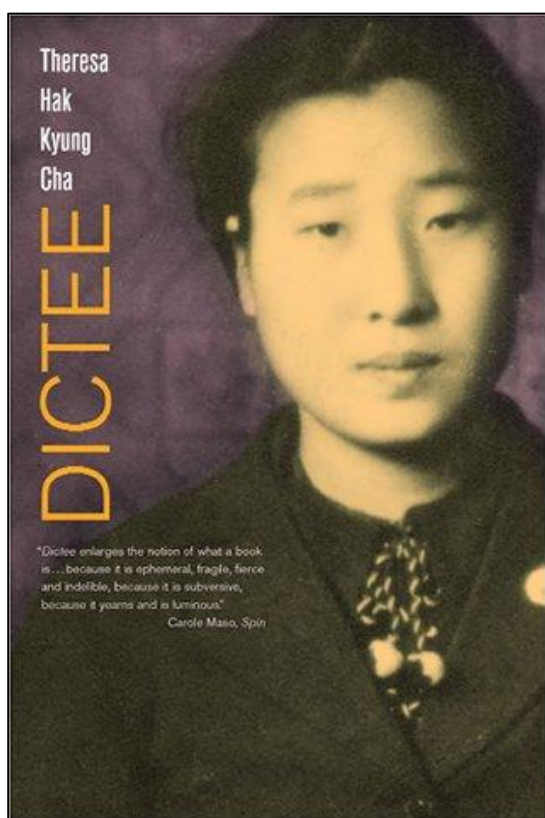
Figure 3. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Print.
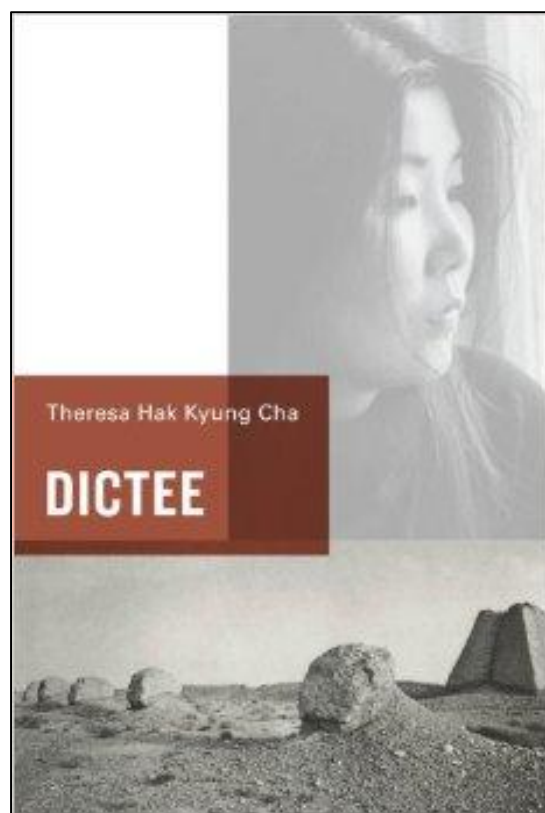
Figure 4. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. S.l.: University of California Press, 2009. Print.

original edition within its outer binding. These later covers clearly emphasize ethno-

biographical interpretations of the text. Reading them against the original cover

physically signifies a congruence of related factors (academic interests, publishing trends,

available identity labels) that have, over time, resituated *Dictée* with regard to both

"avant-garde" and "Asian-American" canons. This is a story told in plain sight – a

narrative of lineage that speaks to readers from the cover of the text. Cha's avant-garde

aesthetics encourage interpretations that view these forces of production not as evidence

of economic or technological determinism, but as evidence of a highly politicized,

genealogical perspective on diasporic media production in the public sphere.

Producing the Social Biotext in Fred Wah's *Sentenced to Light*

One can read the trajectory of Fred Wah's poetry as an effort to find an avant-

garde language suited to the sinuous histories of migration underlying contemporary

Chinese-Canadian communities. Wah's language has evolved from its original emphasis

on the materiality of the word to a broader focus on the materiality of media. Like Cha,

he draws on avant-garde traditions to develop connections between material textuality

and more general categories of cultural production. Wah, however, more explicitly

occupies the gap between event and text, and more explicitly foregrounds the

collaborative nature of diasporic media practices. In his recent collection *Sentenced to*

Light (2008), Wah connects these event/text gaps to a perspective on diasporic migration

that results in what I call a "social biotext." The social biotext complicates the textual

object in much the same way that the "biotext" complicates the traditional aims of

autoenthography.[24] In this way, Wah's avant-garde work illuminates the complex lineage

of its own production as a critique of public sphere theory.

Wah began his career heavily influenced by American Language poetry.

However, over time, he sought out different idioms for his poetry, in the hope that such

idioms might allow him to more directly address his experience as a Chinese Canadian in

the small town of Swift Current. While increasingly drawn to biographical themes, Wah

did not wish to sacrifice the experimentation and playful eccentricity characterizing his

work. Instead, like Cha, he synthesized a bridge position between these poetic languages

(avant-gardism and autoethnography) which are often seen as antithetic. Regarding this

mid-career shift, Wah states the following in an interview with Margery Fee and Sneja

Gunew:

> So, I felt awkward in that kind of shift from a community of writing that
> had been very much a white, European avant-garde, that we inherited in
> North America in the 60's and 70's. And then this new thing, this
> racialized thing where it was really difficult to negotiate that position
> amongst a lot of white writers, and it still is, and it has split some
> communities, shifted them, changed them somewhat ("An Interview with
> Fred Wah").

Gerunds like "splitting," "shifting," and "changing" are apt descriptors for Wah's

resulting treatment of migration and racial identity. Wah's work begins interlacing these

"communit[ies] of writing" with, arguably, *Waiting for Saskatchewan* (1985), but the

semi-biographical prose poems of *Diamond Grill* (1996) are seen as a more definitive

pivot-point. In the afterword to the tenth anniversary edition of *Diamond Grill*, Wah

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[24] For a useful distillation of this term, see the following article: Ellis, Carolyn, Tony Adams & Arthur
Bochner. "Autoethnography: An Overview.*" Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12.1 (2011). Web. 4
February 2015.

writes that the project originated with a poem he wrote for *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C* (1975), an earlier collection of poetic "transcreations." Wah states that the word "transcreation" comes from Coleridge's *Literary Reminiscences* (1839), and proceeds to argue in favor of viewing poetic composition as a fundamentally transformative process. The etymon "trans," Wah writes, strikes him in the same way as does the hyphen in "re-mix," in that poetry is fundamentally a process of "transcreation, trans-lation, transport" (180-181) that splits and merges apparently stable signifiers. Later in the afterword, Wah draws out the wider stakes of this perspective, writing "The implications of such a term around notions of diaspora, foreignicity, and multiculturalism are clear" (181). Briefly, Wah's poetic development involves, on his part, the adoption of an aesthetic philosophy of transcreation that coincides with his burgeoning interest in diasporic identity. In this chapter, I argue further that in Wah's work *Sentenced to Light*, this two-pronged poetic development assumes yet another valence rooted in media production, which brings the author full-circle to the intentions of earlier avant-garde forms.

To this point, Wah notes yet another catalyst for *Diamond Grill*. In the same afterword, he evokes the genre of "biotext" advanced by the Canadian poet George Bowering. Wah finds his way to this genre by stumbling upon a "multiple exposure, a reject, found in my mother's footstool of old family photos" (2232). In other words, Wah's turn towards family migration history results from his interpellation into a diasporic media genealogy which, in this telling, results from the discovery of a particular "reject" photograph of himself as a boy. Clarifying his resulting understanding of the "biofiction" or "biotext" genre, Wah writes: "The biofiction, then, is that years later the

little boy on the swing must imagine the self, generated by the arms of the loving father and the distant mimicry of the Chinese grandfather, spiffy in his dress-up costume, visage through the haze of migration and hybridity" (2232). This concern with "generation," I suggest, should be understood not only in terms of literal genealogy, but also in terms of avant-garde media genealogies: in other words, in terms of the mediated fictions of reproduction, lineage, and affiliation that make up group identity across distance. Wah further alludes to the necessity of "making up" identity in his preface: "I take 'biofiction' as the necessary 'making up' (even dressing up') the memory and images of a life, texting the 'bio,' hence 'biotext,' the story of the cell(f)" (2248).

The relationship posited between memory, image, and text, produce a "story of the "cell(f)" that stages diasporic identity as biological, when "biological" is understood as a stream of uniquely hybrid iterations of "cell(f)." Identity thus stems from collaborations between other "cell(f)"s, and *Sentenced to Light* represents this stream as a collaborative and trans-creative project. Building on Wah's description of the biotext, I call this project a "social biotext." The term evokes the definition of bibliography given by D.F. McKenzie: "bibliography is the discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception" (4). McKenzie argues that such "arbitrary marks" index interpretively significant production processes. As a result, he argues that bibliography must assume a broader interpretive range to account for the significance of seemingly minor mistakes. McKenzie's work thus moves away from questions of description and authorial intention, and towards questions of readership and production. He thus comes to define bibliography as a

"sociology of texts," which concerns "texts in some physical form and their transmission" (5). In this definition, "text" is understood broadly, as the "interlacing or entwining of any kind of material" (5). Invoking "sociology" reminds "us of the full range of social realities which the medium of print had to serve, from receipt blanks to bibles" (5), and moreover, suggests the range of actors involved in composing, producing, circulating, and receiving texts. Every text testifies to the actors involved in this production history by exhibiting material signs of their involvement.

Jerome McGann extends McKenzie's perspective to develop the idea of the "social text." McGann's "social text" takes the "sociology of the text" to its logical extreme as a complete revision of theories of authorship. Working from a more explicitly postmodern orientation than McKenzie, McGann centers his critique of editorial practice on the fundamentally "polyvocal" nature of literature, in which the scholar-editor, as another agent of textual transmutation, also participates. This perspective leads McGann to describe a "double helix" of "linguistic codes" and "bibliographic codes" (43) that together constitute the full range of interpretive information embodied in textual objects. McGann's "double helix" metaphor participates in the genealogical methods developed throughout this chapter, as it represents textuality as a mutative, hybrid social process, and invites readers to locate the imprints of many individual and technological processes on the surface of a given page. These imprints may, McGann suggests, operate at cross-purposes, such that every text retains and projects the residue of multiple agencies.[25] I

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[25] Reading with this notion in mind requires invokes what George Bornstein calls "material textuality." Attending to the physical units of signification that constitute books as objects, artworks, and commodities can develop reading practices better attuned to what Bornstein calls the "politics of the page." See:

suggest that the avant-garde collages characterizing *Sentenced to Light* constitute a "social biotext" that pursues questions of textual lineage and transmissions. The social biotext is not (only) concerned editorial or book-historical questions, however. Instead, Wah's work connects questions of textual descent to diasporic identity production in the public sphere.

Critics like Peter Jaeger have suggested that Wah's generic appropriation of the biotext represents a formal response to the unified consciousness underlying the lyric subject, a perspective I fully endorse, particularly as it disrupts models of textuality premised on romanticized, solitary authorship. Joanna Saul, moreover, connects the biotext's generic disruptions to its concern for cultural displacement:

> Together, however, they can be read as challenges to the theory of the enlightenment subject because they are constructing subjectivities that are multiple, performative, and in flux, while still acknowledging the political importance of the subject's claim for legitimacy (259-260).

This "theory of the enlightenment subject" also underwrites the transmission models of communication disputed by Cha and Wah. Saul writes that Wah's work with the biotext genre aims to project a more fluid sense of selfhood: "Wah ultimately abandons the sense of a static self, somehow locatable in the past tense, in favor of a self in flux—continually changing, performing" (268). While I largely agree with Saul's description of Wah's biotext and its generic commentary on identity in contexts of displacement, I want to suggest that *Sentenced to Light*, in particular, does more than simply embrace a "self in flux." Instead, it draws on an avant-garde tradition that contests the very category of

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Bornstein, George. *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

individual production, and for this reason, must be read in different terms than those proposed by Saul, which still circumscribe hybridity within the boundaries of an individual subject. This section instead reads *Sentenced to Light* as Wah's version of "social biotext," which I understand as a collaborative approach to identity production in the public sphere. This collaboration partakes of and extends many of the core characteristics of the biotext, while also commenting more expansively on group identity through a trenchant, cross-platform media critique.

Put another way, Wah disrupts the lyric subject through line, but also through medium. There is much evidence in support of Wah's self-conscious concern for material textuality, and his tendency to draw poetic resources from editorial practice. For instance, there is the multiple versioning associated with his book *Breathin my Name with a Sigh* (1981). This collection was originally published in a series called "Manuscript Editions" by Coach House Press in Toronto, in which texts were "run off and bound up as orders [were] received at the press,"[26] a computerized, line-printed production model that allowed for authorial revisions unique to each individual print run" Further, Wah's work as contributor and editor for the first electronic poetry "magazine" *Swift Current* builds on the rationale of these editions, developing in greater detail his playful employment of textuality's collaborative elements.[27] Wah's use of images in *Sentenced to Light*, too,

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[26] This description is taken from a circular put out by Coach House Press. For more information about the press, see: Davey, Frank. "A History of the Coach House Press Quebec Translations." *Frank Davey*. The University of Western Ontario. Web. 4 February 2015.

[27] The electronic "magazine" *Swift Current* was essentially an email listserv installed on a VAX 750 at York University in Toronto. It was used to solicit poetic collaborations (the final products of which were later remediated in a book, unfortunately without the ancillary workshop apparatus). See: Quartermain, Peter. *Stubborn Poetics: Poetic Facticity and the Avant-Garde*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2013. Print. 265. See also Keep, Christopher, Tim McLaughlin and Robin Parmar. "Swift Current."

builds on his early work in *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (1975) and extends to his more recent collection *Is a Door* (2009). And, of course, he has participated in countless public and semi-public events or "happenings," which by their nature are singular, in-group, and incapable of repetition.

And yet, *Sentenced to Light* restages, or remediates, these happenings. In this respect, it follows *Harlem* in representing collaboration within the space of a book-as-object. The text's avant-garde orientation results in a confusion of voice and corresponding confusion of authorship. This is evident from *Sentenced to Light*'s first dedication, which names twelve individuals as the "image provocateurs whose hungry eyes for pictures and words have lit these poems." The concluding acknowledgments, moreover, span two full pages, including image credits and (like *Dictée*'s "notes") a section devoted to "sources." In this section, Wah writes the following note:

> …all of these poems were produced for collaborative image-text projects and were published in gallery installations, art catalogues, chapbooks and literary magazines. The 'poetry' (except for 'Sentenced to Light' section) has been extracted from its original context and, in some cases, reworked to stand alone (158).

Wah's note brings the whole "sphere of activity" surrounding his text squarely to the fore. Such acknowledgments raise questions of provenance that apply both to the text, and to the evolving diasporic public spheres from which it emerges.

The first poem-project in *Sentenced to Light*, "Anecdotal Waters," winds throughout the collection as a whole, forming a liquid adhesive for its many sections.

The Electronic Labyrinth. 1993-2000. Web. 4 February 2015. This magazine was later turned into a book, which presents itself as a traditional poetry collection: *The SwiftCurrent Anthology.* Ed. Davey, Frank and Fred Wah. Toronto, ON: Coach House Press, 1986. Print.

"Anecdotal Waters" consists of a number of two-line stanzas (some of which are in bold, and some of which are in lighter gray) which appear sporadically throughout the book. In each iteration, these lines appear to "scroll down," introducing new stanzas and dropping previous ones before returning to what might deceptively be the "origin" of a first line. And yet, there are no such origins in "Anecdotal Waters" – just a fluid field of poetic motion, which functions almost like a chorus. The illusory appearance of poetic origins through its false first line, the ongoing reiteration of the poem, and the particulars of its vocabulary nonetheless orient readers to the concerns of *Sentenced to Light* as a whole. When put into context with the linearity associated with reading codices, "Anecdotal Waters" achieves an interesting tension between the left/right imperatives of the book itself and its own circulatory patterns. This tension works in concert with lines like "The rhizome river rises like a desert dust storm / The states run hydraulics like glass," or alternatively, "Ginger roots itself into the race / All this local movement on the surface ripples" (6). When viewed in tandem with the poem's unique motion, the vocabulary of these lines ("rhizome," "states," "ginger roots," "race") asks readers to understand the volume as a commentary on the politics of identity, genealogy, and movement.

In addition to "Anecdotal Waters," *Sentenced to Light* employs another framing device. This device is called "Homing Pidgin," and it serves as a secondary chorus to the text as a whole. "Homing Pidgin" consists of cartoon-like drawings of birds on a wire, who spout word bubbles filled with short poetic lines; these lines adopt the tone of maxims and are often represented as dialogue. Such illustrations often interrupts other projects — that is, the "pidgins" show no respect for the autonomy of other works — and

they do not present a coherent narrative. The complexity of this particular piece,

however, does not stop with its ambiguous figures and cryptic maxims concerning

migration and hybridity. While "Anecdotal Waters" constitutes a poetic response to a

mixed-media installation, Wah relates the origins of "Homing Pidgin" as follows:

> These 'one-liners' were written as an interactive text for an animated
> website (http://www.vaarc.ca/lostandfound) constructed by Cindy
> Mochizuki and displaying multimedia artist Haruko Okano's 2006
> 'Homing Pidgin' project, an extension of the earlier 'High ~~Bridi~~ Tea'
> piece" (9).

The "origins" of such a piece are again seen as an impossible textual proposition. In fact,

Wah's above explanation obscures the full depth of the genealogical complexity invoked

by these multimodal avant-garde pieces. In this case, a live, collaborative event between

Wah and the artist Haruko Okano in 1996 (called "High ~~Bridi~~ Tea") provided the first

documented instantiation of "Homing Pidgin." This event led, in turn, to a website

constructed by Cindy Mochizuki, which produced some of the images found in *Sentenced

to Light*. The collaborative performance of "High ~~Bridi~~ Tea," it should also be noted, led

to another section of *Sentenced to Light*, called "Jingo Cards," which attempts more

directly to reproduce some aspects of that original performance. I will examine these

projects in more detail, but at the moment, I want to draw attention to Figure 5, which

tries to delineate the complex collaborations that converge in *Sentenced to Light*:

Fred Wah / Haruko Okano / Audience Members / Café Owners

↓↓↓↓

"High ~~Bridi~~ Tea" Performance (Haruko Okano/Fred Wah) [1998]

↓

High ~~Bridi~~ Tea Chapbook (Haruko Okano/Fred Wah) [1998]

↓   ↓

"Jingo Cards"   "Homing pidgin"

(Fred Wah)   (Haruko Okano)

[2008]   [2006]

↓

Website

(Cindy Mochizuki)

[date unknown]

↓

"Homing Pidgin"

(Fred Wah)

[2008]

↓   ↓

Sentenced to Light (Wah) [2008]
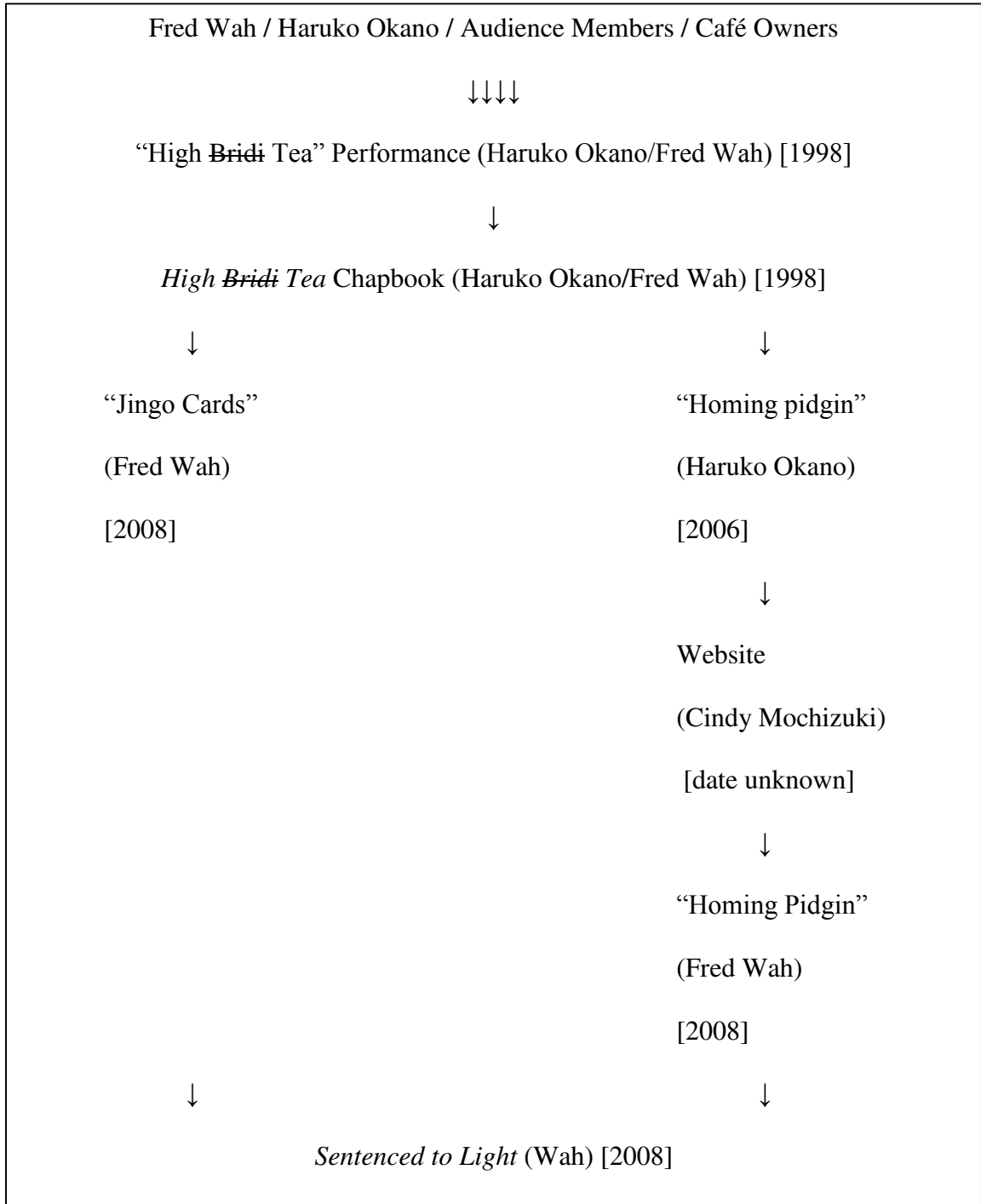
Figure 5. Media Genealogy Chart.

This chart visualizes the many vectors (social, textual, poetic) that collide on the pages of

Sentenced to Light; however, it could also easily extend to the text's readers, and to

future performance pieces, to say nothing of future editions of the collection itself.

I want to develop these vectors in more detail, as a means of connecting their

textual history to Wah's treatment of diasporic media practices. To this end, I will begin
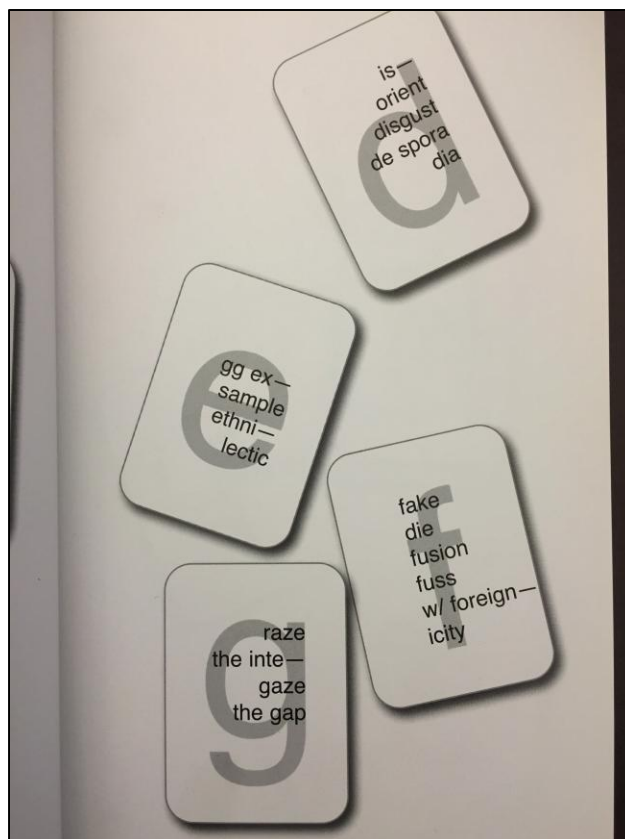
Figure 6. Wah, Fred. *Sentenced to Light*. Vancouver, B.C.: Talonbooks, 2008. Print. 39.

with "Jingo Cards," the nearest variant of "High ~~Bridi~~ Tea." In *Sentenced to Light*, this

section comprises a series of cards, each of which use the 'theme' of a given letter of the

alphabet to present a series of short poetic lines (see figure 6). As mentioned, this section

was originally a performance art piece; in *Sentenced to Light*, Wah describes its

background on the recto page, while on the verso page, he offers a "photographic

collage" of a later performance in Vancouver put together by the photographer Glen

Lowry. Further photographs from the event appear on Haruko Okano's professional

website ("Community Participatory Public Art"), where the extent to which Wah's "Jingo
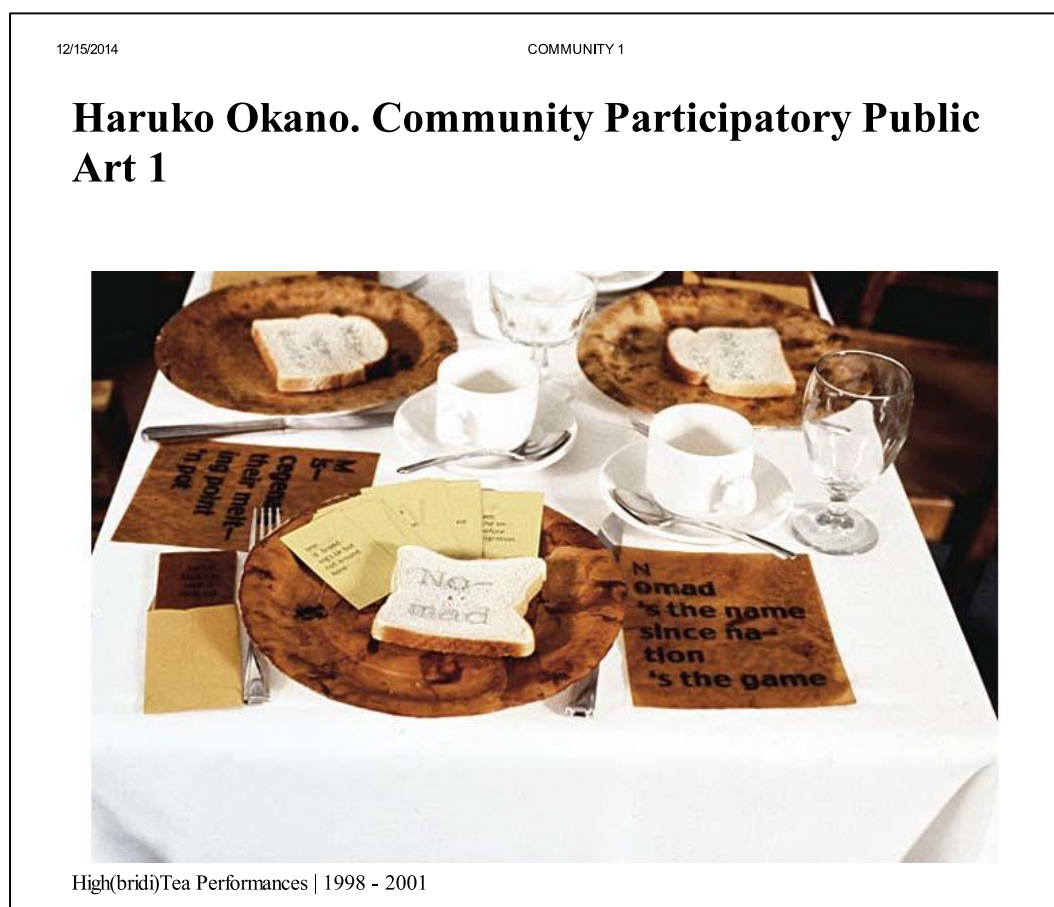
Figure 7. Okano, Haruko. "Community Participatory Public Art 3." *Haruko Okano*.
Galleria. 2008. Web. 4 February 2015.

Cards" were originally literally embedded in food and dining objects becomes much

clearer than in the rudimentary representation found in *Sentenced to Light* (see figure 7).

These photographs indicate how both artists use highly sophisticated materials to develop and expose the vast migrations and resulting cultural prejudices that play out at the table. This project also asks us to recall the presence of the audience at such an event, whose reactions and interactions are necessarily both an intended target of the performance, and a source of unintended responses that can later reemerge in complex ways. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, audience reactions not playing into the content selected for *Sentenced to Light*, or failing to impact the nature of their subsequent remediation in the volume. The minimal allusions to the original performance contexts found in *Sentenced to Light* are not intended to be willfully obscurantist. Instead, I argue that this lack of context highlights the work's material textuality: it suggests just how much is gained, and/or lost, in such cross-platform adaptations. In this way, the identity politics advanced by Wah's "Jingo Cards" are related to a production history whose most recent iteration is the social biotext of *Sentenced to Light*. This production history is both intentionally complicated, and intentionally drawn into the foreground. The end result is a hybrid, process-based, and group-produced fiction of diasporic identity whose incorporation of several migration histories is at once textual and political.

In addition to "Jingo Cards," the "High ~~Bridi~~ Tea" event/chapbook produced an interactive website. This website provides the basis for the version of "Homing Pidgin" (from *Sentenced to Light*) which began this line of inquiry. Mochizuki's website (or is it Okano's website?) is a very different animal from Wah's piece in *Sentenced to Light*,
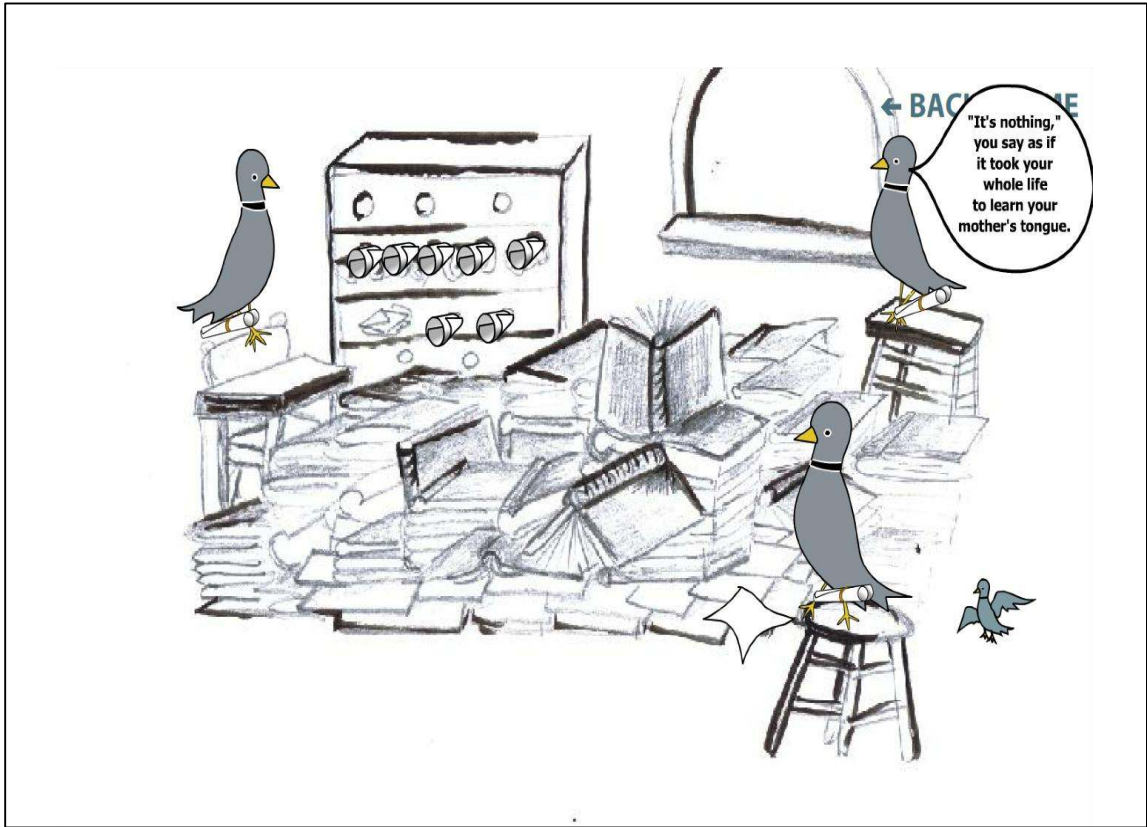
Figure 8. Mochizuki, Cindy. "Lost and Found." Powell Street Festival Society. Web. 3 March 2015. http://accessgallery.ca/wp-content/downloads/lostandfound/index.html.

despite working from much of the same genetic material (see figure 8). In fact, the

website is best approached as an adaptation of "High B̶r̶i̶d̶i̶ Tea," "Homing Pidgin," and

Sentenced to Light as a whole. The website puts "High B̶r̶i̶d̶i̶ Tea" into further

conversation with two more artists, thereby broadening the reach of the project, and

further confusing any efforts to locate a solitary author. The only graphic carry-over from

this website to *Sentenced to Light* are the pigeons on the wire (seen in figure 9). Clicking

on the "XX" section takes users to a cartoon-like image of a kitchen table, where users

can use their mouse to drag and drop words from the soup pot into their own bowls.

Clicking on other graphical elements in the scene reveals more of Wah's text, some of
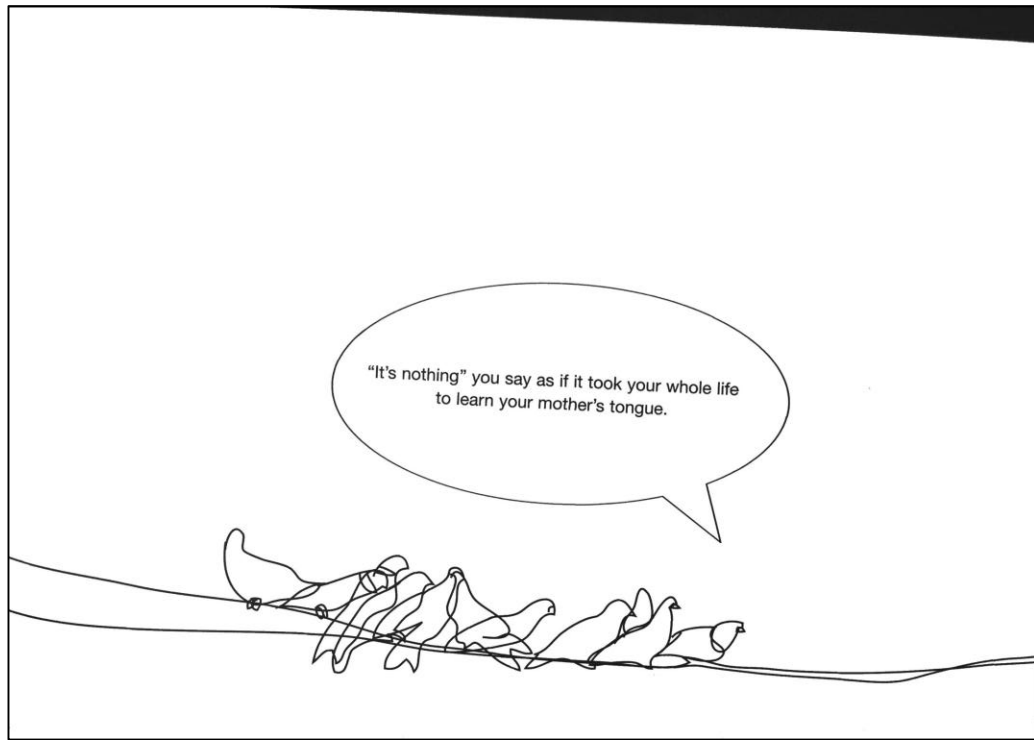
Figure 9. Wah, Fred. *Sentenced to Light*. Vancouver, B.C.: Talonbooks, 2008. Print. 47.

which is then "ported over" to *Sentenced to Light* (see figure 9). As a result, it is difficult

to understand how to "read" this website, particularly in conversation with *Sentenced to*

Light; the interactive elements are disorientating, as they offer the same kind of obscure

repetitions as Wah's texts for the website. The connections between the photographs and

text are also difficult to decipher, and finally, there are many un-credited authors

involved in the coding, execution, and maintenance of the website and in particular the

flash animations that comprise this piece. *Sentenced to Light* attempts to translate these

events and alternative mediations into a codex form; this effort preserves some aspects of

the prior elements, while also performing a crucial slippage between event and text. I

argue that this slippage reveals the extent to which the text itself is a social production.

And this self-positioning as social production is exactly what orients the text within an avant-garde tradition, and forms the basis of Wah's media critique. By working in this tradition, Wah avoids collapsing transnational public spheres into generalizations about globalization or cosmopolitanism. Instead, he signals how diasporic identity is a collaborative production between persons and media, which results in irreducibly hybrid histories and correspondingly unpredictable futures.

Conclusion

I will conclude by returning to *Harlem*, the academic essay/photography collection that opened this chapter. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that her collaboration with Alice Attie was "somewhat peculiar in that I emphasize our differences rather than our similarities" (12). This emphasis on difference over similarity is arguably observed in the book itself; some of *Harlem*'s pictorial layouts jarringly disrupt Spivak's essay, and vice versa, thereby producing an effect of mutual contestation. One could also make the argument that including these contested elements within the boundaries of *Harlem* produces entirely unexpected forms of similarity, while also retaining the aforementioned differences. In either case, the existence of the object itself, and its broader effects in circulation, cannot be neatly attributed to an isolated "sender," or located in an individual "receiver." This resistance to such basic communications categories suggests a nuanced perspective on media production in *Harlem*. And as I have shown, such a perspective resonates in diasporic culture, particularly in the avant-garde wing represented by Cha and Wah.

Spivak understands Harlem's past, present, and future meaning as rooted in negotiations between collaborators that emphasize difference over similarity. This emphasis on negotiation is central to the "public relations" described in this dissertation, and carries over to the work accomplished in each of the forthcoming chapters. In many ways, Spivak's description of her work with Attie represents a succinct encapsulation of diasporic public spheres that seek to explore problematize dominant theories of media as a stimulus to the articulation of transnational communities. By approaching the politics of the public sphere through a highly sophisticated theory of media production, the authors examined in this dissertation disclose the prior politicization of media channels as the basis for new modes of multi-state negotiations about the origins and ends of "diaspora." The following three chapters will continue this line of thought by tracing the "circulation," "reception," and "survival" components of the communications model outlined in my introduction.

CHAPTER THREE

PUBLIC SPACE: ASSEMBLING DIASPORA IN ALEKSANDAR HEMON AND

TEJU COLE

In an interview with Jennifer Berman, the Bosnian-American author Aleksandar

Hemon describes how books "open a space, a public space" in which "truth can be

negotiated." This chapter asks what kinds of spaces are created when books circulate in

tandem with other media. Questions about space are fundamental to diaspora studies; in

his essay "Diasporas," for instance, James Clifford locates "the empowering paradox of

diaspora" in the fact that "dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*"

(269). Empowering or not, Clifford employs the language of "here" and "there" to

describe this paradox, suggesting the degree to which space inflects even the basic

vocabulary of diaspora research. Diaspora studies can, in fact, be rewritten as a series of

spatial paradigms, including hostland/homeland schemas (Safran 1991), Atlanticentric

networks (Gilroy 1993), cosmopolitan or planetary mappings (Darieva et al. 2012),

"relational spaces" (Bruslé and Varrel 2), and "circuits of production and consumption"

(Blair 547). Despite this breadth of scholarship, however, there remains ample room to

discuss how space is represented in diasporic literature.

This chapter argues that Aleksandar Hemon and Teju Cole employ multimodal

narratives to address the complexities of diasporic space. Furthermore, it contends that by

treating such complexities, these narratives constitute a critique of the spatial paradigms

of the public sphere. The need for such a critique arises from the fact that space is often

undertreated in public sphere theory. Despite its concern for private salons and public

agoras, public sphere theory tends to view space as a neutral backdrop. Nancy Fraser, for

instance, defines the public sphere as "a theater in modern societies in which political

participation is enacted through the medium of talk" ("Rethinking" 2). However, she says

little about the actual "theater" that structures this "medium of talk." While Fraser is

clearly employing the "theater" as a metaphor, there is a need for analyses which explore

how the spaces of the theater — its stages and seats, grounds and balconies, dressing

rooms and atriums — define gathered publics and direct their modes of political

participation. In the absence of such analyses, however, one must assume that certain

spatial models have assumed a normative status in the public sphere.

This chapter reads such spatial models as projections of the nation-state. Drawing

on the work of Henri Lefebvre, it contends that the freedom of movement associated with

citizenship renders space abstract, non-ideological, and undifferentiated. Diasporic

displacement, by contrast, discloses space as concrete, politicized, and highly variegated.

It draws attention to the folds between self and space that emerge as diasporic subjects

navigate between immediate spaces and mediated, remembered, and/or imagined points

of origin. Hemon and Cole elaborate on these folds via cross-platform narratives that

employ writing, photography, web design, and social media. Their narratives migrate

across several media apparatuses, which represent the spaces of Chicago, Sarajevo,

Lagos, and New York in different and even contradictory ways. The gaps typifying

Hemon and Cole's diasporic space, however, assume tentative forms of coherence when

their works are read as media assemblages. When read in this way, Hemon and Cole develop a critique of the bordered space of the public sphere, the depth of which may go unremarked without interpretive practices attuned to the interactive properties of media.

Representing the Spatial Turn

Diaspora studies have grown in tandem with a general "spatial turn" in the humanities. This "turn" refers to a broad array of research that pivots away from the focus on time and teleology associated with 19th and early 20th century thought. Susan Stanford Friedman notes that the spatial turn tries to theorize simultaneity and juxtaposition in global space, as opposed to charting metanarratives of social development. Friedman's comments reinforce earlier remarks by Michel Foucault, who linked the emerging "epoch of space" to increasingly prevalent conditions of dispersal: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" ("Of Other Spaces" 22). Subsequent theorists have approached this "epoch of space" via several overlapping theoretical orientations, including Marxism (Harvey 1990; Williams 1973), feminism (Rose 1993; Massey 1994), phenomenology (Bachelard 1969) and more singular positions (de Certeau 1984; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Individually and collectively, researchers have therefore developed a number of tools to unpack the politics of "space," broadly construed.

However, in my reading, the work of Henri Lefebvre proves most salient to the spatial critique advanced by Hemon and Cole. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) is a sprawling, amorphous text that stubbornly resists direct summary. Lefebvre

employs a number of terms which, while ultimately distinct, can confusingly bleed into

one another. For the sake of clarity, I will adopt the term "state space" to refer to the

spatial mechanisms ("abstract space" and "absolute space") Lefebvre associates with the

nation-state. Lefebvre argues that state space departs from previous conceptions of space

rooted in the productive capacities of nature. By contrast, state space is fetishized as

either independent of psychic life, or born *sui generis* from mental projections. This

fetishistic quality, he contends, relies on the state production of "abstract space": "As a

product of violence and war, [abstract space] is political; instituted by a state, it is

institutional" (285). For Lefebvre, the act of abstracting space creates the impression of

"absolute space," which acts as a neutral backdrop against which social life proceeds

independently. Lefebvre discusses absolute space as follows:

> To criticize and reject absolute space is simply to refuse a particular
> representation, that of a container waiting to be filled by a content - i.e.
> matter, or bodies. According to this picture of things, (formal) content and
> (material) container are indifferent to each other and so offer no graspable
> difference. Anything may go in any 'set' of places in the container. Any
> part of the container can receive anything. (170)

In the logic of state space, diasporic displacement would simply transplant the "content"

of diasporic populations into another geographic "container," with few consequences for

either content or container. For Lefebvre, this logic serve the interests of the nation-state,

which must distribute its power evenly across divergent people and places.

The multiple spatial attachments engendered by diasporic migration challenge the

abstract universalism of state space. By revealing the constructed-ness of space, diasporic

displacement inevitably presents a counterpoint to the illusion of spatial transparency

produced by the state. Lefebvre describes this counterpoint as "social space," and the

development of this concept by later critics suggests how and why Hemon and Cole

employ multimodal narratives as a spatial critique. Working from Homi Bhabha, the

geographer Edward Soja recasts Lefebvre's "social space" as "Thirdspace," and describes

in more detail the challenge Thirdspace poses to the spatial productions of the state:

> Combining the real and imagined, things and thought on equal terms, or at
> least not privileging one over the other a priori, these lived spaces of
> representation are thus the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,'
> spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their
> subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning. With its
> foregrounding of relations of dominance, subordination, and resistance; its
> subliminal mystery and limited knowability; its radical openness and
> teeming imagery, this third space of Lefebvre closely approximates what I
> am defining as Thirdspace (*Thirdspace* 68).

By re-fragmenting state space, Thirdspace generates alternative political stances from

what Soja calls "counterspaces." Hemon and Cole, I argue, work from the position of

such counterspaces, as their efforts to represent the multiple dimensions of diasporic

space contest the abstract universalism of state space.

These efforts grapple with what Soja calls the "provocative shift back from

epistemology to ontology" (81) associated with the spatial turn. Spatial analyses are often

framed as ontological questions, as they contend not only with the material realities of

space, but also with the integral role space plays in defining social bodies, whether these

social bodies are conceived as communities, nations, or publics. Diaspora studies,

however, concern how social bodies cohere when basic spatial experiences are not

shared, fixed, or bordered; they concern, in other words, transnational social ontologies

that incorporate a variety of real and imagined spaces, spread across multiple states.

Such ontologies may develop through homeland orientations that culminate in nostalgic return narratives; Hemon and Cole, however, do not write such narratives. Instead, their texts emphasize the diversifying after-effects of displacement, and explore tensions between local spaces and transnational diasporic networks. To grapple with this dialectic between local and transnational space, Hemon and Cole approach diaspora as an "assemblage" of spatial differences. Ian Buchanan and Gregg Lambert note that assemblages make space habitable when space-making apparatuses like memory and tradition have been destroyed. Their argument builds on the fact that assemblage theory conceives new relations between "parts" and "whole" in social ontology, relations are reflected in the kinds of narratives developed by these authors. Such narratives are characterized by their expansion beyond individual texts, and circulation between multiple media. Owing to these characteristics, I argue that Hemon and Cole employ "media assemblages" to represent the many dimensions of diasporic space.

Before describing "media assemblages," I will briefly explore assemblage theory in further detail. While the term "assemblage" comes from Gilles Deleuze,[1] it has been more fully developed by later theorists. Andrew Davies provides a concise definition: "assemblage stresses the emergent nature of social processes…the term generally refers to the coming together of various entities into a loose aggregate" (274). Assemblage theory articulates a scalar ontological model wherein larger and more complex social

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[1] Specifically, it is associated with the section of *A Thousand Plateaus* titled, "1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible."

entities arise from interactions between their component parts.[2] Bodily organs, for

example, can remain operational outside of the body when plugged into medical

machinery; similarly, the parts of an assemblage do not lose their capacities when

"plugged into" broader collectives. This heart/machine complex will work towards

different ends than the heart/body complex, but not as a result of the explicit, irreducible

properties of its parts. As assemblage theorist Manuel DeLanda explains: "…a

component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different

assemblage in which its interactions are different" (10). Thus, a given assemblage will

draw out different aspects of its constituent parts. Crucially, this part/whole relationship

also applies to social bodies. To this end, Davies describes social assemblages as the

combined effects of individual actors: "assemblage allows an understanding of the ways

in which a variety of actors come together to temporarily establish order within a given

social setting" (274). Social assemblages can fluidly assume several scales depending on

the actions of its components, or members.

By virtue of their concern with scale, assemblage approaches to social ontology

offer significant resources for re-conceptualizing diasporic space. DeLanda, in fact,

describes assemblages explicitly in terms of "territorialization" (12), which defines the

extent to which assemblages are recognizable as a singular entity. In DeLanda's view,

assemblages are scaled according to two factors: "territorialization" and "specialized

expressive entities." "Specialized expressive entities," for DeLanda, include items like

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[2] George Marcus and Ekran Saka describe the critical utility of this mode of theory as follows:
"Assemblage is a sort of anti-structural concept that permits the researcher to speak of emergence,
heterogeneity, the decentred and the ephemeral in nonetheless ordered social life" (101).

genes and words, which complement processes of territorialization through the "production and maintenance of identity" (14). DeLanda's monist approach allows him to conflate genes and words; I focus on the latter, and suggest that territorialization can function through expressive entities including images, words, and media interfaces. Together, these multiform entities constitute a "media assemblage" which can redraw the "territory" associated with a given social ontology.

Media's role in defining space becomes particularly evident in diaspora, as connections between communities are maintained by the expression of spatial experience across distance. Hemon and Cole employ multi-platform narratives to explore such connections through the relationship between media circulation and diasporic space. Their spatial representations are held together by formal continuities that include first-person narrative voice, biographical echoes, recurrent urban environments, thematic concerns of displacement, and the use of promotional paratexts. At the same time, however, their use of multiple platforms often pushes back against such continuities, as the same spaces are revisited from different and sometimes irreconcilable perspectives. In order to fully develop Hemon and Cole's paradoxical approach to space as a critique of state space, it is therefore necessary to approach their work as a "media assemblage." [3]

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[3] I have settled on "assemblage" to describe these interactions, since it usefully binds together media and social ontology. However, other terms were also available. In particular, "media ecologies." In North American contexts, the term often means studying media as environments that extend human capacities. Continental media ecologists, however, tend to be more concerned with interactions between media that occur independently of human intervention. The work of Matthew Fuller is most representative of this approach, and most resonant for this chapter. Fuller describes media ecologies as systems whose parts should not be understood as discrete entities; instead, when media interact, they "set in play a process of mutual stimulation that exceeds what they are as a set" (1). His work exemplifies how media interactions produce multivalent results that draw social, political, and cultural concerns into the orbit of a larger, emergent whole. My use of "media assemblages" also describes the effects of media circulation.

While several scholars have employed the term "media assemblages," the phrase remains largely open to interpretation, particularly in terms of scale (Tabbi and Wutz 185). In some cases, media assemblages can refer to an entire media ecosystem, including the cultural values and literacies associated with all extant media at a given point in time (Hackman 16). However, at base, media assemblages apply the same part/whole dynamics of assemblage theory to media, as they suggest that individual media can, in certain circumstances, coalesce into broader systems that impact the functionality (and ultimately, the meaning) of their discrete parts. I restrict my usage of the term to refer to the several media which are "territorialized" within the corpuses of Hemon and Cole. This restriction results from the narrative, biographical, and thematic continuities noted previously. I am primarily interested in how media assemblages offer a way to read the several platforms employed by these authors as part of a broader commentary on diasporic space. This commentary draws on assemblage theory to articulate the "sticky symbiosis" of media, migration, and space described by Amit Raj: "Affective assemblages of bodies, populations, and media function through a kind of sticky symbiosis of what Baruch Spinoza called 'relations of motion'" (11-12). Such "relations of motion" emphasize the interactive, circulatory properties of media in this chapter. Moreover, they place these properties in relation to the apparent contradictions between part and whole characterizing diasporic space. To this end, Raj describes how media assemblages stitch together such contradictions: "Here distinctions between public and private space, modernity and the primitive, and stasis and flow enter into mobius-strip formations, inhere in each other as elements of each other, and produce zones of creative

indetermination" (32). I advocate reading Hemon and Cole in the context of such assemblages, which frame diasporic networks as such "zones of creative indetermination," where space is immediately lived, and distantly conceived.

Aleksandar Hemon and Diasporic Time-Geography

In the penultimate section of Aleksandar Hemon's novel-in-stories *Nowhere Man* (2002), the Bosnian immigrant Jozef Pronek tears apart the Chicago apartment he shares with his live-in girlfriend. His actions expel the rage and frustration he has internalized as a result of the violence besetting his home city of Sarajevo, and the difficulties he faces as a recent immigrant to Chicago. As Pronek lies weeping and bloodied on the apartment floor, the narrator attempts to soothe him with the following statement: "Let us just sort through this destruction. Let us just remember how we got here. Let us just remember" (221). This statement advocates a form of palliative memory-work: it addresses "how we got here" by situating the wreckage of the apartment, and Pronek's responsibility for this wreckage, within a chronology of diasporic displacement.

The injunction to connect Pronek's surroundings to a broader history of involuntary migration encapsulates my argument in this section, which explores the unique relationship between space and time in Hemon's cross-platform narratives. In addition to this journalism and uncollected writings, Hemon has published two short story collections, two novels, and most recently, a volume of essays. He has also overseen three web projects related to his print output. I argue in favor of reading these works comparatively, as a critique of the spatial reasoning of the nation-state. Hemon's multimodal aesthetics appose multiple perspectives on shared spaces to foreground the

constructed, social nature of space. I argue that such perspectives assume coherence when read as a critique. In Hemon's work, this critique operates through what I call "diasporic time-geography," which describes a model for understanding space in terms of multiple, overlapping migration histories. Hemon's time-geography foregrounds the diversity of spatial experience in diasporic culture, and in my reading, orients this diversity toward a spatial critique of the public sphere.

Time-geography is a geographical method associated with Torsten Hägerstrand's seminal "What About People in Regional Science?" (1970), which viewed social behavior as an outcome of movement through space and time. While related to work by Bertrand Westphal (2011), Andreas Huyssen (2003), and Mikhael Bakhtin (1981), time-geography is distinguished by a visual methodology that proves companionate to the multimodal aspects of Hemon's work. Hemon's cross-platform narratives juxtapose spaces before and after displacement in order to position spatial difference-through-time as a constitutive feature of diasporic identity. My reading focuses on the temporal gaps in Hemon's multimodal representations of space, and suggests that the configurable aspects of his cross-platform narratives perform a function similar to his narrator's injunction to "just remember how we got here," as described at the outset of this section. By drawing together novels, websites, and photography, Hemon surveys the lived histories of particular spaces. The resulting time-geographical aesthetic represents diasporic space as a network of overlapping migration narratives; when read in concert, these narratives generate a critique of the abstract state space described by Lefebvre. To demonstrate such

a critique in practice, this section reads Hemon's novels *Nowhere Man* and *The Lazarus Project* alongside their respective websites.

Hemon's novel *Nowhere Man* (2002) is divided into seven sections, each of which is associated with a specific city and date. The sections, which do not follow in chronological order, are split between Chicago, Sarajevo, Ukraine, and Shanghai. The first section depicts Chicago in 1994; it opens with the narrator, an unnamed Bosnian immigrant living in Chicago, moving through his apartment building. He walks from the living room, to the porch, to the laundry room, and back. While walking this circuit, he tries to imagine these spaces in his absence: "The frighteningly simple thing was that when I was inside nobody was on the porch: the green plastic chairs convened around nothing…" (5). The narrator's impression of a gulf separating him from his surroundings is reflected in his amazement over the endurance of this porch through time. This impression associates space with a frightening feeling of indifference that, on account of its near-exact repetition by several migrant narrators in the text, signifies a broader sense of exclusion from the avowedly universal space of the narrator's hostland state.

The narrator instead sees himself and his surroundings as following independent trajectories: they exist separately from one another, and work in different timeframes (stability in the case of the porch, temporariness in the case of the narrator). This discontinuity suggests a misalignment between migrant "content" and spatial "container" particularly evident in diasporic contexts defined by involuntary dispersal. The narrator's commentary on the way to a job interview further elaborates on this misalignment, and

starkly opposes it to the nation-state's production of space as a neutral backdrop. While

riding a city bus, he reminisces about a friend who was murdered in the Bosnian war:

> I used to have a friend – he was killed by an accelerating piece of shrapnel
> – who liked to think that there was a quiet part of the universe where a
> body could have a steady velocity, going in the same direction, at the same
> speed, never stopping or entering a gravitational field. This bus, for
> instance, would have moved with smooth, pleasant velocity down Touhy,
> not stopping at the lights, on to Lincolnwood, Park Ridge, Elk Grove
> Village, Schaumburg, Hanover Park, and onward through Iowa and
> whatever there was beyond Iowa, all the way to California and then over
> the Pacific, gliding across the endless water until we reached Shanghai –
> we would have all got to know each other on this ship, we would have
> gone all the way together (10).

This passage juxtaposes an accelerating piece of shrapnel with the steady movement of a

bus that glides through space, never stopping. The bus's "smooth, pleasant velocity"

associates continuous, unchanging space with continuous, unchanging time. It also

provides an enclosure in which passengers can travel together without incident. The

image of accelerating shrapnel, on the other hand, indicates a violent break between

moments, as its dynamic movement creates a temporal rupture that intrudes on the

present-tense narration in Chicago. Having developed these drastically different notions

of space through the time-based movements of bus and bullet, the narrator lays bare the

fantastical elements of his imagined bus trip: he describes how his present Chicago bus

stops for a man, weighed down by a carpet, who attempts to cross the street. In contrast to

the imagined bus, then, his real bus passes from storefront to storefront, before arriving at

a Chinese restaurant called the "New World," where the narrator disembarks, alone.

He then enters an English as Second Language center, where his brief encounter

with Pronek segues into *Nowhere Man*'s second chapter. Here, the text adopts the

objective third-person narrative voice and linear time associated with realism and especially the genre of the bildungsroman. Responding to earlier comments by Friedman and Foucault, this genre shift juxtaposes Pronek's near-anonymity at the ESL center with his highly typical Sarajevan childhood, producing the impression of different Proneks existing simultaneously in Chicago and Sarajevo. Focusing on the latter, the second chapter offers a representation of state space through the narrative conventions of its adopted bildungsroman genre, but also more directly through several potent images. For instance, the narrator describes the maps adorning Pronek's classroom wall in Sarajevo. Echoing the first chapter, where a map with North America at the center of the world hangs in the ESL center, Pronek's English classroom holds a map of England "with London like a wound in its side, ruptured blood vessels stretching towards Scotland and Liverpool" (36). The violent incorporation of several spaces in the generalized state of "England" suggests how the spatial abstraction of cartography belies state violence. This abstraction is further observed in young Pronek's lesson plan:

> …they learned that Nature was everything that surrounded them; that Tito was president; that the most important thing in our society was preserving brotherhood and unity; and that our planet was in the Solar system, which was in the Milky Way, which was in the Universe, which was everywhere, much like Nature (36).

In this consummate model of state space, nature is bound up in Tito's rule, and Tito's rule is projected onto the cosmos, before recombining with Nature. The state thus subsumes "local" and "global" scales to represent its own rigorously patrolled, bordered space as a transparent, universal construct.

Against this universalizing tendency, the formal structure of *Nowhere Man* emphasizes Pronek's embedding in specific spaces, at specific times. This time-geographical structure produces important gaps in characterization, as chapters alternate between representations of Pronek as young and old, near and far, confident and fearful, loved and anonymous. These representations are further enmeshed in the spaces of Sarajevo, Ukraine, and later, Chicago. Once settled in Chicago, Pronek mournfully plays with a resulting diffusion of identity across space while he canvasses for Greenpeace:

> To a young couple in Evanston who sat on their sofa holding hands, Pronek introduced himself as Mirza from Bosnia. To a college girl in La Grange with DePaul stretching across her bosom he introduced himself as Sergei Katastrofenko from Ukraine. To a man in Oak Park with chintzy hair falling down on his shoulders, the top of his dome twinkling with sweat, he introduced himself as Jukka Smrdiprdiuskas from Estonia…To a woman in Hyde Park who opened the door with a gorgeous grin, which then transmogrified into a suspicious smirk as she said, "I thought you were someone else," he was Someone Else (180).

Struggling to adapt to his changed circumstances in Chicago, Pronek fears living perpetually as "Someone Else," a condition connected to the novel's title *Nowhere Man* — the implication being that in order to be someone, you must be from somewhere ("Someone Else" is the only name listed without a corresponding geographic origin). Like the narrator from the text's first section, Pronek is continually astonished by the indifferent endurance of space over time (even employing the same language on page 193). And also like the first narrator, this indifference constitutes a nightmare scenario for Pronek, in which absolute space is less a comfort for the situated citizen, and more an expulsion from the "everywhere" of state space, which remains inaccessible to a diasporic "Nowhere Man" like Pronek.

The semi-discrete narrative units that comprise *Nowhere Man* are tentatively unified by a time-geographical orientation towards its migrant characters, and in particular to Jozef Pronek. Pronek, however, appears only briefly in the text's final section. This section instead subsumes Pronek's story into a frame tale that stretches his displacement into an even wider network of violent uprooting in the twentieth century. It comingles Kiev circa 1900 with Shanghai in 2000, and abruptly shifts its focalization from Evgenij "Captain" Pick to the recently-married narrator from the first section of the text. Pick's narrative is a collection of historical and biographical details reassembled into an elaborate adventure tale rooted partly in fact. He is a quintessential "Nowhere Man," in that he exhibits no particular attachments or allegiances except to a very specific kind of home built at the Cathay hotel in lawless turn-of-the-century Shanghai. Pick's Russian nationalism is portrayed as opportunistic at best, whereas Shanghai is presented as his "real" home, insofar as Pick associates the city with a sense of self, or rather, an ability to shift fluidly between selves, as seen in the theatrical streak of his stage name "Eugene Hovans." Shanghai's labyrinthine anonymity allows Pick to weave together multiple identities; eventually, however, he is forced to abscond. Later, he returns to the city, and in the wake of Hiroshima, finds it changed almost beyond recognition: "He goes back to Shanghai and attempts to restore his network to serve the Americans, but to no avail – Shanghai is not the same, and it never will be" (239). After this failed homecoming, Pick falls into further dissolution and lands in a Taiwanese prison, where he tells stories about Shanghai in the thirties, before disappearing altogether.

At this point, the narrative reassumes the first-person voice of the unnamed narrator from its first section, who is reading a book about Pick while on his honeymoon in Shanghai. *Nowhere Man*'s abrupt shift from Pick's biography to the narrator's more recent voyage creates a palimpsest between the characters at the exact spot of their spatial convergence; the newlyweds are staying in room 741 at the Peace Hotel in Shanghai (formerly the Cathay hotel), which was Pick's home during his time in Shanghai. The narrator reflects on his own relationship to the space of the hotel, and the extent to which Shanghai has changed since Pick's time: "We stayed at the Peace Hotel, which used to be the Cathay, and we liked it – they changed our towels regularly, the staff who could speak English always asked us how we were, and we would tell them, for they seemed to care. Pretty soon, we started referring to our hotel room, room 741, as our home" (240). The lawless space of Shanghai, formerly a nexus of colonial intrigue perfectly suited to a man like Pick, has given way to the unreflective, ahistorical sheen of global capitalism, which creates tourist sites couched in homogeneous service standards, and voiced in English, the global language of business.

Once the narrator thinks of the Peace hotel as "home," his meditations on Shanghai develop a sense of vulnerable contingency. Time-geography, for Hemon, underscores the basic instability of a concept like "home," and instead attempts to establish continuity by presenting space as a locus for multiple pathways through time. The narrator's recognition that spaces change over time aligns with his recognition that the identities rooted to such spaces are equally subject to change. This mode of continuity explores the gaps separating spaces over time, and associates diaspora less with a shared,

recoverable homeland and more with a time-sensitive approach to space. While

meditating on the ghosts of the Cathay/Peace hotel, the narrator conveys a perpetual,

irrational anxiety, which assumes the shape of a mouse. The novel concludes with an act

of movement ambivalently offered as resolution: as the mouse merges with the narrator's

body and tries desperately "to get out," the narrator chooses "to get up." This provides a

bookend to the first chapter, wherein Pronek watched the narrator grab a mouse off the

ground. The mouse bites the narrator; reflecting on the incident, the narrator states that

Pronek, smirking, looked "as if he knew all along what would happen." (26).

Perpetually homeless and susceptible to predatory violence, the mouse symbol

links the several narrators of *Nowhere Man*, all of whom (excepting in particular the

voice from the second section) feel such a creature clawing at their chests. The only

antidote to such a feeling, it seems, is the spatial memory-work suggested to Pronek at

the outset of this section. The narrator of that injunction *is* a mouse, which Pronek has

badly injured. Its attempt to soothe him suggests the aims of Hemon's time-geography:

rather than associate diasporic space with the discrete nodes of homeland/hostland

advanced in triadic relations theory (Safran 1991), it approaches diasporic space as a

material index of disjunctive histories of movement. This effort does not erase the

violence and vulnerability associated with the mouse; it does, however, provide a

trenchant, time-centered critique of the homogeneous space of the nation-state.

The structure of *Nowhere Man* thus disrupts the linear time and spatial continuity

associated with realism and the bildungsroman genre; and yet, by putting disparate points

in space-time into close proximity with one another, it also generates unexpected

connections between such points. In this way, Hemon represents diasporic space as a

relational concept that traces routes of historical departure and arrival, while refusing to

arrange these routes into a straightforward narrative of cultural assimilation. Reading

Nowhere Man in context with materials like its promotional website helps elucidate this

approach to space. Such a reading underscores how Hemon's aesthetics prompt readers to

speculate on the histories of movement underlying space in diaspora. *Nowhere Man*'s

website contributes to this project by generating further perspectives on the novel's

diverse space-times. By inviting readers to revisit such space-times through a highly

configurable and visual interface, Hemon's website multiplies the variable migratory

pathways associated with diasporic time-geography. And when read contrapuntally with
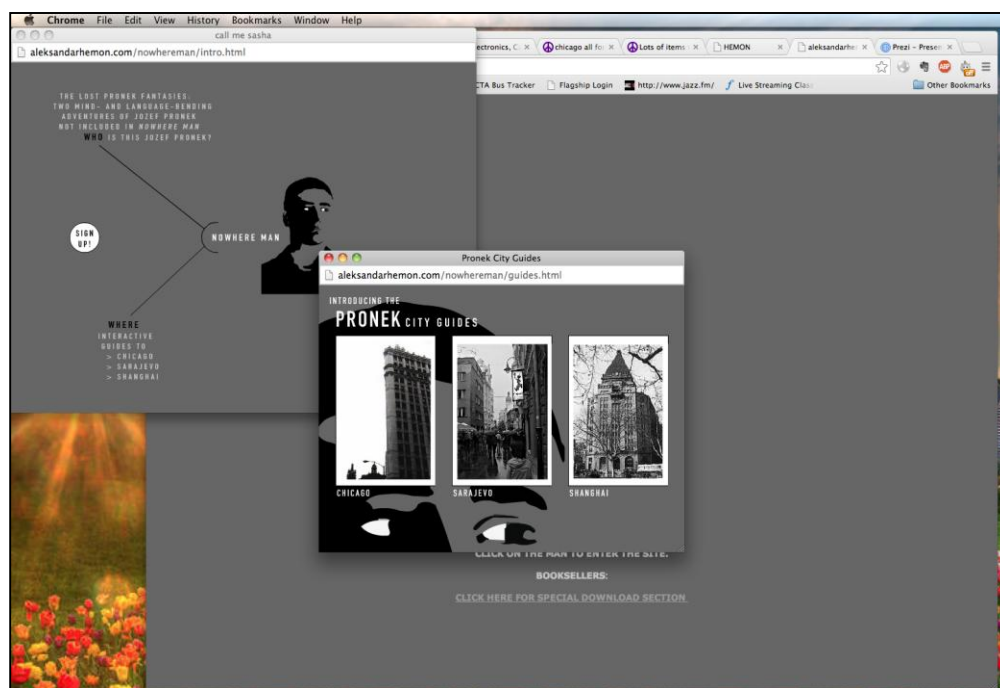
Figure 10. Hemon, Aleksandar. *Nowhere Man*. Aleksandar Hemon. Web. 3 March 2015.

the novel, the website helps orient the gaps and connections of diasporic space toward a

spatial critique of public sphere theory that draws on the interactive, circulatory
properties of media.

The site bills itself as an "interactive guide" to Chicago, Sarajevo, and Shanghai.
This raises several questions: what kind of guide? What sights does it showcase? How
does it represent these cities, and what reading strategies can account for its interactive
elements? Folding the website into the broader spatial critique developed across Hemon's
work can help answer these questions. Clicking on the section titled "where" opens up a
browser window with three images (see figure 10), one from each of the cities in
question. Clicking on the "Chicago" or "Sarajevo" images takes the viewer to separate
pages full of specific locations and associated hyperlinks. In both cases, clicking on the
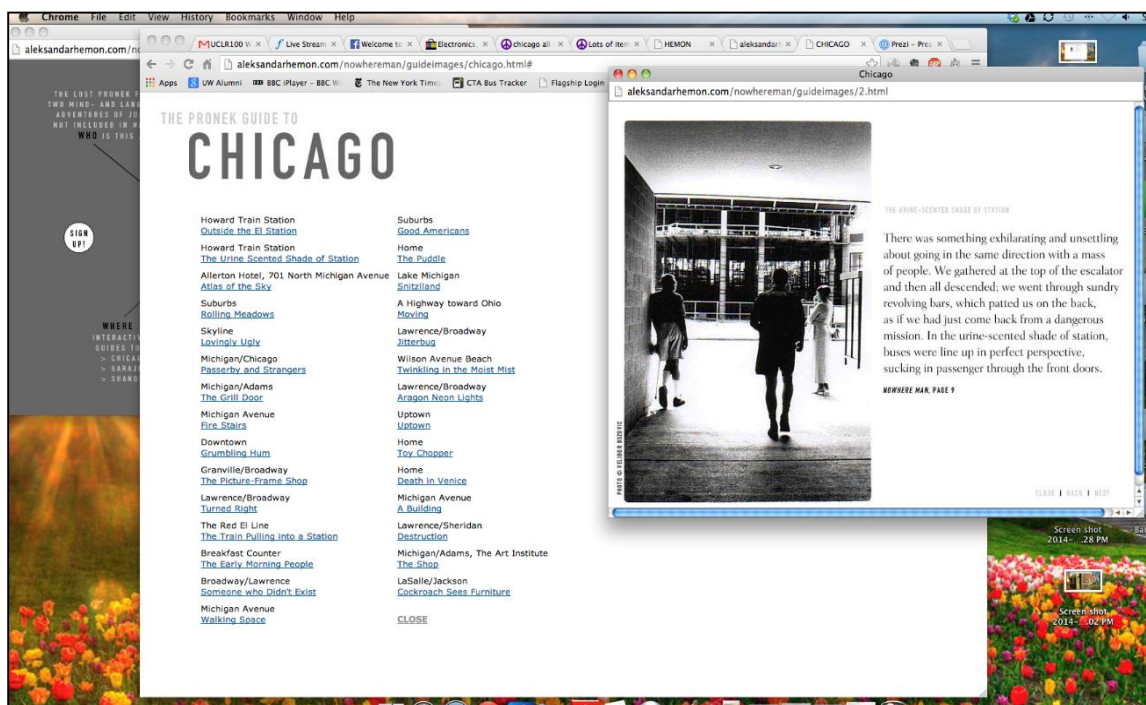
Figure 11. Hemon, Aleksandar. *Nowhere Man*. Aleksandar Hemon. Web. 3 March 2015.

hyperlink opens yet another window, which contains still photography from the chosen

city. These photographs are accompanied by excerpts from *Nowhere Man* relating to the location (See figure 11). Readers can navigate these spaces by opening each link individually, or progressing through a linear sequence in the browser window.

The Chicago images by Velibor Božović[4] (who also did the photography for Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*) are presented in black and white, while the Sarajevo images are in full-color, with authorship attributed to "SDMD." The color contrasts between these images envelop modern Chicago in an anachronistic historicism, and present Sarajevo in terms of a more vibrant present. Such a contrast work against the before/after rupture characterizing traditional diasporic return narratives, and more broadly, foregrounds the temporal dimensions of urban space. Finally, clicking on the Shanghai image takes users to the Peace Hotel website, which offers a panoramic and user-controlled real-time view of the city from the top of the Hotel. This hyper-presentist perspective produces a sense of perpetual immediacy via its "real-time" control functions. Linking out to the Peace Hotel website offers a more dynamic, commercialized, and depopulated sense of space than provided by the still images from Chicago and Sarajevo. In addition, it offers an alternative sense of movement that mirrors the rhetoric of transnational capitalism, which promises travelers unrestricted freedom of movement, while also fixing them within a highly controlled system of managed perspective.[5] By drawing the Peace Hotel's web stream into the broader media assemblage of *Nowhere Man*, Hemon's work invites users to reflect on the strategies by which the Peace Hotel's

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[4] Božović also did photography for *The Lazarus Project.*

[5] This section of the Peace Hotel's website is now defunct; as a result, it leaves Hemon's website with an interesting lacunae, and alters the overall tenor of *Nowhere Man*'s media assemblage with a conspicuously absent presence, reasserting the contingency of space even for this ultra-modern boutique hotel.

representation of space effaces its own history. In particular, when read against the novel's description of Shanghai in the early twentieth century, the web stream asks readers to reflect on the chasm separating its static representation of contemporary time and space to the dynamic histories of the hotel's past and present occupants.

This chasm is accentuated by the diversity of spatial representations observed in the media assemblage of *Nowhere Man*; and yet, as when read as an assemblage, these component parts achieve a broader synchronic coherence as a time-sensitive critique of state space. All three guides are embedded in independent browser windows that can be examined in isolation or layered atop one another. In theory, readers could have the three city guides opened simultaneously, and arranged as a palimpsest. The configurable nature of this web platform requires a more spatially-conscious way of reading the fragmented excerpts, and asks readers to create multiple, shifting connections between the spaces in question. The website is therefore continuous with the novel in presenting fragments of time-space; its photographs represent fixed locations, but their connections via browser windows produce an effect that is both fragmentary and cohesive at any given moment. These print and electronic fragments can be arranged in many possible ways, and the photographed cityscapes create an impression of material embedding in lived social space that proves particularly distinct from the novel. The novel's redeployment in this website creates an emergent effect that binds the site's photographs to the imagined spaces of its narrative, while at the same time, foregrounding their artifice of these images — their status as representations — by virtue of an interactive web interface. It presents readers

with further materials and methodologies to understand Hemon's time-geography as a response to the question of "how we got here," which functions as a spatial critique.

Hemon hoped to make the website more elaborate, but failed as a result of limited time and money (Personal Interview 2013). However, the experiment strengthened his interest in the relationship between movement, text, and image. In this sense, the experiment leads in a direct line to Hemon's next novel, *The Lazarus Project* (2008), and its corresponding website. Two narratives comprise *The Lazarus Project*: the "Brik" section (set during the present), and the "Lazarus" section (set during the early twentieth century). Brik, a displaced Bosnian writer, becomes interested in the story of Lazarus Averbuch, a Russian Jew who fled the Kishinev pogroms to Chicago, where he was shot by the Chief of Police. Hemon interweaves these narratives through textual allusion and visual montage; strategies of repetition which evoke the trauma of displacement; and yet, these narratives also exhibit distinct differences that resist the cyclical dynamic of trauma as an unending series of modified recurrences. While the Lazarus storyline, for instance, is written in a third-person omniscient narrative voice, the Brik storyline assumes a first person limited perspective. The Lazarus storyline takes place solely in Chicago (a New World immigration tragedy), while Brik crosses back over the Atlantic (a diasporic return narrative). Such differences suggest important variations in the time-geographical trajectories experienced by Brik and Lazarus. And yet, these characters often stand on the same ground, literally and metaphorically, creating a spatial proximity that draws together their distant chronologies.

The novel begins with a statement of epistemological limitation anchored at a determinate point in space-time: "The time and place are the only things I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain…" (1). The narrator (presumably Brik) relates Lazaraus' path through Chicago on the day of his murder. While Lazarus' memories occasionally intrude on the action, readers are given little access to his interiority. By contrast, his trail through Lincoln Park is meticulously rendered, up to and including his final arrival at the house of the Chief of Police. At this point, the narrative voice begins splintering, as the certitude of space gives way to the erasures of time surrounding Lazarus' death. Lazarus is shot multiple times by multiple parties; alternate voices intercede in italics, as the popular media (in the guise of Tribune reporter William Miller) reframe the story in their descriptions of Lazarus as a "vile foreigner" with a "cruel mouth" and "determination terrible to behold" (8). The highly stylized racism of such reports remains the only archival testimony to Lazarus. As a result, Brik turns to the spaces of Chicago for a better perspective on the life and death of Lazrus Averbuch. This prelude establishes the novel's central theme of resurrection that intertwines the Biblical Lazarus, Lazarus Averbuch, and Brik's resurrection of Lazarus for Bush-era reading publics. Resurrection implies a liminal passage that both connects and divides spaces (here and there) and times (before and after). It connects space-times within an overarching framework of death and rebirth; however, it also divides them through the transformative nature of resurrection. When applied to diaspora, such a framework encompasses the paradoxical nature of migrations defined by violent rupture.

The Lazarus Project employs a time-geographical approach to narrative structure that understands diasporic space as reflecting the complexities of such a passage. Brik's storyline begins as he encounters Rora (a photographer friend from Sarajevo) at a Bosnian gathering in Chicago. Later, the two meet to photograph the city and visit its former Jewish quarter. This area, Brik observes, has been utterly transformed since Lazarus' time, and he attempts to "locate" Lazarus amidst the city's continual urban rewriting. For Brik, this rebirth elides testimonies to the racial violence informing Chicago's past, violence which still inheres in the gentrification overrunning its present spaces. This pursuit of an increasingly overwritten past leads Brik to the conclusion that in order to understand Lazarus, he must return to Lazarus' place of origin. Rora prompts this notion: "You should go back where he came from, Rora said. There is always a before and an after" (46). As we will see, Rora's comment contains hidden depths, but Brik accepts his suggestion at face value: "Rora was right: I needed to follow Lazarus all the way back to the pogrom in Kishinev, to the time before America…I needed to step outside my life in Chicago and spend time deep in the wilderness of elsewhere" (46). Brik wants to view space as a container for time: he desires to reverse the flow of time-geographical movement, and locate windows to the past in spaces of departure and arrival. In amny ways, this constitutes a time-geographical critique of state space in line with my reading of *Nowhere Man*. And yet, *The Lazarus Project* also undercuts Brik's position by more fully emphasizing the contingency of time-geography: its critique of state space, in other words, also functions as a critique of diasporic return narratives, which (like Brik) aim to recapture time frozen in space.

Brik initiates such a narrative when he emends their return-migration to start from Lviv, Ukraine. Brik's grandfather came from nearby Krotkiy, which Brik, as a result of his family lore, associates with a near-mythological convergence between self and space. However, the "wilderness of elsewhere" (69) Brik and Rora encounter in the darkening streets of Lviv assumes an unexpectedly menacing aspect. This menace results from the disjuncture between Lviv's reputation in Brik's family memory, and its present reality. Such a "wilderness," in other words, exists only in relation to the orderliness of nostalgic memory, which fixes Lviv as a space of permanent departure for the migration history of Brik's family. The gap between past and present, marked on the streets of Lviv, reveals Brik's primary intention for the trip, which is to preserve the past in space as an antidote to the passage of time. Brik's need to "find" Lazarus reflects a need to "lose" himself, or rather, to lose the portions of himself that are increasingly interwoven with the space of Chicago. This is the sense in which his project represents a traditional diasporic return-narrative, which opposes and even outright denies the "after" category of displacement by rooting identity in the unchanging space of "before."

Such narratives depend on a perspective on identity that sees the "self" as a ballast which can resist changes in space and time. Brik describes this perspective as follows:

> Everybody imagines that they have a center, the seat of their soul, if you believe in that kind of thing…But even if the center is elsewhere in the body – the head, the throat, the heart – it is fixed there, it does not move around. When you move, the center moves with you, following your trajectory. You protect the center, your body is a sheath; and if your body is damaged, the center is exposed and weak. Moving through the crowd at the bus station in Chernivtsi, I realized that my center had shifted – it used to be in my stomach, but now it was in my breast pocket, where I kept my American passport and a wad of cash. I pushed this bounty of American

life through space; I was presently assembled around it and needed to
protect it from the people around me (177).

Brik understands identity as a "center" that must be protected by one's bodily and mental

apparatus. His description of being "assembled" around the two totems of American life

suggests an exogenous force has overwritten his Bosnian identity, much as the buildings

in Chicago have been overwritten since Lazarus' time. This perspective informs his belief

that in contexts of involuntary displacement, identity requires insulation from the

influence of people, places, and time. Displacement produces the desire for such

insularity; however, it also ultimately checks this desire, as migration reveals the degree

to which identity and space are always-already embedded in changing time. Brik

confronts this reality precisely as a result of his failed return-narrative. Instead of helping

recapture his previous identity in space, his return migration reflects the extent of his own

change over time. He perceives this change through his encounters with the dynamic,

changing social space of Lviv and later, Sarajevo, which refuse to be fixed within his

own personal chronology of involuntary migration. Brik's spatial encounters, in other

words, reveal the very impossibility of such return narratives. His initial urge to protect

his own center transposes an urge to protect Sarajevo. He states: "So I had a crazy,

liberating feeling that my life was neatly divided: all of my now in America, all of my

past in Sarajevo. Because there is no now in Sarajevo, no McDonald's" (208). Viewed in

this way, as a container, Brik's perspective on Sarajevo reveals the close association

between diasporic return narratives and the abstraction associated with state space.

Rora, however, challenges Brik's tendency to reify spaces in his own biography.

He does so by invoking their autonomous timelines. In particular, he dismisses the idea

that Brik's current state, or "now," must map onto Sarajevo in order for that city to

participate in the present:

> What you see is what you see, but that is never everything. Sarajevo is
> Sarajevo whatever you see or don't see. America is America. The past and
> the future exist without you. And what you don't know about me is still
> my life. What I don't know about you is your life. Nothing at all depends
> on you seeing it or not seeing it. I mean, who are you? You don't have to
> see or know everything (209).

Rora's argument is a powerful counterpoint to Brik's desire to make spaces conform to

his own experience. In this line of thinking, while Brik's time-geographical path winds

from Sarajevo to Chicago, it must also inevitably interact with numerous other spatial

perspectives on Sarajevo, including those which know the city purely in the context of

Brik's "after" displacement. *The Lazarus Project* thus employs time-geography to

foreground the close relationship between state space and the assumptions underlying

diasporic return narratives; such assumptions are ultimately revealed to rely on the same

logic of abstraction defining the bordered space of the nation-state. By introducing the

element of fluctuating time to space, however, the novel as a whole develops a spatial

critique premised on the overlapping histories of motion associated with time-geography.

This critique is further illuminated when viewed within a broader media assemblage.

 Like *Nowhere Man*, *The Lazarus Project* extends its critique through multimodal

work that allows several temporalities to inflect the diasporic spaces of its narrative. The

novel itself advances such a project through its internal use of photography, which creates

an internalized media assemblage through interplay between text and image. Some of the

images in the text are taken from the Chicago Historical Society, while Velibor Božović

captured others. In both cases, the pictures are presented in black and white, and without

dates. There are several pictures of Chicago and Sarajevo, along with profile shots, and

haunting images of Lazarus. These photographs are a major part of both *The Lazarus*

Project and its meta-novel "The Lazarus Project" (presumably written by Brik, with

photographs by Rora). The assemblage relationship between text and image is further

compounded by the novel's website. The website transfers the novel's content into a

more configurable medium, which (according to its introductory text) constitutes another

version of the novel. The interactive properties of this platform emphasize the multiple
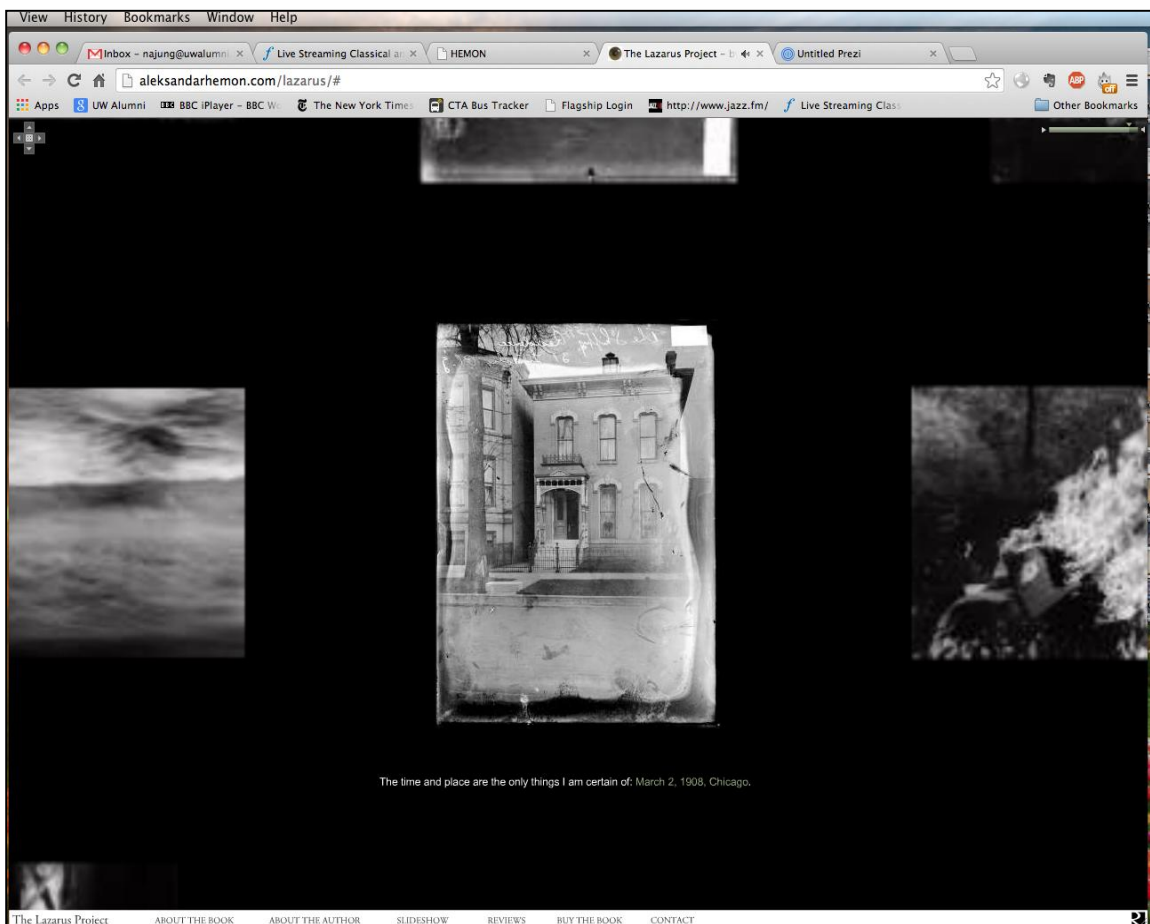
Figure 12. Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Lazarus Project*. Aleksandar Hemon. Web. 3
March 2015.

time-geographical migration trajectories developed by the novel's parallel timelines and

use of photographs. To this end, the website's first flash page raises a browser window

against a backdrop of photographs; this window includes an introductory paragraph

comprised of promotional points, a description of the novel's interlocking narratives, and

a description of the website itself. Clicking "Proceed" zooms in on an inverted version of

the novel's first image, which is paired with its first sentence (see figure 12). The

sentence is hyperlinked; following the link causes the screen to pan towards the upper
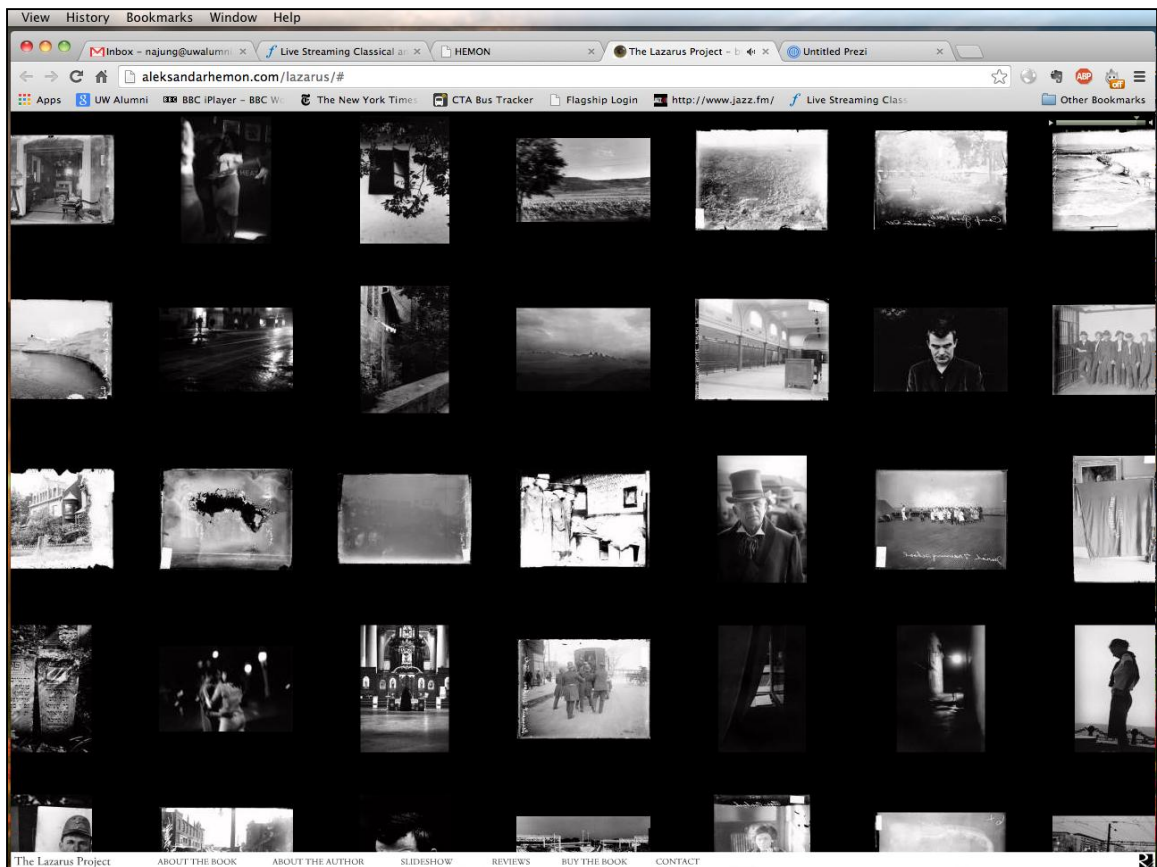
Figure 13. Hemon, Aleksandar. *The Lazarus Project*. Aleksandar Hemon. Web. 3 March 2015.

left, and settle on another photograph, with another hyperlinked excerpt. Clicking on this

link triggers another movement, to another photograph. These links shuttle users in seemingly random directions, with no indication of beginning or end.

In the upper right corner, however, there is an interface consisting of four directional arrows and a center button. Clicking on the arrows takes users towards the next photograph in that direction, while clicking on the button zooms the perspective out to encompass a bird's-eye view of the grid of photographs (see figure 13). The "slideshow," like many on the web, offers users the option to view either a full or short version of the project. As a result, Hemon's website plays on broader media conventions, whose unique tempos ("full" or "short") and directionality (left to right) contribute to the dynamic combination of space and time developed by Hemon's media assemblage. The website's full version plays straight through a series of photographs and text, and in that sense feels more like a linear narrative. But when read against the potential for innumerable user-controlled photo-essays, such pathways through place and history create a sense of contingent networks that complement the novel in underscoring the disjunctive networks of diasporic time-geography. These networks suggest the degree to which diaspora engenders multiple spatial attachments that can never be reduced to a single, linear experience (although such attachments may, at times, partake of linearity). In all, there are a total of 143 pictures hyperlinked in this way. When read in combination with the novel, these images and their control interface suggest an attempt to represent variable links between discrete space-times. This effort works through spatiotemporal fragments developed across several media; and yet, these fragments attain coherence when read as a media assemblage, and in particular, when read as a spatial critique that

contests the abstraction of state space. Ultimately, Hemon's work responds to such spatial abstraction in the same voice of the dislocated mouse-narrator of *Nowhere Man*: with the time-geographical imperative to "Let us just remember how we got here."

Teju Cole's Spatial Transgressions

"I'm trying to create a space where something can enter into your head — usually it's something that is connected to cities and usually it's something that has to do with trying to find a way to turn the volume down — so that something strange can happen." – Teju Cole ("Pitch Forward" 2013)

In a letter of support written for the literary magazine *A Public Space*, Teju Cole praises the publication's spatial breadth: "Each piece in the magazine, whether written about domestic affairs or from an international point of view, underscores William Carlos Williams' faith in the 'universality of the local.'" ("Letter" 2013). This letter asks readers to consider the key role played by literary culture in connecting "domestic and international affairs," and suggests an understanding of "universality" predicated on the particularity of local spaces. Finally, by describing the magazine as opposed to the deep fragmentation of the "American agora," Cole invites us to contextualize these concerns (literature, localism, and globalism) within a revised framework of public sphere theory.

Like Hemon, Cole's biography maps onto his narrators' lives in ways that invite indexical readings of the relationship between author and character. These readings are further solicited by the consistency of his meditative, articulate, and (to date) invariably first-person narrative voice. However, the redeployment of this voice across novels, essays, photography, and Twitter resists indexical readings in favor of comparative, assemblage-based analyses attuned to the nuances of its different permutations. This section examines *Open City*, *Every Day is for the Thief*, and "A Piece of the Wall," a

Twitter essay. I argue that Cole represents diaspora as a form of embodied spatial

practice rooted in what Bertrand Westphal calls a "state of transgressivity." [6] For

Westphal, spatial transgression comingles physical movement and departure from

normative cultural standards; in this way, it repurposes borders as sites of liminal

transformations that impact both mobile actors and the sites of movement themselves.

The mobility characterizing Cole's characters thus confuses the physical and conceptual

boundaries of state space as part of an ethical project that builds from acts of empathetic

spatial imagination.

This position departs from prior criticism on Cole's work, which advances a

postcolonial critique of cosmopolitanism (particularly cosmopolitan aesthetics).

Katherine Hallemeier, for instance, writes "Cole's texts value a cosmopolitan literariness

that neither hails from the intellectual cosmopolitan elite nor takes the dispossessed

cosmopolitan migrant for its subject" (239). She contends that Cole's work points to the

limits of a cosmopolitan agenda whose universalism advances solely through western

Anglophone literature. Similarly, Pieter Vermeulen finds that *Open City* questions

whether aesthetics can perform a truly cosmopolitan function: "Even if the novel is

thoroughly occupied with the question of how aesthetic form can contribute to the

furthering of cosmopolitan understanding, it ends up as a catalogue of failed attempts to

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[6] Westphal develops "transgressivity" as a central plank of geocriticism. He describes its etymology follows: "Among the Romans, one transgressed when passing to the other side of a boundary or a river…The transgression could also be an infraction: one does not cross a boundary without departing from the norm" (41-42). Transgression, in his sense, can only occur in the "striated" space of the state; in the "smooth" state of the nomad, boundaries and borders are inconceivable. Westphal therefore argues that multiplying borders to the extent of overload can help fracture the falsely "smooth" contours of state space. This results from the fact that every border allows for its own transgression, which can reveal the full heterogeneity of state space.

forge intercultural connections by artistic means" (42). In this way, Vermeulen explores

the blindness and memory-loss endemic to cosmopolitan aesthetic discourses.

I want to take a slightly different tack in my readings of Cole. Cosmopolitanism is

inarguably a thematic concern in his work, and these critics have usefully explored how

Cole modulates and critiques the concept. However, I want to "ground" cosmopolitan

discourses, and return to Cole's enactment of the concept in local spatial practice. To do

so, I suggest rereading Cole's depictions of cosmopolitanism in context with his more

immediate depictions of diasporic migration. Cole, I argue, explores diasporic identity

through cosmopolitan frameworks; as a result, his renditions of diaspora inherit the

problems and possibilities of such frameworks. Reading diaspora as a form of local

spatial practice can therefore develop Cole's use of cosmopolitanism as a boundary

marker for "transgressive" spatial acts that saturate local actions with global or

transnational significance. These diasporic spatial acts build a "transgressive public

sphere" premised on cross-cultural interactions that are fundamentally enabled by the

physical and imaginative trespassing of real and imagined spatial borders.

Westphal notes that transgression can assume several different spatial scales

ranging from "the sphere of intimacy" to "large groups" (45). Cole's work concerns how

public space functions as a point of exchange between these intimate "small unities" and

the broader claims of "large groups," and understands diaspora as a mode of

transgressing these scales. He introduces a "state of transgressivity" that, in Westphal's

words, "characterizes the forces continually acting upon heterogeneous spaces, forces

that make them a multiple 'territory of germination'" (46). This "state" develops a spatial

model predicated on the conscious confusion of predetermined spatial categories like "local," "global," "intimate," and "social." For Cole, this confusion of categories repurposes the borders of state space to create opportunities for transgression. These transgressions do not always lead to desirable outcomes; instead, their force resides in tapping the randomizing potentials of urban space. Westphal elaborates on the unpredictability of such transgressions:

> Transgression corresponds to the crossing of a boundary beyond which stretches a marginal space of freedom. When it becomes a permanent principle, it turns into transgressivity. The transgressive gaze is constantly directed toward an emancipatory horizon in order to see beyond a code and territory that serves as its 'domain.' But transgression equally lies in the swerve, in the new trajectory, the unexpected, and the unpredictable. (47)

Cosmopolitanism is therefore best understood as an "emancipatory horizon" in Cole's work: an abstract universal, or boundary-marker, that helps develop the particularity of local spaces and individual spatial practice, while also allowing for transgressive acts that may assume unexpected forms. Putting cosmopolitanism into a wider engagement with diasporic spatial practice in Cole's work, I argue, provides an opening to rethink spatial practice as a key component of the discursive characteristics of diasporic public spheres.

Reading these texts as participants in a "transgressive public sphere" that reintroduces motion into public space helps develop Cole's critique of state space. Richard Gilman-Opalsky provides ways of reading transgression in conversation with public sphere theory. This is a crucial gesture, because it suggests a method for reading the contradictions characterizing Cole's diasporic Thirdspace as loosely coherent when situated within the broader framework of public sphere critique:

> …simply put, transgression refers precisely to a public sphere and political identity that require an ongoing understanding of their double-occupancy in both national and transnational frameworks in order to be properly understood. Transgressive public sphere, apparently paradoxically, can have a nationalist and a cosmopolitan self-understanding; that is to say, they transgress the either/or choices that have been recently presented by cosmopolitan thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas, Martha Nussbaum, and Janna Thompson" (233).

Transgressive public spheres embrace the contradictions inherent in spatial analysis. Gilman-Opalsky's work, when placed in the context of spatial analysis elaborated by Westphal, helps orient the representational strategies Cole employs to transgress the geographic, political, and cultural distances of diasporic communities. Cole represents spatial practice on the ground through multimedia projects that transgress generic and platform expectations, while also transgressing their readers' desire for stable, defined models of diaspora that exist unchanged and unchallenged across such projects.

First, I will explore spatial transgression in Cole's 2012 novel *Open City*. Julius narrates the novel; he is a Nigerian-American psychiatrist raised in Lagos and currently living in New York. *Open City* is structured around his movements and meditations, which often have the feeling of vignettes. This fragmentary structure links various cities: New York, Brussels, and Lagos feature prominently, although the latter only manifests in Julius' memories. Julius left Lagos with violent willfulness, for reasons that are never explicitly communicated to readers. At the outset of the novel, Julius describes his recent practice of taking long walks through New York City at night; these walks, he states, are meant as a "counterpoint" to his "busy days at the hospital" (3). He begins walking in order to "break the monotony" (7) of nights spent alone in his apartment, and describes how "In this way…New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace" (3). The

novel's opening overture connects these walks to Julius' speculations on the migratory

patterns of birds. These speculations echo the same fears of absence witnessed in Hemon:

"So amazed was I by them that I couldn't trust my memory when they weren't there" (4).

These birds are further connected in Julius' mind to the solitary radio hosts who

broadcast classical music from Europe into his apartment. Immediately, then, Julius' act

of walking the city is framed as an attempt to understand the seemingly incomprehensible

networks of movement characterizing life in the early twenty-first century, and the media

practices that hold such networks together. However, while these walks are meant as an

antidote to the "monotony" of his solitary existence, they have the opposite effect:

> Walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people,
> hundreds more, thousands even, than I was accustomed to seeing in the
> course of a day, but the impress of these countless faces did nothing to
> assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them (6).

Julius' isolation is thus heightened when he finds himself surrounded by people. This is

the central paradox of the novel: transgressing the spatial boundaries of private

(apartment) and public (street) confuses such categories, and allows for a complex

"double-occupancy" (218) of private and public space, in Gilman-Opalsky's words.

When mapped onto the migrations of birds and distant, radio-delivered voices, such

categorical confusions expand to incorporate global space. Proximity, then, creates a

sense of isolation, while distance, as in the distance between Julius and the radio

announcers, creates a sense of connection: "it wasn't at all difficult to draw the

comparison between myself, in my sparse apartment, and the radio host in his or her

booth…" (5).

The fact that such "double-occupancy" could also be described as "double-displacement," however, foregrounds the complexities of diasporic space. Julius' isolation is evident even during his early childhood years in Lagos, where his foreign name, passport, and lighter skin color produce in him a "sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria" (79). This stems from the displacement experienced by his German-Nigerian mother, and the grandmother he half-heartedly attempts to locate in Brussels. *Open City* thus understands diaspora as a mode of post-memory that spans generations; it is not inherently linked to a "homeland," but instead manifests as a mode of engaging the interrelated histories of various cities. This engagement is a fundamentally spatial practice, which transgresses several boundaries at once. Julius moves between spaces saturated with different geographies, ethnicities, histories, cultures, and languages, which ultimately reinforce his sense of singularity. Julius' walks thus allow for interactions that transgress social boundaries, but also prohibit definite claims on his allegiances. In this way, Cole maps diasporic identity onto the paradoxes of cosmopolitan discourses that stitch together universalizing within/without social postures.

Such discourses casts diaspora in terms of "claims" which can be accepted, rejected, or transgressed. Examples of diasporic claims in *Open City* include a series of incidental urban encounters that put Julius in the position of assessing his relationship to broader migrant collectives. A cab driver, for instance, criticizes Julius for not acknowledging his presence: "Not good, not good at all, you know the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I'm African just like you, why you do this?" (40). This comment disturbs Julius, but for unexpected reasons: apologizing to

the driver, he thinks, "I wasn't sorry at all. I was in no mood for people who tried to lay

claims on me" (40). This plainly aritculates Julius' rejection of what he understands as

the core elements of diasporic identification: nation and race. The reasoning behind his

rejection of such claims is developed in greater detail through his conversation with an

off-duty security guard: "Kenneth was, by now, starting to wear on me, and I began to

wish he would go away. I thought of the cabdriver who had driven me home from the

Folk Art Museum – hey, I'm African just like you. Kenneth was making a similar claim"

(53). Julius recognizes the partly spurious nature of these claims, which assume a shared,

unchanging homeland orientation. He disputes this shared orientation when reflecting on

the physical site of Ellis Island, which ties together his interactions with Kenneth and the

cab driver: "but it had been built too late for those early Africans – who weren't

immigrants in any case – and it had closed too soon to mean anything to the later

Africans like Kenneth, or the cabdriver, or me" (55). Julius recognizes the tendency for

the African slave trade to subsume diverse migration narratives under the heading of

"diaspora," and pushes back against the presumption of shared diasporic ties based on

categories like race, ethnicity, and nationality.

Julius' spatial practice allows him to actively resist interpellation into diasporic

collectives on the basis of such categories. However, his resulting sense of singularity

takes on a troublingly bleak tone later in the novel. The morning after a party, an old

acquaintance accuses Julius of sexually assaulting her during their teenage years in

Lagos. He neither confirms nor denies these accusations, and instead discusses his

subsequent trip to the George Washington Bridge, along with other mundane

occurrences. In many ways, Julius embraces the anonymity of space as a means of fleeing

the incident; his only other comment on the matter regards the unreliability of individual

perception. Julius supports this assertion by allowing the event to pass through his own

narration as yet another incidental observation, followed by a meditation on Mahler's late

symphonic work. By design, this is the most troublesome part of the novel, as it recasts

the whole of Julius' narration in terms of detachment: detachment from action, from

consequence, from engagement, and from memory. And yet, despite his tendency to

embrace urban space as an anonymizing agent, it is worth noting that this unexpected

revelation would not have entered Julius' narrative stream without his practice of spatial

transgression: he randomly meets his accuser, Moji, in a grocery store during one of his

many walks. Positioning this encounter in terms of cosmopolitan detachment allows Cole

to explore the ethical valence of diasporic "double displacement," in the case of Julius,

and/or "double occupancy," as seen in his other print and electronic works.

To this end, in order to get a fuller sense of Cole's depictions of space, we must

read the novel in context with his wider corpus. *Every Day is for the Thief* overlaps with

Open City in several ways, while ultimately developing a distinctly mirrored perspective

on the relationship between diaspora and space. In this case, displacement from Lagos is

attributed to the pressures resulting from economic mismanagement and graft. The text

concerns an unnamed narrator who, like Julius, is a Nigerian medical student living in the

United States. *Every Day is for the Thief* relates its narrator's return to Lagos after a

prolonged absence. It begins at the Nigerian consulate in New York, where he is waiting

to get his papers for the trip. At the consulate, tensions run high as willful inefficiency

creates, enforces, and internalizes a sense of diasporic distance from Nigeria in the would-be travelers. Readers observe the complex embedding of Nigeria in the middle of New York, as the narrator admits he expected bribery at the Lagos airport, but never at the consulate. Nevertheless, these transgressions of western norms do not dislodge Nigeria's status as "home" for the narrator; instead, they intensify it by facilitating liminal, and even exhilarating, transgressions between spaces and value systems: "And I, too, experience the ecstasy of arrival, the irrational sense that all will now be well. Fifteen years is a long time to be away from home" (10). After fifteen years, the narrator still refers to Lagos as "home," and notes an "irrational" feeling that despite his time in diaspora, returning to Lagos will ensure that "everything will be well."

The narrator takes a cab from the airport, and notes that the whole traffic system of Lagos reflects an economy structured around petty extortion: policemen direct the flow of traffic and the offering of bribes under billboards that impotently decry corruption. The city extends from deeply embedded social practices of bribery that are also inexorably tied to Nigeria's "entrepreneurial" reputation. The social construction of this urban space — the way graft inflects even the motion of the city — is newly apparent to the narrator. His return migration thus reveals the extent to which he is a stranger in his "homeland," which creates the conditions for an objective evaluation of Lagos:

> I am breathing the air of the city for the first time in a decade and a half,
> its white smoke and ocher dust which are as familiar as my own breath.
> But other things, less visible, have changed. I have taken into myself some
> of the assumptions of life in a Western democracy – certain ideas about
> legality, for instance, certain expectations of due process – and in that
> sense I have returned a stranger (17).

The narrator acknowledges his hybrid identity, which is challenged by the familiarity of the "white smoke" and "ocher dust" of Lagos. His transgression across cultures has not only developed the social nature of space, it has also posited transgression as a spatial practice that productively alienates the narrator. This alienation allows him to perceive the "less visible" changes resulting from his time abroad, creating what Westphal calls a "transgressive gaze" that falls upon both Lagos and, in a dual gesture, America.

The narrator's desire to re-familiarize himself with Lagos informs several of the ensuing chapters, as he seeks immersion in the public life of the city. However, in contrast to Julius, these ventures do not increase his feelings of isolation. On the contrary, they stage forms of diasporic spatial practice that construct new Thirdspace cultures from transgressive acts. For instance, despite objections from his relatives, the narrator insists on riding public transportation. His relatives warn him against this on the following grounds: "Yes, you are street-smart, no one doubts it. But like it or not, America has softened you" (34). The narrator nevertheless follows through on his plan to ride on the "danfo," or bus system: "They don't understand that being there on the danfo, being there on the streets, is the whole point of the exercise" (34). For the narrator, the "whole point of the exercise" is to engage with Lagos outside class distinctions. Such distinctions structure space in Lagos: the rich ride in private vehicles, and as the narrator states, "Each person knows how to get maximum comfort out of situations, how to avoid being 'one of the masses.' It is essential, not just in terms of safety, but also in social terms." (34). As with petty corruption, class also structures the space of Lagos, and the narrator's desire to

transgress his spatial-economic milieu directly results from his desire to engage with the

social spaces of his erstwhile "home:"

> The degree to which my family members wish me to be separate from the
> life of the city is matched only by my desire to know that life. The danfo,
> carrier of the masses, is the perfect symbol of our contest. The energies of
> Lagos life – creative, malevolent, ambiguous – converge at the bus stops.
> There is no better place to make an inquiry into what it was I longed for all
> those time I longed for home (35).

The narrator seeks to "make an inquiry" into what he "longed for" while away from

Lagos. The peculiar notion of making an inquiry into one's home - almost as a returning

anthropologist – underscores the narrator's desire to reengage the public space of Lagos.

The same impulse that leads the narrator to ride the danfo influences his decision

to go to the city's outdoor market. This activity requires him to assume a certain physical

and mental posture, which he gladly assumes in order to "act" the part of a typical market

dweller: "My shoulders are dropped back, my face is tensed, my eyes narrowed. It is

difficult to keep from overdoing it at first, hard to recall how I had managed all those

years ago, but I soon find the right register" (37). Through this combination of mimicry

and distance, the narrator locates the contradictions inherent in Lagos in a way that would

be impossible for local residents, who are more fully enveloped in the assumptions and

practices governing life there. This approach to public space activity reproduces the

Lagosian market as a hybridized Thirdspace: in other words, the narrator's near-theatrical

transgression into the market creates an intersubjective encounter that redefines the city

of Lagos and the narrator's own diasporic identity in relation to each another:

> One goes to the market to participate in the world. As with all things that
> concern the world, being in the market requires caution. The market – as
> the essence of the city – is always alive with possibility and danger.

> Strangers encounter each other in the world's infinite variety; vigilance is needed. Everyone is there not merely to buy or sell, but because it is a duty. If you sit in your house, if you refuse to go to market, how would you know of the existence of others? How would you know of your own existence? (57).

The sense of a new, uniquely diasporic culture emerging out of spatial practice finds expression in this passage. As opposed to *Open City*, there is little sense of the narrator's monstrousness in *Every Day is for the Thief* (his indiscretions are minor acts of callousness at worst). The text participates in the same transgressive spatial practice as *Open City*; and yet, in this case, cosmopolitan stances produce the basis for genuinely Thirdspace cultural encounters, as opposed to Julius' universal detachment.

There is no reason for these texts to align ideologically; they are, after all, distinct works of art. However, the repetitions of place, voice, and spaces across Cole's corpus require reading strategies that can address the gaps, or contradictions, that accompany these repetitions. I suggest that these gaps are best approached in terms of the heterogeneous nature of spatial experience in diaspora, and indicative of a public sphere critique that emphasizes a migration-centered "state of transgressivity" over and against state space. This critique articulates the conditions of power governing lived spaces through acts of conscious transgression, which generate uncertain connections to alternative lived spaces connected by histories of movement. In this way, Cole's juxtaposition of contradictory spatial representations becomes a provocation to state space. And like Hemon, Cole's provocation arrives largely through his use of media assemblages. The street photography in *Every Day is for the Thief*, for instance, is crucial to its spatial critique. These photographs capture ephemeral, unexpected encounters in

Lagos and spread, at times, across two pages in the American edition. They assume the

critical, cosmopolitan "outsider" perspective adopted by the text's narrator, but like this

narrator, the photographs assume such a perspective in order to more deeply engage the

nuances of Lagosian social spaces.

Cole's interest in photography arises precisely from this attraction to the

revelations afforded by social space. On his website, Cole describes his photographic

practice as follows: "The great street photographers, from Atget onwards, inspire me.

When I go out shooting, I'm interested in catching or in being caught by the unexpected,

in 'organizing the rectangle' as Sergio Larrain put it" ("Photography"). "The unexpected"

thus assumes an aesthetic priority for Cole, and develops the sense, foregrounded in

Every Day is for the Thief, that diasporic culture involves transgressing spatial boundaries

in order to facilitate more acute observations. The photographs on his website, moreover,

capture moments of encounter in several locations, and thus develop diaspora as, in part,

a method for drawing disparate spaces into communion. Cole is clearly cognizant of how

the photographic medium and its more recent distribution platforms multiply the potential

for such aesthetic, intersubjective encounters. For example, he has written at length about

the deluge of images facilitated by Instagram:

> We are left with optical discriminations and optical pleasures, and it is in
> this private space that the work regains its aura…It will be a headache for
> curators in the future, but it's a pleasure for the pure lover of the image:
> while lying in bed in the morning, you can see the latest work from a
> photographer you find interesting. The image comes to you ("Teju Cole"
> 2012).

Note the recurring dialectic between public space and private aesthetics; Cole's interest in

this dialectic is apparent, even if his feelings about the extremities of such dialectic poles

are, as seen in the character of Julius, ambivalent. In any event, it is clear that Cole views

spatial transgression as a vital aesthetic and political action.

Cole's interest in the distribution of spatial images ties directly into his use of

Twitter, which reveals the political dimensions of his diasporic spatial practice. While

several of Cole's Twitter projects speak to the concerns of this chapter,[7] I will focus on

his essay on immigration, "A Piece of the Wall." Cole wrote the essay in a traditional

format before revising it to suit the platform. He recounts this effort as follows:

> …the next challenge was technical: opening 12 email accounts to allow
> me to open 12 Twitter accounts, and then converting the direct speech in
> the essay into this form…and massaging the text to make those
> conversational flows work. And then finding appropriate avatars for all the
> speakers, either photographs of them I took, or symbols, logos, or official
> crests connected to their work. It took time. It was a bit of world-building,
> in a way, though I do want to emphasize that this piece is fact-checked and
> nonfiction. ("Author" 2014)

What Cole describes as a purely technical challenge represents a significant innovation in

essay writing that employs new platforms to convey the ethics of "world-building" across

spatial sites. This innovation derives from the public nature of Twitter as a medium: its

multiple character profiles and back-and-forth reply structure lend the piece the

appearance of public debate (see figure 14). In addition, it allows Cole's followers to

interact with these characters, and thereby participate in the kind of transgressive "world-

building" that "A Piece of the Wall" seeks to promote.

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[7] In particular, the project known as "Small Fates," which accompanied the composition of his purported
next project, a non-fiction narrative of life in Lagos.

The narrator begins with an effective piece of defamiliarization, as he describes the sound of advancing "bells" in terms of the Christmas holiday, only to reveal that the sound emanates from the chains binding together seventy men. This realization provokes
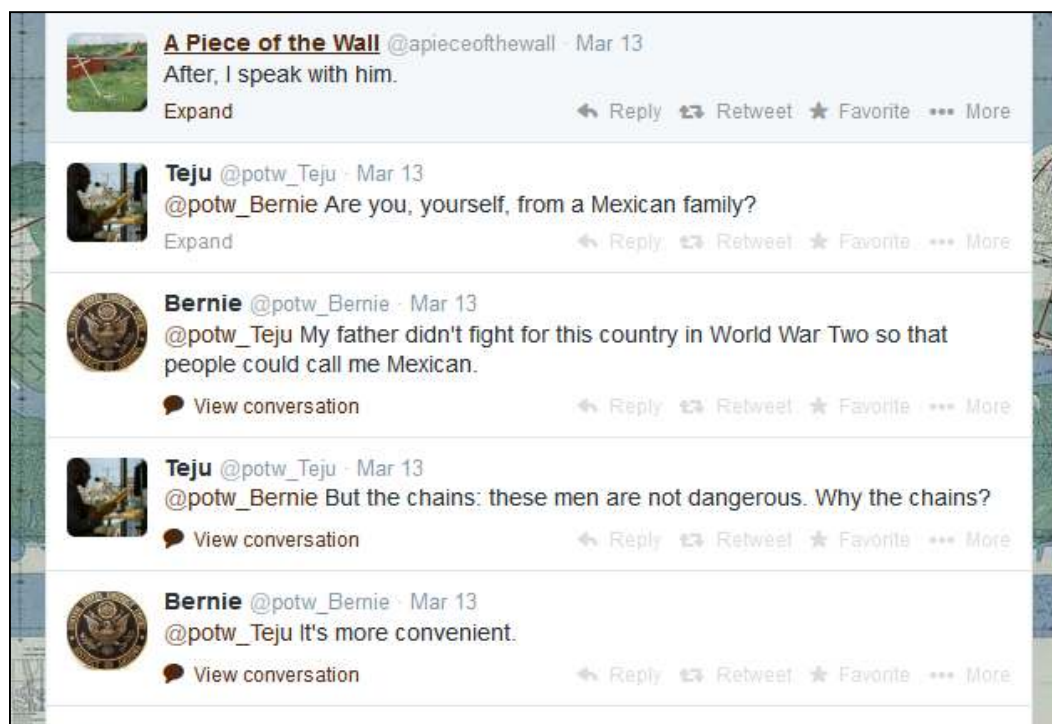
Figure 14. Cole, Teju. *A Piece of the Wall*. Teju Cole Twitter Feed. Web. 3 March 2015.

a reflective comment: "What you think is true of the country in which you have arrived is often true only of where in it you are" ("A Piece") This comment speaks to the heterogeneity of national space, and evokes Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an "imagined community." However, while Anderson saw this community as concomitant with the rise of "print capitalism," Cole's use of Twitter suggests that other media might produce different models of community: it presents an imperative, then, to imagine other spatial experiences elided by the abstractions of state space. To this end, the narrator recounts his highly localized understanding of American politics based on the few sites of

his lived experience: "These places became my America, and their landscapes and way of life became natural to me" ("A Piece"). These "landscapes" and their "way of life" are contrasted with the imagined cohesion of vast tracts of land and culture into a homogeneous nation-state: "Other Americas — Salt Lake City, Anchorage, Honolulu — I knew by name only, and considered part of my America only through the imagination" ("A Piece").

The narrator suggests that stepping into, or transgressing upon, one of these "Other Americas" requires a reevaluation of both the spatial "part" in question and the assembled "whole" of the country: "If I traveled to one of these distant Americas, I had to reimagine them. I only slowly understood how I was connected to life there" ("A Piece"). This impetus to "reimagine" space directs readers' attention to the ground-level realities of such "distant Americas." For instance, the narrator describes the plight of the Tohono O'odham people, whose land "preceded Mexico or the United States" and stretches across the current border: "And the border is incessantly crossed, by various people for various reasons, a matter of commerce, culture, law, and unhappiness" ("A Piece"). The cross-border stream of these populations recasts diasporic migration as transgressive by virtue of its opposition to the border-apparatus of the state. To communicate the material reality of this border-apparatus, "A Piece of the Wall" also contains several images in its feed. One image accompanies the essay's brief description of the small town of Nogales, Arizona, which is separated from another small town of Nogales, Sonora, by an eighteen-

foot wall (see figure 15). The image, however, contains no identifying information — it

could show either side of the wall. It thus presents an important counterpoint to the lived

realities on either side of the wall, leading viewers to focus on the space itself, and

contemplate the violence implied and imposed by such a structure. The narrator then

discusses the winding course of the wall, and the dangerous lengths individuals will go to

circumvent it. "Teju" interviews another volunteer, who describes the situation as a "race

war" ("A Piece"). Her comment is followed by an image of a man kneeling in front of the

Figure 15. Cole, Teju. *A Piece of the Wall*. Teju Cole Twitter Feed. Web. 3 March 2015

wall, while a woman takes a picture in the background. Again, it is unclear on which side

of the wall the photograph is taken. This uncertain perspective forces viewers to question

their interpretation of the characters populating the scene in relation to the facts presented throughout the essay as a whole.

Later in the essay, Teju interviews Roberto Bedoya, who runs the city's Arts Council. Roberto tweets the following messages in succession, which provide extremely important insights into the nature of this essay's spatial intervention:

> "@potw_Teju There are three ways of making a space."
> "@potw_Teju Through systems, through arguments, and through poetics"
> ("A Piece")

These three ways of "making a space," while voiced by another character, succinctly encapsulate the relationship between theory, aesthetics, and politics developed by Cole's media assemblages. Poetics, in this case, are not an alternate realm of discourse. Instead, they form one end of a trialectic approach to spatial representation fully evident in the multimedia components of Cole's Twitter essay. His use of the platform to stage multiple arguments grounded in the border space constitutes a form of spatial poetics that allow for the reimagining of spaces based on the representation of local spatial practice.

Roberto and Teju visit a group of artists called "Culture Strike." Their group travels to the crossing-point of Sasabe, where American border officers have set up targets for shooting practice. The group presents their passports and cross the border from Sasabe into Mexican community of El Sasabe. Once in El Sasabe, they visit a bungalow where "Grupos Beta," the Mexican government's near-equivalent of America's border patrol, is giving a presentation. Grupos Beta is federally funded, but the narrator notes that their mission is to *help* people migrate, in attempt to avoid adding further "red dots:" "In the office is a large map of the border and the Sonoran Desert. One red dot for each

death, the officer says." This map represents the consequences of spatial abstraction via abstract cartographic representation. It is immediately followed by a description of the target practice initiated by the border guards, which is juxtaposed with images of white crosses. These crosses are tilted at forty-five degree angles, and planted on the Mexican side of the border, presenting a powerful ethical counterpoint to the map witnessed earlier. This counterpoint works against the abstraction of state space by developing the ground-level effects of interactions between systems, arguments and poetics.

The essay concludes with some comments by the narrator, who says, "My understanding of American experience has mostly been from the point of view of a recent African immigrant" ("A Piece"). In the next tweet, he states, "I tried to understand the interconnected networks of trade and atrocities that formed the histories of the cities I've known and visited" ("A Piece"). Cole's essay thus imaginatively recreates space as an empathetic political project. Cosmopolitanism, for Cole, entails understanding the specificity of spaces, as opposed to their generalization; the ground-level reportage on Arizona's border spaces builds imaginative attachments by representing how spaces are "made" by material practice, and transfigured by poetic engagement.

Conclusion

And yet, the empathetic politics of "A Piece of the Wall" must be read alongside the isolating spatial practice of *Open City*. While separated by medium (print for *Open City*, Twitter for "A Piece of the Wall") and outcome (amoral isolationism in *Open City*, imaginative communion in "A Piece of the Wall"), the mutual concern with space in these works requires reading methods that can hold their contradictions together within a

shared interpretive framework. I contend that a "media assemblage" orientation is best suited to this task. Such an orientation accommodates the diversity of spatial representations in diasporic culture, while also suggesting how this diversity coheres within an overall critique of state space. This critique relies on media circulation to develop an assemblage approach to diasporic public spheres, which employ media circulation to expand the spatial imagination of public sphere theory. Elaine Campbell hints toward such an expansion when she describes public memorialization in terms of assemblage practices. She views the resulting public sphere as "a space of connectivity brought into being through a contingent and heterogeneous assemblage of discursive, visual and performative practices" ("Public Sphere as Assemblage" 526). This chapter has argued in favor of reading the novels, photographs, Twitter feeds, and websites of Hemon and Cole as a similarly "contingent" and "heterogeneous" assemblages; their spatial representations, however, cohere when understood as a project to reintroduce space as an object of analysis in public sphere theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC SPEECH: READING THE LANGUAGE OF MEDIA IN MICHAEL

CHABON AND JUNOT DÍAZ

Early in Michael Chabon's 2007 alternate-history novel *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, the narrator describes a children's television show beamed from America to a temporary Jewish settlement established in Sitka, Alaska. The program depicts "the adventures of a pair of children with Jewish names who look like they might be part Indian and have no visible parents" (38). The children possess a "magical dragon scale" that transports them to another, enchanted realm "of rainbow idiocy"; eventually, they depart to this realm entirely, leaving behind earthly bodies "each with a bullet in the back of the head" (38). This imported representation of multiracial Jewish orphans is made more inscrutable by the fact that "Like 90 percent of the television [Sitkan Jews] watch, it comes from the south and is shown dubbed into Yiddish" (38). With the droll cynicism characterizing the noir genre from which the novel draws so heavily, Chabon's protagonist Meyer Landsman glosses the show's juxtaposition of lunatic fantasy and hard-boiled reality as follows: "Maybe, Landsman thinks, something gets lost in the translation" (39). The idea that something is "lost" in translation clearly refers to signal noise resulting from the program's English-to-Yiddish dubbing. However, Landsman's reading also involves the translation, or mistranslation, of an American cultural-industrial

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product that seeks to frame, from a distance, the impending and painfully familiar dispersal of Alaska's Jewish population.

This passage draws together the three related concerns of this chapter: multilingualism, mass media, and the idiosyncratic reception theories characterizing diasporic public spheres. In the following pages, I demonstrate that novels by Michael Chabon and Junot Díaz draw parallels between multilingual "code switching" and a broad spectrum of transnational reading practices. Research to date has not adequately treated the relationship between multilingualism and popular culture in these texts. To fill this gap, I argue that what might appear to be distinct formal characteristics are in fact related aspects of the same project. In this project, Chabon and Díaz understand diaspora an interpretive practice comprised of "sociocultural code switching," as opposed to a nostalgic land-claim. More specifically, these authors draw connections between immediate speech acts and more obviously mediated forms of communication, whose influence grows in tandem with the distances characterizing diaspora. The model of code switching employed by Chabon and Díaz thus reacts to the power dynamics embedded in the transnational co-presence of multiple languages, cultural registers, images, and texts. Ultimately, I demonstrate that these authors' sociocultural code switching constitutes a multivalent, media-savvy diaspora literacy that aims to reformulate the reception-end of public sphere theory.

First, I describe the problems multilingualism poses for normative, state-based public sphere models, and detail trends in linguistics that respond to similar concerns. I then argue that these trends allow us to conceive a mode of sociocultural code switching

that encompasses both multilingual and multimedia communications. To this end, I explore how works by Chabon and Díaz employ sociocultural code switching to develop "diaspora literacy" in the public sphere. This literacy positions diaspora as a specific countersphere, or reading community, built around interpretive practices attuned to migratory media. Such practices respond in particular to the supposed homogeneity characterizing popular culture in culture-industry discourses. To this end, I claim that the diaspora literacy promoted by these authors understands diasporic public spheres as highly politicized "convergence cultures," which reframe the relationship between mass media and public reception practices.

Diaspora Literacy and Sociocultural Code Switching

Public sphere theories are first and foremost models of communication. In most cases, they respond to a tradition, inaugurated by Habermas, which seeks to understand and actuate the ideal speaking conditions under which genuine popular opinion might flourish in democratic societies.[1] These conditions apply to a wide range of communicative acts including (but by no means limited to) speech and writing. In all cases, however, communications falling under the banner of "public speech" assume a typological specificity that distinguishes them from other speech acts by virtue of intent, effect, and/or circulatory patterns.[2] Such communications are considered unique in that they can disclose the collective interests of citizens, and hold state power accountable to

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[1] Communication theories are, however, at the core of prior public sphere inquiries, particularly in the distinctions between "public" "social" and "private" employed by Hannah Arendt (1958), and in the "indirect consequences" discussed by John Dewey (1928).

[2] This is precisely the argument advanced by Michael Warner, whose work notes the unique dissemination patterns characterizing public sphere communications.

these interests. Public speech is thus a reflexive form of address; it interpellates potential discussants into a self-generative cycle of consensus building that, while inarguably politicized, is technically distinct from the institutions of the state.

It is crucial to note, however, that in Habermasian models, the "outside" location of the public sphere (vis-à-vis the market and government) is also always-already "inside" the state. This outside/inside paradox conceals the extent to which the apparent structural autonomy of public speech acts is at the same time underwritten by inherited assumptions regarding the linguistic and cultural homogeneity of the nation-state. This underwriting is especially evident in the extent to which later public sphere theorists like Alvin Gouldner and Richard Sennett inherit an idealized model of transparent speech from Habermas. In my usage, "transparent speech" refers to the fact that, for these theorists, speech in the public sphere is by definition pre-shorn of private interests. As a result, public sphere communications are at least theoretically transparent in their motivation to discern and advance the collective good. Taking this motivation for granted, public sphere theorists often strive to define the correct voicing for public and private interests, while rarely addressing the issue of basic intelligibility. In other words, they assume that once public and private concerns are separated, public speech becomes comprehensible solely and tautologically on the basis of its public orientation.

This chapter contends that such a tautology results from the assumption of monolingualism and, by extension, monoculturalism in the public sphere. Such premises, I argue, are an outgrowth of nation-state paradigms that project a public image of internal demographic and ideological coherence. As I will demonstrate, this image operates in

several dimensions, but first and foremost, it manifests in language use. By limiting the linguistic resources available to public sphere discussants to a national language, nation-state models frame public discourse and its ensuing political demands within their own governing conditions of possibility. Many theories of the public sphere ask whether the semantic content of speech acts are insufficiently generalized and thus not "fair game" for public discourse. However, in debates about where, when, and how private and public interests diverge, the basic legibility of such communication has often been overlooked. This results from the public sphere's inheritance of state-based communication frameworks that presume a single, national language voicing a single, national culture.

Nancy Fraser identifies such frameworks in Habermas' inaugural theory of the public sphere: "Tacitly presupposing a single shared linguistic medium of public communication, Habermas effectively assumed that public debate was conducted in a national language" ("Transnationalizing" 12). Building from this point, she notes how the implied association of public spheres and national languages troubles the public sphere's ability to produce a sufficiently inclusive civil counterweight to state power, particularly in the case of transnational populations holding tenuous ties with several states. Furthermore, Fraser notes power imbalances in the use of vernacular, national, and state languages, even when such distinctions are not codified in law. She attempts to square these imbalances with the communicative egalitarianism associated with public discourse, and questions why public sphere theory has failed to confront the population flows characterizing contemporary globalization. Such flows, she contends, should

refocus critical attention on the always-already multilingual nature of the state, in addition to the increasing spread of multilingual communities across several states:

> Consider, too, the presupposition of a single national language, which was supposed to consitute the linguistic medium of public-sphere communication. As a result of the population mixing already noted, national languages do not map onto states. The problem is not simply that official state languages were consolidated at the expense of local and regional dialects, although they were. It is also that existing states are de facto multilingual, while language groups are territorially dispersed, and many more speakers are multilingual ("Transnationalizing" 24).

For Fraser, these observations indicate that public sphere theory is underequipped to address its main contemporary task, which is to theorize (and ideally, in a critical-theoretical mode, to actuate) transnational civil societies that represent geographically diffuse communities against global capitalism and more recent, related forms of empire. The territorial dispersal noted by Fraser clearly applies to diasporic populations; further, the linguistic variety evinced by such populations both within and across states exists in direct opposition to the "presupposition of a single national language" in public sphere theory. Fraser sees monolingual speech as a critical flaw in state-based public spheres, which cannot accommodate the reality of rhizomatic, global linguistic cartographies, and cannot, by extension, maintain the pretense of inclusiveness. She describes her concerns on these points as follows:

> Insofar as Westphalian-national-based public-spheres are monolingual, how can they constitute an inclusive communications community of all those affected? Conversely, insofar as public spheres correspond to linguistic communities that straddle political boundaries and do not correspond to any citizenry, how can they mobilize public opinion as a political force?" ("Transnationalizing" 25).

In essence, Fraser identifies a double bind in which monolingual states will never appreciably accommodate their internally diverse linguistic communities, while at the same time, these communities are unlikely to hold any significant influence over such states, on account of their de-centered distribution. As a result, "Westphalian-national-based public-spheres" not only fail to represent minority languages within individual states; they also reinforce the isolation and resultant disempowerment of scattered transnational linguistic communities.

The task of "transnationalizing" public sphere theory, in Fraser's terms, must confront the biases built into public sphere communication. The "contact zones"[3] created by diasporic populations inevitably bring different speaking conditions into the fold of public discourse. They demand new ways of conceptualizing public speech acts that operate in several registers, not all of which will explicitly harmonize. Diasporic populations challenge the normative basis of a single "transparent" language in the public sphere. Diasporic public spheres therefore require "readers" who are equipped to navigate the many languages circulating in multi-state vernacular marketplaces. Such readers must "code switch" between different languages operating simultaneously. Code switching is therefore the primary mechanism driving the diaspora literacy developed in this chapter.

In linguistics, the concept of code switching[4] arose in the early 1970s as a response to the structuralism associated with Ferdinand de Saussure. While useful and

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[3] "Contact zones" signifies spaces (metaphorical and literal) that facilitate certain types of discursive encounter, as famously developed by Mary Louise Pratt (1991).

[4] The practice has several spellings including "code-switching" and "codeswitching." I have decided to adopt the logic of Chad Nilep (2006) and use the spelling "code switching." However, I preserve the spelling used by other scholars when directly quoting them.

certainly influential, structuralist methods proved unable to explain the dynamics

involved when speakers alternate between two or more languages in conversation. Such

alternations were consequently viewed as either an illogical quirk or, more typically, a

linguistic deficiency resulting from imperfect second language acquisition. Code

switching departed from such "native speaker" paradigms; it understood the alternation

of languages, dialects and cultural registers as a normative practice (Debosse 1992) and

in this sense, undermined the idea of a monolingual, monocultural "native speaker."

While several studies set the stage for explicit research on code switching,[5] the

phenomenon first emerged in a landmark 1972 study by Jan-Petter Blom and John

Gumperz. Since that study, researchers have emended and expanded the work of Blom

and Gumperz, and code switching has assumed more specific contours. To this end, Chad

Nilep (2006) defines code switching as follows:

> Code switching is defined as the practice of selecting or altering linguistic
> elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction. This contextualization
> may relate to local discourse practices, such as turn selection or various
> forms of bracketing, or it may make relevant information beyond the
> current exchange, including knowledge of a society and diverse identities
> ("'Code Switching' in Sociocultural Linguistics" 1).

In Nilep's definition, code switching is the practice of "selecting or altering linguistic

elements" in order to "contextualize talk in interaction." This implies a significant

amount of agency for both speakers and listeners, whose negotiated code usage

continually adjusts the boundaries of any discursive encounter. Furthermore, codes may

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[5] Studies leading to the development of 'code switching' as an explicit object of analysis include: George
Barker (1947), Uriel Weinreich (1953), Charles Ferguson (1959), and Joshua Fishman (1967). In addition,
Erving Goffman (1979) developed the complementary concept of "footing" to describe the multiple
positions speakers take in interaction.

stretch from "local discourse practices" to "knowledge of a society and diverse identities." Nilep's definition therefore leaves significant room to understand "exchange(s)" in extra-linguistic terms. And in this sense, Nilep positions code switching within a specific subsection of linguistics called "sociocultural linguistics."

Sociocultural linguistics concerns more *why* code switching occurs in specific contexts;[6] it theorizes code switching as an interactive, language-based negotiation of power differentials. Jane Hill, for example, thus calls for more "detailed attention to the ways that speakers are able to draw on larger systems of power in establishing their claims to linguistic resources and their rights to remodel both [the] structure and meaning of these" ("Styling Locally Styling Globally" 542).[7] Hill describes how the discipline challenges the discrete "field site" as a unit of analysis, on the grounds that such sites operate from modernist assumptions about human organization that culminate in the nation-state.[8] As a discipline that addresses the "larger systems of power" informing

[6] Code switching research initially dovetailed with the onset of "sociolinguistics" in the 1970s, which drew on anthropology, linguistics, and literary analysis to address the limitations of strictly structuralist analyses of substitution or syntax (Tracey and Morrow 2006)). Over time, sociolinguistics became increasingly associated with quantitative methods that could not address the original question of why and when code switching occurs. Sociocultural linguistics developed to fulfill the original promise of sociolinguistics. Nilep describes the discipline as "an emerging…approach to linguistics that looks beyond formal interests, to the social and cultural functions and meanings of language use" (2). For information on continuing overlap between the two sub-disciplines, see: Mary Bucholz and Kira Hall's article "All of the Above: New Coalitions in Sociocultural Linguistic" (2008).

[7] In addition, writing with David Coombs, Hill notes that "language usage plays a pivotal role in the expression of structured inequality. In such systems, a dominant language can spread into a vernacular because vernacular speakers are exploiting it as a source of symbolic material for the management of their oppressed status" (224). The authors argue that the reappropriation of such "symbolic material" results in situation wherein "transvaluation and remodelling can heighten the ambiguity of symbolic materials by ambiguously invoking several norms at once" ("Vernacular Remodeling" 226). Such ambiguous invocations, and the political ambivalences they denote, are critical to the diaspora literacy developed in this chapter.

[8] In the same article, Hill herself makes the connection between such understandings of the discrete "field site," and the ideologies underlying broader bodies of social organization including the nation-state:

communication and analyzes the expansion of such communications beyond bordered "field sites," sociocultural linguistics strongly resonates with diaspora studies. And in fact, several authors have examined code switching in diasporic and "ethnic" [9] literature, albeit to different ends. Their analyses share a concern for how code switching proliferates multiple meanings in interaction, while diverging on the consequences for diasporic identity. Mary Bucholz and Kira Hall "argue for the analytic value of approaching identity as a relational and sociocultural phenomenon that emerges and circulates in local discourse contexts of interaction rather than as a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories" (586). In this case, code switching draws attention to the semiotic fluidity that destabilizes diasporic bonds. Alternatively, Lars Hinrichs sees code switching as a form of semiotic action that "define(s) a common cultural identity in the face of displacement and alterity within a surrounding mainstream community" (2). In this reading, code switching consolidates diasporic identity as an oppositional political practice.

I see no reason to adopt either perspective exclusively; the actor-orientated nature of code switching in sociocultural linguistics means that the practice can either deconstruct or mobilize identity politics, depending on the context. I am more interested in how diasporic texts build on trends in sociocultural linguistics to recalibrate code switching as an engagement with public sphere theory. Chabon and Díaz effect this

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"However, what is more likely is that analytic and theoretical units like 'field site' and 'speech community' are artifacts of a particular kind of consciousness, heavily imbricated with wider modernist understandings about human organization, that saw this as a system of relatively bounded cells in a complex hierarchy between local (entities like the 'tribe') and the global (entities like 'world systems)" (544).

[9] For a study of code-switching in U.S. "ethnic" literature, see Holly Martin's article "Code-Switching in US Ethnic Literature Through Multiple Perspectives Presented Through Multiple Languages." (2005).

recalibration by employing textual and paratextual devices that draw attention to what Hill calls the "larger systems of power" embedded in the flow of mediated codes across compromised field sites. Only some of these codes are purely related to multilingualism. In response, I employ the term "sociocultural code switching" to describe the vernacular diversity of public sphere communications in transnational contexts, where "vernacular" refers not only to local speech contexts, but also to local media contexts. Sociocultural code switching therefore preserves the theoretical apparatus developed around multilingualism by sociocultural linguistics, but also widens the field of concern to include the many "codes" that accompany the inscription, circulation, and reception of cultural texts in and across various media. Chabon and Díaz, I argue, widen the reach of code switching to include the navigation of cultural registers; diaspora literacy thus expands the "codes" in play to include not only languages, but other forms of communication as well, including the channels of mediation that direct the provenance and usage of such communications.

Sociocultural code switching thus describes both multivalent messages and the decoding/reception practices that arise in response to the compressed complexity of such messages.[10] In this chapter, I focus primarily on the latter practice (reception), in order to describe how diaspora literacy responds to the interpretive mandates of any conceivable transnational public sphere. In my usage, diaspora literacy concerns the ways diasporic reading publics recalibrate the relationship between majority and minority languages. In

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[10] As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Hall's formulation of media theory in terms of temporary sites of "encoding" and "decoding" maps almost exactly onto his work on diaspora.

this respect, I build on prior uses of "diaspora literacy,"[11] while also reorienting the term toward overall media literacy. The term originates with Vèvè Clark, who argues that diaspora literacy entails a "marasa consciousness," or anti-binary reading practice capable of balancing intertextual references between different diasporic sites. Drawing on Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Clark argues that diaspora literacy "defines the reader's ability to comprehend the literatures of Africa, Afro-America, and the Caribbean from an informed indigenous perspective. The field is multicultural and multilingual, encompassing writing in European and ethnic languages" (11).[12] I follow Clark in emphasizing the layered nature of diasporic cultural texts and the need for similarly layered reading practices. However, I depart from her emphasis on an "informed indigenous perspective," and instead foreground the diversiform media literacies operating in diasporic public spheres. In particular, my usage describes how diasporic reading publics model a multidirectional relationship between mass media and specialized reading communities.

To this end, my model of diaspora literacy highlights the degree to which Chabon and Díaz understand diaspora as a "convergence culture," in the words of Henry Jenkins.

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[11] Sylvia Wynter (1992) calls this form of literacy a "deciphering practice," while Joyce Elaine King (2006) explains how diaspora literacy describes black struggles for universal "self-knowing" and collective identity.

[12] Clark also briefly approaches these issues from a book-historical perspective which broaches the circulation of texts in translation in ways that prove extremely valuable to my work in this chapter: "The problematic area of reader identification remains a central issue for consumers of transnational texts. Concerns expressed by the producers of indigenous texts within the multilingual Caribbean assume a different configuration. Reader identification recedes in its theoretical relevance when bilingualism and illiteracy within national boundaries subvert the establishment of a coherent, native reading public. When some of the more adventurous authors render their texts in Creole, they risk not being read in the original by both national and transnational audiences" (15).

Some sociological research has remarked on conceptual similarities between convergence

cultures and diaspora studies; however, I would like to focus more intently on the

interpretive work enacted in such cultures, and relate this work to the transnational and

public sphere-directed forms of literacy endemic to diasporic culture.[13] For Jenkins,

convergence cultures signal a shift in our understanding of the interplay between media

producers and consumers. This shift moves away from the influential "culture industry"

paradigm associated with the Frankfurt School.[14] The culture industry model assumed

that technological and industrial rationalization conspired to distribute mass culture and,

in so doing, created a homogenous and politically passive "mass" populace. Against this

passive promotion of media spectatorship, "convergence" signals new forms of

participatory culture that entail more fluid interplay in the politics of cultural

consumption and production:

> Today, consumption assumes a more public and collective dimension - no
> longer a matter of individual choices and preferences, consumption
> becomes a topic of public discussion and collective deliberation; shared
> interests often lead to shared knowledge, shared vision, and shared actions
> (*Convergence Culture* 223).

Jenkins' emphasis on deliberation and "shared interests" provides a critical link to public

sphere theory focused on the uses of media. Further, Jenkins describes how "what might

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[13] Julian Murphet discusses this interpretive work in terms that valuably complicate perceived incommensurability between the "particular" contexts of a local community and the "universal" reach of mass media: "Analysts of diasporic appropriations of convergence culture often remark upon the implicit tension between the 'particularism' of the community in question, and the 'universal' means of representation through which these particularisms make manifest their identities today" (64).

[14] Jenkins' intervention in previous work on mass culture is announced quite clearly: "If, as some have argued, the emergence of modern mass media spelled the doom for the vital folk culture traditions that thrived in nineteenth-century America, the current moment of media change is reaffirming the right of everyday people to actively contribute to their culture" (*Convergence Culture* 132).

traditionally be understood as media producers and consumers are transformed into participants who are expected to interact with each other according to a new set of rules which none of us fully understands" ("Welcome" 2006). This chapter suggests that diasporic authors are interacting with such new media landscapes in new and sometimes surprising ways. Chabon and Díaz frame diaspora as a participatory "convergence culture" defined by self-conscious interpretive practices. Some may object that equating fandom and diasporic communities troublingly elides the violent exercises of power characterizing involuntary migration; however, as I will demonstrate, Chabon and Díaz draw on such convergence models for highly politicized reading practices that are in no way divorced from the several imperatives presented by such migrations. Instead of writing off the media literacies of these authors as window dressing, we should attend to the resources such literacies offer as a public sphere intervention.

In the case of Chabon, rewriting homeland discourses in the vernacular of detective fiction reveals the moral morass of redemptive homeland discourses. Chabon instead tries to envision diasporic collectives on the basis of emergent popular cultures. In the case of Díaz, reframing dictatorial politics in the vernacular of science fiction and comic books reveals the mythologies of power underwriting state violence, which are balanced against forms of intimacy grown from the re-appropriation of mass-cultural materials. In both cases, the normative discourse associated with public sphere theories becomes less a process of direct signification and more an interlingual and intergeneric exercise in meaning-mobility. Chabon and Díaz enact code-switching scenarios that

require users to navigate between competing claims to discursive normativity; such scenarios, I argue, constitute a media-centered model of "diaspora literacy."

Michael Chabon and Diasporic Popular Culture

After achieving relative success in the realist mode, Michael Chabon's writing took an unexpected turn in the first decade of the 21ˢᵗ century toward explorations of Jewish identity and popular genre forms. He approached the past and present Jewish diaspora through complex combinations of multilingualism, detective fiction, comic books, and serial writing. These diverse genres require readers to switch between multiple linguistic and cultural codes in ways that often amount to a subtle performance of his version of diasporic identity. The political force of this hybrid and mobile diasporic identity thus derives less from the reclamation of land than from an ability to interpret media in transnational contexts. In other words, it derives from the reception practices of diasporic public spheres. This section responds by connecting the trope of multilingualism in Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) to the comic book print culture found in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) and its companion publication "The Origin of The Escapist" (2004).

The Yiddish Policemen's Union originated with a chance encounter between Chabon and the Yiddish language primer *Say it in Yiddish*. This primer, published in 1958, raised the specter of a vanishing language. Until the 20ᵗʰ century, Yiddish was a cosmopolitan language accepted across dispersed Jewish communities. Its marked diminishment in the last century reflects, among other things, unprecedented trauma and the resulting changes to Jewish migration patterns. The primer's sheer atavism

(predicated on its endurance as a print object) prompted Chabon to write an article on

"probably the saddest book I know." In that article, he tries to envision a world-historical

scenario in which the book serves a practical need:

> Public debate, private discourse, joking and lamentation, all are conducted not in a new-old, partly artificial language like Hebrew, a prefabricated skyscraper still under construction, with only the lowermost of its stories as yet inhabited by the generations, but in a tumbledown old palace capable in the smallest of its stones (the word *nu*) of expressing slyness, tenderness, derision, romance, disputation, hopefulness, skepticism, sorrow, a lascivious impulse, or the confirmation of one's worst fears. What does it mean to originate from a place, from a world, from a culture that no longer exists, and from a language that may die in this generation? What phrases would I need to know in order to speak to those millions of unborn phantoms to whom I belong? Just what am I supposed to do with this book? ("Say it in Yiddish" 2002).[15]

The article metaphorically emplaces Modern Hebrew and Yiddish as, respectively, a

"prefabricated skyscraper" and a "tumbledown old palace," and thus invites a broader

commentary on the "home-land" conjunction in Jewish diasporic identity. By welding

together these buildings and languages, Chabon refigures his desired Jewish home as a

vanished communications model that spans public and the private, and expresses, in the

"smallest of its stones," emotions ranging from "slyness" to "the confirmation of one's

worst fears." He privileges the multivalency of the word "nu" and luxuriates in its

coexisting codes. These codes and their switching protocols are, however, lost to history,

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[15] This essay has a tortuous textual history; several versions have been published in several venues. It has been variously titled "Guidebook to a Land of Ghosts" (in *Civilization*, June/July 1997), "The Language of Lost History" (in *Harper's*, October 1997), and "A Yiddish Pale Fire," (on Chabon's website, where it is not currently available in the archives, due to the site's active resistance to 'crawling' by *The Internet Wayback Machine*). The passage above is taken from the following source: Chabon, Michael. "Say it in Yiddish." *Mr. Beller's Neighborhood*. Mr. Beller's Neighborhood. 13 February 2002. Web 20 February 2015.

and indicative of a hermeneutical gap that separates Chabon from the "millions of unborn phantoms to whom (he) belong(s)."

The Yiddish Policemen's Union meditates further on the relationship between the Yiddish language and Jewish diasporic identity. This meditation takes the form of a noir-inflected alternate history in which, following World War II, the United States creates a temporary Jewish homeland in Sitka, Alaska. In this Jewish territory, Yiddish remains the *lingua franca*. Critics have treated the novel as an alternate history (Scanlan 2011), "allohistory" (Rovern 2011) and crime narrative (Richardson 2010). Genre criticism of this kind is essential; Chabon's use of detective fiction tropes, for instance, is merely one instance of his tendency to re-contextual Jewish identity in frameworks ranging from the adventure tale (2008's *Gentlemen of the Road*) to other, more medium-boiled detective stories (2005's *The Final Solution*). Moreover, his use of alternate history and, in his prior novel, historical fiction, represents a major characteristic of diasporic literature, as I will argue in the fifth chapter of this project. However, I am more interested in the way Chabon builds continuity between language use and media literacy. This continuity forms the basis of a diaspora literacy that develops new forms of code switching between diverse, multivalent idioms.[16] The resulting "strange kinship" between idioms is at once generic, tonal, and linguistic, and results in a unique English-Yiddish hybrid made more

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[16] In an interview with Stuart Jeffries, Chabon notes the "strange kinship" that formed the impetus for his novel: "'There was some strange kinship between [Russian writer Isaac] Babel writing in translation and hard-boiled detective fiction, a kinship to Chandler,' he says" ("The Language of Exile" 2007).

rugged and forcefully uneven by the several registers it simultaneously invokes,

juxtaposes, and to a certain degree, combines.[17]

Several critics have discussed the novel's concern with language; indeed, most

scholars at least touch on Chabon's Yiddish slang, but surprisingly few make it their

primary area of focus. One exception, Jeffrey Shandler, has written extensively about

modern treatments of so-called "Yiddishland." Shandler describes how, "far from being

exercises in cultural continuity, [these texts] entail radical transformations of the

language itself and its symbolic value in Jewish life across geographic, temporal and

cultural boundaries" ("Imagining Yiddishland" 144). His article provides a model for

reading the novelistic resuscitation of a dying language against the grain of nostalgia.

However, Shandler uses Chabon's work mainly as a preamble, and does not specifically

discuss *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. Amelia Glaser, on the other hand, treats the use

of Yiddish by Chabon and David Katz as less transformative than reactionary, and even

"dangerously polarizing": "The suggestion that Yiddish, once associated with diaspora

nationalism, might still provide a corrective to Modern Hebrew (Katz) and the State of

Israel (Chabon) not only is dangerously polarizing but also presents the language, and its

social function, as static" ("From Polylingual to Postvernacular" 160).

On the whole, my work aligns with Shandler's assessment of Yiddish as

transformative, as opposed to continuative; Glaser's contention that Chabon reifies

Yiddish as an instrument of political anti-Zionism, while fair in some respects, tends to

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[17] In his own words, juggling such registers proved to be the most difficult part of composing *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*: "For 'Policemen's Union,' [Chabon] adds, 'I felt like I had to invent a whole new language, a dialect. The thing that took the longest for me was finding the right voice'" ("The Frozen Chosen" 2007).

overlook the obviously synthetic nature of Chabon's noir-inflected Yiddish slang. As a result, she has a difficult time reconciling Chabon's use of Yiddish with other languages (not just Hebrew), and with his several registers of Yiddish. Sociocultural code switching develops these nuances in greater detail, and connects linguistic concerns to the novel's other communicative codes, under the umbrella of diaspora literacy. This form of literacy reveals the extent to which Chabon sees diaspora as not only a mobile public sphere, but more specifically, as a form of interpretive work centered on reading mass media across borders.

At the novel's outset, its protagonist Meyer Landsman is living in a state of alcoholic dissolution at the "Hotel Zamenhof." The hotel is named after Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto, which draws readers' attention to the utopian politics embedded in synthetic language forms. Zamenhof believed that an international auxiliary language could help foster world peace. This attempt to facilitate global harmony via language standardization is contrasted with the state of the hotel in Chabon's present-day Sitka: "When the hotel was built fifty years ago, all of its directional signs, labels, notices, and warning were printed on brass plates in Esperanto. Most of them are long gone, victims of neglect, vandalism, or the fire code" (3). The state of the hotel signals the failure of utopian linguistics, and in this sense, Chabon's invocation of Esperanto presents the failure of a universal, monolingual standard for facilitating public sphere communication in diasporic contexts.

Landsman receives notice that there has been a murder in the hotel. While he analyzes the victim's room, smells from the Gulf of Alaska blow in from outside the

building. These smells trigger the narrator to recollect a popular song called "Nokh

Amol," which Landsman and "every other Alaskan Jew of his generation" (4) learned as

children. Esperanto (embedded in the setting) then immediately contrasts with another,

distinct model of language (embedded in the song). The song expresses a sense of

optimism about the future, as the Gulf fills every "Jewish nose" with a "sense of promise,

opportunity [and] the chance to start again" (4). This somatic nostalgia draws out the

same rift between past aspiration and present state as the "Hotel Zamenhof," as the

narrator contrasts the song's utopian prehistory with its contemporary resonance: "'Nokh

Amol' dates from the Polar Bear days, the early forties, and it's supposed to be an

expression of gratitude for another miraculous deliverance: 'Once Again.' Nowadays the

Jews of the Sitka district tend to hear the ironic edge that was there all along" (4). This

bivalency signals, in one voicing, the recovery of a Jewish past rooted in stability,

location, and monocultural preservation. Another analysis, however, suggests an

apocalyptic scenario that entwines beginnings and endings in the Jewish diasporic

imagination. Yiddish is therefore described as a double helix linguistic patterning that

encodes historical allusions in a shared context of several often-contradictory literal

meanings. The irony embedded in these elemental Yiddish units recurs in several

instances; while on a stakeout later in the text, for instance, Landsman parks at a street

whose name conveys a similar ironic edge: "He's parked in a cul-de-sac some developer

laid out, then saddled with the name of Tikvah Street, the Hebrew word denoting hope

and connoting to the Yiddish ear on this grim afternoon at the end of time seventeen

flavors of irony" (198). Thus, in addition to presenting the foreign word and its English

translation, Chabon signals how further codes transmitting the sociocultural backdrop of Yiddish are navigated as a matter of course in diasporic public spheres.

The text develops further linguistic difference in its English narration, and asks readers to code switch within the dominant language in ways that subvert its monolithic status. Apart from its Yiddish slang, Chabon's novel is largely monolingual. However, it defamiliarizes English by breaking the language up into different registers suited to different speaking environments. In this sense, the novel exemplifies code switching while remaining within a single language; monolingualism, one might say, is shown as multilingual with regard to context cues, further dissolving myths of the "native speaker." For instance, "American" becomes a specialized vernacular used primarily for swearing and other expressive idioms: "'What?' [Landsman's partner] Berko says, looking up from the book of orderly surprises. 'Fuck!' This word is spoken in American, Berko's preferred language for swearing and harsh talk" (47). The introduction of the foreign vernacular of American into the text's English narration creates an alienating effect with regards to its own narrative voice, distancing readers from their own relationship to English. Berko is not the only character who employs American in this way; Landsmans's ex-wife Bina, too, uses it to similar ends: "'The fact that one of you used to be my husband, and the other one my, uh, cousin, well, shit.' The last word is spoken in flawless American, as are the next four. 'Know what I'm saying?'" (57). Alternating between American and Yiddish is thus framed as alternation between clarity and ambiguity, as further noted when the newspaper reporter Brennan is asked to abandon his

"Flying Dutchman version" (65) of Yiddish and state his point directly in blunt "American."

English-language readers in particular are thus asked to understand language use as comprised of several sociocultural codes that are switched to communicate semantic content, but also to convey implicit information regarding social differentiation and identification. To this end, 'American' is also an identity marker for Sitka inhabitants from America's east coast. Americans in general are referred to as 'Mexicans' by the Alaskan Jewish population, which puts their origins and their language in a strange position of otherness, and even subordination, to the Jewish settlement in Sitka. The policeman Spiro, however, speaks 'American' to preserve his self-identity *as* American, and to specify his desired homeland, or site of return:

> Like most Mexicans working in the District, Spiro clings fiercely to American. For an East Coast Jew, the District of Sitka constitutes the exile of exiles, Hatzeplatz, the back half acre of nowhere. To speak American for a Jew like Spiro is to keep himself living in the real world, to promise himself that he's going back soon (239).

Consider the multiple codes in play here: Spiro is described as "American," "Mexican," and "East Coast Jew," while his current residence is labeled the "Distict of Sitka," "Hatzeplatz," and the "back half acre of nowhere," in the span of three sentences. This suggests the degree to which Sitka, far from being a universal homeland, represents a space of tenuous affiliation between displaced populations whose identities exceed the space of the Alaskan settlement. The ways in which characters negotiate their relationship to Sitka and indeed to one another thus play out in the realm of sociocultural code switching.

The text asks readers to understand the Jewish presence in Alaska in terms of linguistic interactivity. Far from homogenizing the Jewish population, Sitka's Jewish settlement provides a backdrop against which Chabon explores the fundamental diversity of Jewish culture through linguistic juxtaposition. This juxtaposition revels in the degree to which multiple geopolitical power sources surge through vernacular usage, as evident in the labeling of illegal outposts:

> A small metal sign bolted to the railing of the dock reads BETH TIKKUN RETREAT CENTER in Yiddish and American, and beneath this, in American, PRIVATE PROPERTY. Landsman fixes his gaze on the Yiddish characters. They look out of place and homely in this wild corner of Baranof Island, a gathering of lurching little Yiddish policemen in black suits and fedoras (249).

 The dual meanings of "homely" (as both "unattractive in appearance" and "simple but cozy, as in one's own home") develop the problem of settling in an already-occupied space. The retreat announces its presence and autonomy in this "wild corner" as a private, policed conglomerate of Yiddish and American interests, ultimately controlled by America ("Private Property" being solely in "American").

Yiddish, however, also functions as a counterweight to the novel's more militant depiction of Modern Hebrew, a contrast much in line with Chabon's essay on the travel primer. In this case, readers are asked to switch between the codes of Hebrew as dreamed ideal and as practiced reality. In the first instance, Landsman has a utopian vision of Jewish unity: "They are standing in a desert wind under the date palms, and Landsman is there, in flowing robes that keep out the biblical sun, speaking Hebrew, and they are all friends and brothers together, and the mountains skip like rams, and the hills like little lambs" (263). This fantastical vision is premised on the total alignment of language,

religion, and people; however, readers are asked to listen for its dark undertones when

Landsman hears 'Mexicans' speaking Hebrew:

> It sounded to him like the Hebrew brought over by the Zionists after 1948.
> Those hard desert Jews tried fiercely to hold on to it in their exile but, as
> with the German Jews before them, got overwhelmed by the teeming
> tumult of Yiddish, and by the painful association of their language with
> recent failure and disaster (288).

The conglomeration of American power and "hard desert" Zionists coded into this

version of Hebrew results in a violent Middle Eastern land-grab driven by two territorial

fundamentalisms. The major force behind this land-grab, however, is embodied by the

American operative "Cashdollar's" amateur deployment of Hebrew. His glib usage

suggests that accurately reading the sociocultural "code" of Hebrew requires sensitivity

to how fundamentalist Christian actors employ the "failure and disaster" embedded in the

ancient language for their own eschatological purposes.

The novel's diaspora literacy navigates such complex sociocultural codes, and

suggests a model of Jewish diasporic identity distinct from the zealous reification of

geographical space. That said, the novel doesn't celebrate deterritorialization; Sitka's

Jewish population is described as a "goldfish in a bag, about to be dumped back into the

big black lake of Diaspora" (202), and the impending reversion is portrayed in far from

celebratory terms. And yet, however much Sitka impinges on Landsman's memories, the

novel cautions against the monomaniacal privileging of specific territories, After

Landsman and his ex-wife emotionally reconcile in the novel's denouement, their

relationship to Sitka is redefined in terms of their relationship with one another, which is

rendered detachable from Sitka in an affirmation of diasporic mobility. [18] As a result, to counter the mass circulation of images of the destruction of the Dome on the Rock on satellite television, the novel ends with Landsman and Bina reaching out to the American bureau reporter Brennan, and communicating their story through the same American media channels that placate Sitka with "rainbow idiocy," and abet theocratic neo-colonialism by endlessly rebroadcasting the bombing of Islamic heritage sites.

In this way, Chabon repositions diaspora a mode of popular culture engagement that re-appropriates unlikely channels of public sphere communication. To underscore this point, it is crucial to focus on how mass media is portrayed in the text. This issue has received little critical attention, and none which links it to multilingualism. I argue that the novel's code switching between American, Mexican, English, Yiddish, and Hebrew constitutes a practice that extends to other codes, in addition to their circulatory channels. In this sense, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* grows out of Chabon's earlier work, and not only by virtue of its interest in the Jewish diaspora. Chabon's diaspora literacy creates a mode of translation-by-context in the public sphere that relies on sociocultural code switching between diasporic communities. The end result is a shared syntax of historical displacement and liberatory politics: "[Landsman] was oblivious to the raucous frontier energy of downtown Sitka, the work crews of young Jewesses in their blue head scarves, singing Negro spirituals with Yiddish lyrics that paraphrased Lincoln and Marx" (30). This literacy creates a comparative framework for understanding code switching as an

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[18] Landsman, for example, comes to privilege the kind of unofficial and malleable organization represented by "The Yiddish Policemen's Union," whose card "has a six-point shield in one corner. Its text is printed in Yiddish. It carries no authority or weight, not even with Landsman, a member in good standing for twenty years. 'We're all over the world.'" (232).

interpretive stance in the public sphere. And crucially, this stance extends to readings of transnational media, as when a Canadian documentary about the American blues musician Robert Johnson reflects back to Landsman the situation of Sitka's Alaskan Jews: "Landsman waits out the funeral in his car, studying it through the good Zeiss lenses and running down the car battery with a CBC radio documentary about the blues singer Robert Johnson, whose singing voice sounds as broken and reedy as a Jew saying kaddish in the rain" (198-199). When the novel's multilingualism is reconnected with its concern for mass mediascapes, it becomes clear that diaspora literacy entails reading the sociocultural codes of both multilingual speech acts and media channels. Vernacular and cosmopolitan language registers, in other words, are reinscribed in local and transnational media, which are then, in a circular gesture, taken up by the novel's multilingualism. This circuit appears in the popular song 'Nokh Amol' noted above (4); multilingual pulp and academic books (305); the television show concerning Jewish orphans (38); and Sitka's daily newspapers the *Sitka Tog* and *Blat* (13).

The appearance of Orson Welles' never-made *Heart of Darkness* provides yet another example of the complex politics of mass media encoding and decoding. The film adapts Conrad's arguably anti-colonialist text (later accused of perpetuating colonialist racism) into a revolutionary Hollywood product, and in Chabon's novel, also imposes American cultural imperialism on Sitka. Landsman and Bina saw the film many times while dating, and Landsman has these shared viewings in mind when he decides to trade his silence to the American Cashdollar for continued Sitkan residency. He has coded the mass-market film in a niche fan register, and superimposed an intimate relationship to the

film with his relationship to Bina, and to Sitka itself. Only later, when Bina reveals her dislike of the movie, does the "code" of the film snap back from intimate experience to mass cultural product. At this point, the realities of American sovereignty reemerge to dominate the novel's narrative resolution. Both codes are always-already present in a text like *Heart of Darkness*; diaspora literacy decodes them in order to strategically switch between them. Once Bina expresses her dislike of the film, the novel moves rapidly to read the Jewish situation in Sitka and the Middle East as a long-form neocolonial strategy based on territorial romance. At this moment, on the verge of becoming a love letter to Sitka that repeats narratives of expulsion leading back to Jerusalem, the novel justifies its own alternate history gambit by having Landsman effectively abandon Sitka by feeding a competing narrative back through the channels of American media distribution. This story – the story of *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* – is deeply rooted in Sitka. However, it ultimately asks us to understand Sitka as a code for homeland discourses generally. Once Sitka is established as one move in a longer game of theocratic geopolitics, the novel invites readers to switch between related codes ranging from the obvious (Israel/Palestine) to the less obvious, some of which are yet to be imagined.

The novel's diaspora literacy therefore illuminates the several converging vectors in homeland mythologies, much in the vein of triadic relations theory (Safran 1991). In this case, however, diaspora is less as an autonomous category suspended between two fixed poles, and more an interpretive practice attuned to the power dynamics underlying communications between these poles (and the effects of these communications on the ground, in homeland mythologies). As such, diaspora literacy concerns a range of

sociocultural code switching extending from language to media. Incidentally, Orson Welles also appears in Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, which similarly examines the Jewish diaspora through genre play and mass media, while focusing more explicitly on code switching in mass media. I view these novels as variations on a theme: *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* focuses on linguistics with elements of media studies, while *Kavalier and Clay* focuses on media studies with elements of linguistics. And so, while *Kavalier and Clay*'s interest in language is undeniable,[19] it is by no means as highly developed as in *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. However, when read in tandem, these texts exemplify a diaspora literacy that operates through sociocultural code switching. I will accordingly focus on the former novel's media-minded code switching, and in particular, the narrative and thematic concern for comic books that frames the novel and *The Escapist*. After examining criticism on the novel, I will look at its footnotes and ask how they relate to the body text's interest in comic books. Then, I will relate these concerns back to diaspora literacy, before ending with some comments on *The Escapist*.

Several critics have argued that *Kavalier and Clay* presents comic books as an affirmative form of escapism, particularly in its cautious, oblique references to the Holocaust. Lee Behlman, for example, argues that Chabon's novel ultimately explores the "power and possibilities of a special form of non-realist art: the superhero comic book" (57), and views fantasy as a "deflective resource rather than a reflective one" (62).

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[19] Examples include: Sam's confusion between "Jewish" and "Yiddish" in the New York newspapers (10); Sam's mother's demand that his father "talk American" instead of Yiddish; and finally, several instances of spoken German (194, 216) and French (282) in the novel.

Similarly, Alan Berger contends that the novel treats comic books as both "a serious contribution to American culture and as a means of escaping the grim reality of the Holocaust" (82). Against escapism, I argue that the novel's treatment of comic books presents a model for reading the multiple codes circulating in mass media. In this sense, the novel is better understood as advocating specific kinds of diaspora literacy. Hillary Chute comes nearest to my reading; she understands the text as a historiographic metafiction, but also offers some media critique: "All media, to a certain extent, perform the work of 'framing.' Yet comics, by means of manifesting material frames and the absences between them…offer a distinct and particular poetics" (271). Much in the way of linguistic code switching, these frames and absences require an interpretive oscillation between media and their sociocultural associations, as high and low culture, mass media and fan communities, novels and comics, and image and text must all, as Chute notes, "interact and relate to each other" (271).

The novel's footnotes are an important structuring device, and for this reason, it is surprising how little they are discussed in critical literature, especially when compared to the deluge of commentary on such footnotes in *Oscar Wao*. This may result from the perception that they are not thematically important to *Kavalier and Clay*; however, adopting the frame of diaspora literacy reveals the extent of their relevance for Chabon's understanding of Jewish diasporic identity. Footnotes first appear in the novel's seventh chapter, when the protagonists Joe Kavalier and Samuel Clay (formerly Clayman) are on the cusp of creating "a costumed hero whose power would be that of impossible and perpetual escape" (120). At this point, readers are asked without prompt or explanation to

code switch between the body text and its footnotes. The first footnote provides a gloss on the above quote, and argues that Harry Houdini provided a powerful paradigm for the superhero idea, as well as an "argument in its favor" (120). Readers are given no context to explain this sudden textual splitting; however, by echoing academic research apparatuses, the footnote operates in an authoritative register, and provides sociocultural background for the claims of the body text, providing a cultural studies model of reading a character like *The Escapist*.

This holds true for many subsequent footnotes as well, which appear with surprising frequency throughout the text. Some provide strictly historical information, like a description of how James Love's best friend Gerhardt Frege was killed by Nazis (212); others take a speculative position on definite claims made by characters in the body text, as when Sammy states that a hungry Roy Lichtenstein came into the offices of Pharaoh comics looking for job (489). Most of the footnotes, however, provide a semblance of factual information about the novel's largely imagined world of print culture. Such footnotes include: the resale value of Amazing Midget Radio Comics #1 (169); a glossed *Saturday Evening Post* article, "Fighting Fascism in his Underwear," from August 17, 1940 (202); the complete works of George Deasey turning up at IKEA (225); the description of another comic called *The Freedoms*, also propagandistic (318); the print history of *Weird Worlds of Luna Moth,* including an MLA citation, which was reissued to become a headshop bestseller (319); Sammy's adaptations for *Classics Illustrated*, ranging from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to (possibly) *Vathek* (485); and finally, the allusion to Robert Harvey's *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History*

(545). These footnotes adopt a researcher-academic voice to provide forward-projections of where these materials end up, and how much value they accrue.

As a result, the novel works as a primer for how to read and assess the relative cultural and economic value of comic books. In this sense, *Kavalier and Clay* functions like the Yiddish language primer that inspired *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. In addition to its footnotes, the novel contains internal treatises regarding the mass-cultural origins of comic books (74-78). The novel contextualizes their origins, however, with the minority status of their authors, who were often "immigrants or immigrants' children," who "had dreams but, given their last names and lack of connections, no real chance of succeeding in the lofty world of *Saturday Evening Post* covers and ads for Mazda lightbulbs" (76). Superman, the novel stresses, was created by Jewish artists, in a gloss that folds mass culture and subculture across one another and demands a media consciousness capable of deciphering the alternating frequencies of both codes. In this sense, Chabon's novel defamiliarizes the cultural status of comics, and draws out the fluctuations in their sociocultural coding by describing their relationship to novels, less-than-systematic development, multiethnic provenance, surface-level jingoism, periodical publication context, status as incipient high art form, encapsulation of survivor's guilt, and subversive political agitation (293). Negotiating such contradictions requires diasporic literacies attentive to the heterogeneous codes of "mass" culture.

Chabon's novel also offers a primer for how to read interactions between image and text. The model for this practice is *Citizen Kane*: "It was that *Citizen Kane* represented, more than any other movie Joe had ever seen, the total blending of narration

and image that was – didn't Sammy see it? – the fundamental principle of comic book

storytelling, and the irreducible nut of their partnership" (562). Welles' film showcases

code switching between more abstract formal properties like image and narrative, but

also draws connections between mass cultural texts like cinema and comic books in a

multimodal manner: "It was more, much more, than any movie really needed to be. In

this one crucial regard – its inextricable braiding of image and narrative – *Citizen Kane*
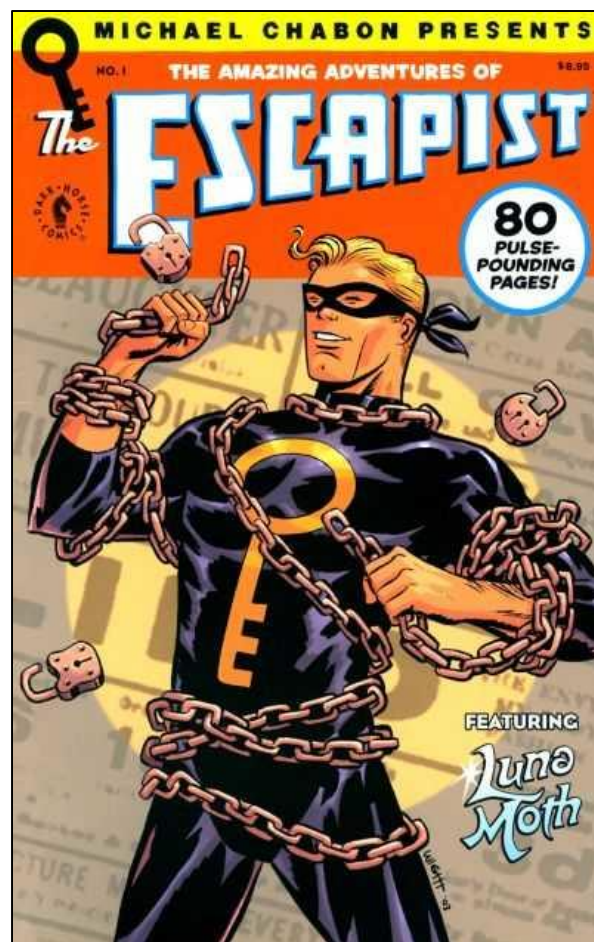
Figure 16. Chabon, Michael. "The Origin of the Escapist." *Virginia Quarterly Review*. 80.2 (2004). Print.

was like a comic book" (362). This extends to the novel's paratextual material, including

the comic books inspired by *The Escapist*, which remediates the novel's content, and

provides a way of reading these comics against the backdrop of Jewish identity created by the *Kavalier and Clay*.

The *Escapist* provides an instance of how to mobilize the novel's reading practices. It requires readers to switch their interpretive languages from the codes expected from a Pulitzer-prize winning realist novel to the fantastical, popular culture intermixture of word and image associated with comic books. Taken at face value, *The Escapist* comics, which are presented in anthologies (much in the line of the novel's retrospective, curatorial perspective on comic book print culture), are relatively straightforward homages to the Golden Age of comic books. The first collection presents

Figure 17. Chabon, Michael. "The Origin of the Escapist." *Virginia Quarterly Review*. 80.2 (2004). Print.

seven stories in 80 pages, two of which were written by Chabon under the pseudonym "Malachi B. Cohen." As seen in figures 16 and 17, the imagery is dynamic, unsubtle

political allegory, which links the fight against Nazism to an imperative for diasporic self-expression in new popular-culture media. These stories ask us to code switch between text and image, and also to read *The Escapist* as another vernacular expression of the diaspora literacy Chabon develops in *Kavalier and Clay*. In a complex temporal fold, the novel works as a primer for rereading comics in their nascent form with the additional benefit of hindsight. Readers are asked to assess the sociocultural significance of a Golden Age comic that never existed for their own time, but also as a print artifact that trains readers to consider how past cultural forms circulate in the public sphere and, over time, influence future popular reading publics..

These examples suggest how the sociocultural code switching associated with diaspora literacy embraces both linguistic and media codes as components of transnational vernaculars. This broader definition of code switching is critical for diasporic populations that are connected (albeit tentatively) by mediated languages, images, and other signals. It is no coincidence that Chabon turns to popular genre at the moment his interest in Jewish identity comes to the fore. This doubled gesture suggests an attempt to rearticulate diasporic as a mode of popular culture: that is, as less a traditional return narrative, and more a set of mass media interpretive practices. Diasporic culture, for Chabon, entails reception practices that challenge the monolithic status of mass media; such practices position a diaspora as a mode of popular culture, which mixes "high" and "low" media forms in the articulation of new identities, and in so doing, requires reading strategies capable of code switching between its several valences.

Media Intimacies in Junot Díaz

"Everyone, he shook his head, misapprehends me" (189) – Oscar Wao, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

In response to a question concerning the Spanish translation of his 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz states, "What's really driving the book is code-switching" ("Words on a Page" 2015). Díaz later gestures toward his bookshelf and bemoans the fact that America has the "lowest rate of translation in any country in the industrialized world." While acknowledging the "signal noise" inherent in any translation, he nevertheless argues that "the more that you actually spend a translated life, the more you realize that it's a minimal charge to be able to engage yourself in another world." In the same interview, Díaz describes an aborted attempt to include "found" comic book art in the novel. He wanted to employ the alluring immediacy of visual art, which he sees as a public art form, as opposed to writing, which is "so personal and so deep and so private." Much like Chabon, then, Díaz sees diaspora literacy as a form of linguistic and media bivalency that responds to reception practices in the public sphere. I argue that through this bivalency, Díaz navigates the "media intimacies" that reshape diasporic identity. This section examines such intimacies through what Henry Jenkins calls the "convergence cultures" invoked by *Wao*, the website *Lit Genius*, and the deluxe 2013 edition of *This is How you Lose Her*.

While many critics have focused on *Wao*'s genre (treating it in particular as a form of historical fantasy),[20] I will develop its generic concerns as they relate to

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[20] Ramón Saldívar places *Wao* in the context of "historical fantasy," a genre that he argues inaugurates "a new stage in the history of the novel by twenty-first century US ethnic writers" (574). Further, he links this genre to what he calls "postrace aesthetics" that highlight the distance between actual and ideal conditions

sociocultural code switching in multilingual and multimedia contexts. In terms of

multilingualism, Elena Marchado Sáez argues that "employing the appealing guise of

polyvocality, *Wao* charms and entices the reader, especially the academic reader, into

becoming complicit with the heteronormative rationale used to police male diasporic

identity" (523-524). Sáez argues that *Wao* employs the nation's "logic of consolidation,

specifically demarcating the borders of a representative diasporic subject in terms of

masculinity and sexuality" (523). She finds that Yunior's inability to represent Oscar's

"queer otherness" therefore results in the text's repression of its own homosocial

imagination, and its corresponding reestablishment of a male, heteronormative version of

diasporic identity. Against this view, I argue that applying diaspora literacy to the novel

helps recover this homosocial imagination. More broadly, however, it helps unpack how

sociocultural code switching creates opportunities for the development of intimate media

vernaculars, which expand the available vocabulary for defining diasporic culture.

The novel trains readers in this kind of media literacy through its multilingual

practices. On this explicit point of multilingualism, Eugenia Casielles-Suárez states,

> I would like to propose, however, that Díaz's use of Spanish…goes
> beyond gratifying the bilingual reader and approaches radical
> bilinguialism, although in a different way, which I will call 'radical
> hybridism'…rather than alternating with English, Spanish becomes part of
> English (477).

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of social justice: "…in these fictions, fantasy compels our attention to the gap or deficit between the ideals
of redemptive liberal democratic national histories concerning inclusiveness, equality, justice, universal
rights, freedom guaranteed by rule of law, and the deeds that have constituted nations and their histories as
public collective fantasies. Accounting for this democratic deficit and locating those who pass
unacknowledged by it is the dynamic of the new postrace novel" (594).

Radical hybridism refers to "the use of spontaneous loan words, and sustained insertion and congruent lexicalization" (485). Importantly, Casielles-Suárez recognizes the foundational connections between this radical hybridism and the text's generic variety:

> Rather, the hybrid nature of the language used seems to be part of the overarching heteroglossic nature of the book, which also encompasses the use of fluid boundaries between conventional dichotomies such as text and footnotes; official history and narrated stories; reality and science fiction; and tragedy and comedy (483).

Casielles-Suárez does not develop these connections further, and does not treat their implications for reading practices. Ed Finn, on the other hand, directly addresses such practices: "This narrative of Díaz the nerd, then, is ultimately a story about reconfiguring reading, the tale of a violent assault on English to carve out a new political space for language" (40). Finn takes the novel's recombination of language and popular culture as "an act of recontextualization, a deft game of what Glissant would call relation, that depends on fostering reading that embraces many cultural and national languages" (40). My notion of diaspora literacy rests on many of the same reading practices that Finn (who also focuses on convergence culture) arrives at via quantitative methods. However, I want to comment more specifically on how these practices operate through the mechanism of code switching, and develop more fully the consequences for *diasporic* culture, which does not constitute the focal point of Finn's article. Finally, I suggest that "media intimacies" provide a pivot between the text's treatment of fan cultures and diasporic sexuality.

Despite *Wao's* chronological shifts and elaborate framing devices, it is a neo-classical diaspora "return" narrative at its core. I describe this narrative as "neo-

classical," because while Oscar's reverse migration to the Dominican "homeland" partly

reconciles him to a masculine Dominican identity (most obviously by fulfilling

heteronormative expectations), the narrative also reframes this masculine identity by

privileging intimacy over intercourse. Oscar's return ends in his murder, following a

moment of gallows-humors linguistic confusion; and yet, his death is also represented as

a heroic self-fashioning that undercuts the surface-level senselessness of his sacrifice

over an underdeveloped (at best) love connection. These ambiguities are built into the

novel's representation of diaspora, and are thus crucial to its model of diaspora literacy.

Wao's conflicted attitude towards the Dominican Republic again signals a critical

ambivalence towards diasporic identities predicated on the reclamation of land. Instead,

the apparatus built around its return narrative works to shift "diaspora" away from a

strictly territorial concept and toward a form of public sphere discourse on the nature of

national affiliation and mediated belonging. This discourse models itself on the complex

practices of cultural consumption typifying fan cultures. Díaz's novel is filled with

private documents and mass media, but the lines between these categories blur in

practice, and result in new opportunities for reading mass culture in terms of private

intimacies. Reading in this fashion, I argue, invokes the nuanced forms of sociocultural

code switching found in the text's depictions of multilingualism.

Early in the novel, Yunior voices the fear, common in Oscar's childhood

community, that the boy will "become the neighborhood parigüayo" (19). This section

makes connections between the text's footnotes, languages and cultural vernaculars

particularly evident. To begin, the footnote to "parigüayo" describes its etymology as a

"corruption of the English neologism 'party watcher'" (19). This linguistic explanation expands to a colonial context, as the origins of the word, according to the narrator, stem from the first American occupation of the Dominican Republic. In this context, being a watcher is a curse, as it refers to American marines who remained in the background at parties while local Dominican men interacted with the women. This positions Oscar outside the hypersexual prowess associated with Dominican male identity throughout the text. Oscar's outsider status is further reinforced when, by the end of the footnote, the term is collapsed into his own bodily figure, such that he becomes an indexical sign for everything uncontained by Dominican masculinity (in the "Dictionary of Dominican Things," Oscar is said to function as a veritable "wood carving" of the term). Following this string of codes, however, "leads [the narrator] to another Watcher" (19), at which point the term assumes yet another meaning, which results not from linguistic corruption, but from the invocation of yet another code, this time drawn from comic culture. "The Watcher" refers to a non-interventionist race of extraterrestrials in the Marvel Comics "universe," and in particular, Uatu, with whom the narrator, as a "Third Worlder" "DarkZoner," states a "certain amount of affinity" in a footnote on page ninety-two. The narrator Yunior, who describes himself as "your Watcher" at least three times in the novel,[21] adopts the multivalency of every code contained in the term, as he explores the cultural hybridity of language, recovers American colonial history in the Dominican Republic, upholds stereotypes of Dominican masculinity, positions Oscar as an outsider

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[21] See pps. 4, 92, and 149.

figure vis-à-vis this masculinity, and refigures his own status as an otherworldly comic

book character.

Crucially, as a narrator, Yunior employs such multi-valent codes to retroactively

reframe his relationship to Oscar, with whom he belatedly constructs a communication

model built on diaspora literacy. The novel is saturated by a "nerd" vernacular shared by

Oscar and Yunior, which eventually constitutes a version of diasporic identity unlinked to

territory. Instead, the diasporic bond between Yunior and Oscar develops through media

intimacies, or the private appropriation of diverse, niche mass media figures to describe

cultural hybridity. To begin, Oscar's ability to code switch between languages extends far

beyond English and Spanish; it also includes so-called artificial languages of fantasy,

which are given a new legitimacy in their adoption by specific sub-communities of fans,

albeit it without explicitly utopian designs. However, such literacy is what initially sets

Oscar apart from American, Dominican, and Dominican-American cultures:

> In these pursuits alone Oscar showed the genius his grandmother insisted
> was part of the family patrimony. Could write in Elvish, could speak
> Chakobsa, could differentiate between a Slan, a Dosai, and a Lensman in
> acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than Stan Lee, and was
> a role-playing game fanatic (21).

And yet, Oscar is not only fluent in geek culture; he is also adept with the multi-syllabic

vocabulary associated with academic achievers: "and he used a lot of huge-sounding nerd

words like *indefatigable* and *ubiquitous* when talking to niggers who would barely

graduate from high school" (22). Oscar's outsider status therefore results not exclusively

from his weight, desperation, or appreciation of "nerd culture," but instead from the gaps

in meaning produced by his employment of a highly privatized language in public speech

contexts. His public speech acts are notably lost on audiences that lack the resources for

the code switching demanded by his multicultural (Dominican, American, "high" culture,

"low" culture) patois. As a result, there is a significant room to argue that the novel's

understanding of diasporic culture has less to do with recapturing authenticated

expressions of Dominican identity, and more to do with reading practices that understand

mass media as a stimulant to new versions of Dominican-ness.

The novel's diaspora literacy is thus defined by its navigation of the ambiguities

resulting from sociocultural code-switching. This is perhaps best exemplified by its dual

usage of fukú and zafa, which function as alternate, competing codes that reframe the

same narrative phenomenon. The text as a whole thus alternates between a fukú (a

reiteration of past curses whose cyclical nature reinforces the traumatic elements of what

Robin Cohen calls "victim" diasporas), and a zafa (a charmed counter-spell, which breaks

cycles of violence by means of a spoken invocation). The dual presence of these codes

requires the same nuanced reception theories incited by the text's knotty return narrative.

To better underscore the code switching involved in the text's fukú/zafa alternations, I

will explore their role as bookends. To begin, the narrator describes fukú as the cause of

JFK's death and the cause of Vietnam: an effect "like Darkseid's Omega Effect, like

Morgoth's bane" (5). The concept is imported stateside and indigenized through a litany

of references. These references and explanations switch between historical referents,

popular culture figures and the dominant meaning of "curse," requiring readers to

exercise forms of code switching that encompass not only Dominican vernaculars,

historical referents, and nerd culture, but other diasporic populations as well. Yunior

describes his solicitation of fukú traditions on a DR1 forum: "And not just from Domos. The Puertorocks want to talk about fufus, and the Haitians have some shit just like it. There are a zillion of these fukú stories" (6). All these "zillion" fukú stories inherit the word's bivalency, which can only be decoded via reading strategies attuned to the dissonances of its hybrid voicing. Yunior's insistence on the need for such code switching practices almost amounts to a provocation at certain points in the novel, as when he demands of the reader, "Zafa or fukú? You tell me." (242) Yunior's demand that readers translate his own narrative into one dominant code is best understood as a rhetorical question, which advocates keeping both codes simultaneously operational in the shared syntax of diaspora literacy. He repeats the question one page later, along with a predictably evasive, and predictably instructive, answer: "So which was it? you ask. An accident, a conspiracy, or a fukú? The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you'll have to decide for yourself. What's certain is that nothing's certain. We are trawling in silences here" (243).

Such silences, the novel suggests, require new strategies for deciphering the mixed codes circulating in diasporic public spheres. In this sense, *Wao*'s diaspora literacy is analogous to the fan cultures associated with Oscar. Such cultures are marked by their outsider status, which is a source of both solace and estrangement from communal norms, as indicated when Yunior describes Oscar's early turn towards fandom: "What is clear is that being a reader/fanboy (for lack of a better term) helped him get through the rough days of his youth, but it also made him stick out in the streets of Paterson even more than he already did" (22). As a result of this outsider status, however, fan cultures also develop

media savvy vernaculars. Due to their ability to incorporate enormous numbers of codes into their semantic domain, these cultures develop new relationships between media consumption and production. These relationships are "new" insofar as they grow out of niche communities devoted to the minority codes expressed in various subcultures formed around mass cultural media, and in this sense, they map onto the trajectory of convergence cultures. The fact that Díaz couches his epic exploration of diasporic Dominican identity within the context of such cultures suggests an attempt not only to reframe diasporic identity within a theory of reception, but also to comment on how reception works through creative re-readings of popular culture.

Such engagements represent diaspora as a mode of communication whose code switching presents an opportunity to redefine the boundaries of a given diasporic culture. Oscar reframes Dominican diasporic identity not only in terms of sociocultural code switching, but also the hybrid, intimate languages produced by this type of code switching. The following passage nicely exemplifies such intimacies and their basis in sociocultural code switching: "Hail, Dog of God, was how he welcomed me my first day in Demarest. Took a week before I figured out what the hell he meant. God. Domini. Dog. Canis. Hail, Dominicanis" (171). Yunior's eventual decoding of this greeting proves emblematic of the growing homosocial bonds between Yunior and Oscar, bonds which are expressed precisely through such interactive code switching, rather than exclusively Dominican slang, which lacks the resources to express the nuances of such bonds. This switching produces the conditions for a diaspora literacy that reinterprets diasporic identity via cultural accumulation and recombination. The first instance of this

arrives when Yunior admits that "[he] liked shit like Akira" (172). The novel itself, and

its calculated ambiguities, arguably results from Yunior's relationship to one of Oscar's

prized possessions: "I find myself at my desk late at night, unable to sleep, flipping

through (of all things) Oscar's dog-eared copy of Watchmen…the original trade" (331).

These bonds ultimately form around their mutual efforts as authors,[22] love of specific

"shit" like japanimation,[23] and exchange of "geeky" materials, as seen when "[Oscar] told

me I could have his books, his games, his movies, his special d10's. He told me he was

happy to have been friends. He signed off: Your Compañero, Oscar Wao" (191). [24]

Yunior also theoretically extends this bond to Lola's daughter. He speculates on the day

when she will show up at his house, at which point he will "take her down to my

basement and open four refrigerators where I store her tio's books, his games,

manuscript, his comic books, his papers…" (330). These materials will ultimately, the

novel suggests, produce new "past publics"[25] when read by Lola's daughter. And her

reading will ideally (though not inevitably) demonstrate a diaspora literacy that

understands *Wao*'s return narrative as a red herring to its real innovation: diaspora, in this

case, constitutes a mode of navigating cultural registers in the public sphere, which opens

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[22] "Not two weeks into my senior year he showed up at my dorm room! To bring over his writings and to ask me about mine!" (194-195).

[23] "You should definitely visit me in Paterson when you have a reprieve. I have a plethora of new Japanimation for your viewing pleasure. Definitely, bro, I said. Definitely" (195).

[24] Oscar's adopted nickname ("Oscar Wao") also constitutes a kind of hybrid identity born from linguistic bivalency.

[25] For a fuller description of this term, see my fifth chapter ("Public History: Archival Interfaces and the Past Publics of Diasporic Literature").

a space for alternatives to the reverberation of traumatic dispersal. Such alternatives are

by no means inevitable; and yet, Yunior finds the language for this surrogate mode of

diasporic affiliation in reception practices whose code-switching creates new, intimate

Figure 18. Díaz, Junot. "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (Excerpt)." *LitGenius*.
Web. 3 March 2015.

vernaculars from mass media materials.

These intimacies are further exemplified in other areas of Díaz's work. His

activity on the website *Lit Genius* demands particular consideration in context with the

footnoting found in *Oscar Wao*. *Lit Genius* is a part of the *Genius* group of websites,

which began with *Rap Genius*, an annotation platform that allowed users to transcribe

and annotate the many inter-textual elements of rap lyrics. *Lit Genius* thus consciously

extends from a rap subculture. By extension, Díaz's decision to employ this platform (as

opposed to other *Wao* fansites[26]), places the novel in direct conversation with such a

subculture.[27] Díaz's entry annotates a footnote taken from page 256 of the novel (see

figure 18). When reading this entry, users are effectively reading footnotes to the novel's

footnotes, which require them to navigate between several voices. Díaz's entry describes

Outer Azua as "our own homegrown sertão," which he glosses as follows:

> Never been to the Northeast of Brazil but I've watched enough Brazilian
> cinema – especially the Cinema Novo stuff - Rocha's Deus e o Diabo na
> Terra do Sol still haunts the shit out of me – to want to extend the sertão
> an Ãzua nod of recognition. In my sureño mind the barrens of Ãzua and
> its profound misery functioned as our very own local island version of that
> Brazilian nationspace ("The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao
> [Excerpt]").

Note how Díaz shifts between Brazilian and Dominican codes to communicate "the

barrens of Ãzua.[28] In addition, he speaks in a more obviously direct and personal voice

than Yunior's "The Watcher" in *Wao*. These are not the only instances of code switching

on *Lit Genius*; later, in the same footnote, Díaz re-describes Outer Azua as follows:

> Outer Azua was the Outlands, the Badlands, the Cursed Earth, the
> Forbidden Zone, the Great Waste, the Plains of Glass, the Burning Lands,
> the Doben-al, it was Salusa Secundus, it was Ceti Alpha Five, it was
> Tatooine ("The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao [Excerpt]").

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[26] For instance, "The Annotated Oscar Wao" (see: http://www.annotated-oscar-wao.com/).

[27] Michael Chabon and Teju Cole have also made annotations on this platform.

[28] In the body text from the novel reprinted on the website, the location is spelled "Azua;" however, in the author's footnotes to this body text, the location is spelled "Ãzua."

Díaz thus associates Azua with seven alternate codes, none of which are particularly

privileged; instead, their irreconcilable bivalency appears paramount. His verified

annotations exist alongside annotations by other website users; together, these

annotations create a collaborative companion to the novel that foregrounds interactive

textual reception and analysis. Díaz's work on *Lit Genius* promotes an intimate fan

community built from the communal code switching invited by both the novel and

paratextual materials like *Lit Genius*.

There is a further paratextual element on display here: the website annotates the

novel's cover. This annotation is written by *Oscar Wao*'s cover artist, Rodrigo Corral.

Corral discusses how he tried to represent the violence of the novel without resorting to

Figure 19. Díaz, Junot. *This is How You Lose Her*. Deluxe Edition. New York, Riverhead
Books: 2013. Print.

sensational illustration. Readers are thus asked to incorporate another code into their

switching repertoire – except this code is clearly visual, and collaborative. A similar

impulse extends to Riverhead's deluxe edition of Díaz's *This is How You Lose Her*

(2013). Yunior also largely functions as the narrator of these stories, and as one might

expect, the work consequently traffics in the same manner of sociocultural code

switching between English and Spanish, and high and low culture. However, I will focus

particularly on the deluxe edition, which adds nine illustrations (one for each story)[29] by

Jaime Hernandez, one of three brothers responsible for the seminal independent comic

series *Love and Rockets*. See figures 19 for a representative illustration; this image again

draws attention to the visual and cultural registers of comic books, as developed in the

previous section on Michael Chabon. The code switching prompted by such illustrations

and the subcultural histories they evoke proves emblematic of the diaspora literacy

promoted by these texts. Moreover the authors, while using different terms, seem acutely

aware of such connections when discussing their collaboration. For example, in an

interview with Leigh Silver, Díaz discusses his decision to seek illustrations for the text:

> I think it creates another channel which the reader has to work with. The
> way that some readers sort of ignore footnotes, some readers will resist
> illustrations because in some ways it goes against what they're imagining.
> And what's really wonderful about illustrated volumes is they are just an
> excuse for the person to think about the work visually (Díaz and
> Hernandez 2013).

In this case, "channels" could easily substitute for "codes," particularly given's use of

that specific metaphor in different interviews. In addition, his argument that illustrations

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[29] "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" and "Otravida, Otravez," "The Pura Principle," "Alma," and "Nilda were originally published in *The New Yorker*; "Invierno" was originally published in *Glimmer Train*; "Flaca" was originally published in *Story*.

work like footnotes supports seeing these images as related aspects of a mode of literacy that views reception as a creative opportunity to create new cultural affiliations based on found materials: "And I do think an illustration is a wonderful channel of information, an opportunity to be creative, a way of thinking about the visual world of the text."

And significantly, this mode of literacy is highly dependent on the sorts of communion around media objects typifying fan culture. This is particularly important when analyzing the cultural codes of a prestigious "deluxe edition" put out by a major publisher like Riverhead, which also attempts to associate itself with the alternative comic subculture represented by *Love and Rockets.* This convergence of communities is not lost on Díaz, who states the following in the same interview: "The funny thing is…I think that my writing will be for many of [Hernandez's] fans something completely new, and probably some of my readers are not familiar with [his work]. It's one of the best parts of collaborations…" My first chapter explored collaboration and its impact on diasporic public spheres in more detail, but for the moment, it is important to reiterate that such collaborations often grow in response to creative acts of sociocultural code switching. Díaz directly solicits such acts; he understands diaspora as in many ways interpretive work that reconciles public culture to private stories. By code switching between these spheres, Díaz creates a diaspora literacy that repositions diaspora as a reception practice that exposes the multidirectional channels linking media production and reception. And in so doing, he creates a paradigm for developing new identity discourses from the private appropriation of mass cultural materials.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored sociocultural code switching in works by Michael

Chabon and Junot Díaz. Such code switching, I have argued, exemplifies a "diaspora

literacy" that refigures the reception practices ofg public sphere theory. In the case of

both authors, this literacy also revises the concept of diaspora, as homeland discourses

are largely abandoned in favor of viewing diaspora as a mode of communication in the

public sphere. Diaspora literacy thus understands transnational forms of the public sphere

as a model of media critique. Such a critique responds to the imperatives of public sphere

multilingualism; in addition, it responds to the distanced realities of diaspora, which

entail communications that are impossible to assess from speaker-to-speaker interactions.

Any attempt to grapple with the question of language in diasporic public spheres must

therefore also address the question of media use more generally, and any engagement

with the question of media must similarly develop an understanding of the multiple codes

embedded in mass media channels and products. As a result, the works of Chabon and

Díaz advance a form of sociocultural code switching that extends beyond language to

include different varying registers of cultural capital and the media circuits and platforms

closely aligned with these registers.

CHAPTER FIVE

PUBLIC HISTORY: ARCHIVAL INTERFACES AND THE PAST PUBLICS OF

DIASPORIC LITERATURE

Despite the influence exerted by Jürgen Habermas' account of the rise and fall of

the bourgeois public sphere, public sphere theories often display a surprisingly limited

historical imagination. They rarely ask, for instance, how publics come to know

themselves in the present, and project themselves into the future, based on their

encounters with the past. Whether these encounters occur through letters, photographs,

newspapers, or less conventional media, this oversight signifies the extent to which "the

public" remains an implicitly national construct, bound not only by categories like space

and speech, but also by the nation-state's manufactured historical time. In response,

diasporic literature explores the archival foundations of public sphere theory, and in so

doing, addresses the "survival" component of the communications circuit structuring this

dissertation. This chapter reads Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* (1993), Julia Alvarez's

In the Name of Salomé (2000), and Colum McCann's *Transatlantic* (2013) as examples

of a media-conscious model of diasporic historiography, which reads archives as

stimulants to new "past publics."

Historiography describes "the writing of history; written history," as distinct from

history as pure event, or documentary record. This distinction arises in response to

the rapprochements between postmodernism and history characterizing works like *Metahistory* (1973), Hayden White's influential study of the narrative structures governing historical discourse. Such works understand "history" and its corresponding truth-claims as an effect of signification, thereby collapsing distinctions between literary and historical writing. Linda Hutcheon has worked along similar lines, describing postmodern literature as a form of "historiographic metafiction," which employs pastiche, irony, and parody to refute "the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between fact and fiction" (93). The historiography associated with White and Hutcheon is far from apolitical, but crucially, works primarily through formalist methodologies.

By contrast, the mass and involuntary nature of diasporic dispersal leaves behind little of the documentary evidence that typically grounds such written histories. Diasporic public spheres thus confront the more basic problem of maintaining historical continuity in the absence of authenticating testimonies. Diasporic literature responds to this problem through an archival practice that is similarly decentered, dispersed, and tentative concerning the origins and uses of historical records. This practice, I argue, constitutes a diasporic mode of historiography. Diasporic historiography operates in the interstices between narrative and archive, and concentrates as much or more on the material properties of archival media as on their signified content. In other words, it concerns not only the narratives structures of "written" history, but also the influence of such structures in "mediated" history more generally. Mediated history, in my usage, concerns history as inscribed, preserved and organized in media that, when designated as archives, constitute the *a priori* grounds for past publics. In diasporic literature, these archives

become material registers of social elision, or corporeal testimonies to the structuring effects of state power.

The authors examined in this chapter promote connections between archival theory and diasporic historiography in several ways: first, they adopt the genre of historical fiction, which comingles real and fictional persons, documents, and events.[1] Far from indulging in nostalgia (Verma; Mannur) their use of the genre models alternative forms of historical imagination that prove politically useful in the present (Riemenschnitter and Madsen). Second, they detail the minute processes by which documents are inscribed, stored, and accessed, and build major plot points around archival documents, archivist characters, and archival collections. Finally, they employ non-linear narrative structures that resonate with archival questions of historical sequence. Taken together, these features result in texts that face uniquely outward, toward extant archival collections. As a result, I suggest these texts are best understood as "archival interfaces," or novel-archive complexes, which unsettle the nationalist timelines defining state archives through their unexpected focus on archival materiality. To this end, the metaphor of "interface" employed in this chapter invokes sociologist Norman Long's theory of the "social interfaces" operant in actor-oriented development paradigms, which finds social and political power imbalances expressed explicitly through technologies of cultural preservation and transmission. By emphasizing the layered continuities that draw together archives and political ideation, these novels

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[1] Their embrace of the genre reflects a broader trend in diasporic literature; from the collage of history and fantasy in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), to the archival simultaneity in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project* (2008), many diasporic texts concern "making" history.

resituate public sphere theory in a context defined by the relationship between media survival and historical visibility.

Archiving Dispersal

This chapter will discuss how the archival theories developed by Cliff, Alvarez, and McCann encourage reading their respective novels as archival interfaces; first, however, I will outline the critical backdrop informing such readings. There are precedents for my focus on transnational time and archival authority: these novels build from the contention, advanced by both Homi Bhabha and James Clifford, that the ruptures associated with diasporic culture invoke non-linear, transnational chronologies. Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, too, pursued the mechanisms and effects of archival processes during the "linguistic turn" of post-structuralism. However, research to date has not adequately addressed the archival theories developed by diasporic culture. To address this gap, I suggest we turn toward archival theorists; in particular, we should emphasize their mutual concern for "archives" as places, practices, and documents.

In her article "Archives as Place," Luciana Duranti argues that Justinian law codifies a complex relationship between location, authority, and memory that associates archives with "a *place* [emphasis added] of preservation under the jurisdiction of a public authority" (243). Duranti notes the development of archival thinking through time, and connects successive archival eras via the enduring process by which documents assume the status of normative law. This transformation requires movement, both spatially and conceptually, into realms of evidence and memory. Spatially, this passage occurs in the movement of documents between courts and repositories; conceptually, it occurs in their

related assumption of testimonial authority. Regarding this liminal passage, Duranti writes: "There must be a space, an in-between space, where this happens, a space bound by two limits, one bordering the documents and the other bordering the evidence: the *archii limes* or 'archival threshold'" (243-244). Associating archival authority with the "juridical authority" of specific places presents obvious challenges for diasporic populations who lack the permanence of land and power of legality underwriting archival sites and their associated testimonial practices. Duranti's notion of a liminal passage, however, highlights the contingent processes by which media become evidentiary archives, and locates an "in-between" space that I suggest diasporic novels seek to locate and exploit.

This space intercedes between the material existence of documentary media, and the narrative authority that coalesces around these media when preserved as "archives." Diasporic historiography revisits Duranti's "in-between" space, and redeploys the materiality of such documents as commentary on the otherwise-lost narratives of diasporic past-publics. Achille Mbembe's "The Power of the Archive and its Limits" locates the same nexus of location, authority, and memory in South Africa, and in this respect, echoes Duranti's definition of archives as "a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state" (19). Again, the significance attributed to archival *places* deserves emphasis: "there cannot therefore be a definition of archives that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there" (19). These places imbue archives with an "inescapable materiality" (19) that engender their socio-political function as an "instituting imaginary," or sanctioned adjudicator of

state power. However, like Duranti, Mbembe notes a crucial paradox in the passage from living documents to testimonial authorities: burying archives within curatorial catalogs, he contends, upholds state power, but also challenges it. On one hand, archival work promises nation-states "the abolition of debt and the possibility of starting fresh" (25) by transforming archives into "talisman(s)": defanged documents made suitable for mass consumption via commoditized memory. On the other hand, however, Mbembe locates agency in the fact that archives cannot be destroyed, as states require their legitimating power, and recognize that their conspicuous absence often speaks louder, and more subversively, than their sanitized presence. In his view, archives retain their auratic power to challenge claims to authority, justice, and representation precisely in their seemingly stable material presence.

Mbembe's emphasis on the subversive undercurrent of archival media's "inescapable materiality" proves crucial to the historiography developed in diasporic literature. To this end, Wendy Walters describes how archives reinforce state chronologies, and argues that diasporic literature seeks to unsettle this reinforcement function:

> Against the well-theorized connection between the archival and the nation-state, diaspora novels require a transnational reading practice that encompasses multiple national archives. This critical practice opens the archive and exposes the nation-state's exclusionary investments in it. Diaspora literature thus unmoors the archive from its stubborn attachment to national narratives ("Archives of the Black Atlantic" 163).

This passage encapsulates the push-pull dynamics existing between diasporic literature, archives, and national narratives. However, building on Waters' work, I suggest that diasporic literature also, by necessity, addresses the very *lack* of archives shadowing

involuntary migration. Paradoxically, such texts accomplish this by returning to the materiality of archives, materiality which is "rewritten" as a record of exclusion. Walters similarly emphasizes the attractive material endurance of archives, which can confirm cultural, political and social heritages: "Yet the archive is also a site of desire and attraction because it promises *access to a material past"* (164). Moreover, invoking Mbembe, she describes the magnetism this materiality holds for diasporic culture: "[the archive] is proof that a life really existed, that something actually happened, an account of which is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that makes it possible" (21). In her inside/outside approach to materiality, Walters raises a crucial question: what happens to other stories, when state archives are the only means available to access material pasts?

My approach emphasizes the extent to which diasporic historiography revises public sphere theory through an idiosyncratic archival imagination. As noted, there are precedents for such an approach; in addition to the aforementioned poststructuralist and postcolonial theorists, digital humanists are presently grappling with similar questions about the politics of archival preservation and presentation. Archival theorists, however, have presented their own often-overlooked contributions to these discussions, contributions which offer significant insight into how and why diasporic texts "interface" with state archives. In particular, they describe alternate ways of reading state archives for insight into archival practices; in this way, such readings preserve the subversive materiality of extant archives, while also gesturing towards alternative archives lost in dispersion. David Greetham for instance, advocates examining archives as a form of

"cultural poetics," in which archives are taken not as intact or representative time capsules, but as "social texts" that obliquely reference "the everything" from which only a "select few shards will be saved" ("'Who's in, Who's Out'" 8). This approach builds on the work of Jerome McGann, and before him, D.F. McKenzie (both of whom are discussed in the second chapter); Greetham, however, expands on their work to develop a fuller poetics of inclusion and exclusion based on the specific sociopolitical function of archives.

Cyndia Clegg moves in a similar direction; she adapts Roland Barthes' distinction between texts and works to unsettle divisions between historians (who work with 'documents') and literature scholars (who work with 'texts').[2] Clegg promotes an "archival poetics" that proves companionate to Greetham's "cultural poetics."[3] For Clegg, reading documents in a literary mode surfaces many submerged agencies in the style, subject, and silences of a given object. "Archival poetics" are therefore an interpretive imperative, which asks readers of archives to listen more intently for such silences. To this end, Clegg argues that archivists "need to read historical documents analogically…we must read each document not only for its contents but its textual strategies…[but also] with a sensitivity to how documents participate in a wider cultural conversation" ("Archival Poetics and the Politics of Literature"127). Greetham and Clegg's materialist poetics therefore combine both literary and archival methodologies,

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[2] Thomas Tanselle also treats this distinction; see: Tanselle, Thomas. "The Editing of Historical Documents." Selected Studies in Bibliography. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979. 454. Print.

[3] Clegg notes that while some scholars have criticized practitioners of "New Historicism" for reading "documents" like "texts," her own archival approach explicitly endorses this practice.

with the aim of marking a liminal space on the very surface of archival documents, a

surface which Duranti sees as emblematic of social inclusion and exclusion.

Such surfaces demand processual readings that can track a given document's

transformation from a vulnerable scrap in the world-at-large, to a permanent record in a

state-supported collection. Clegg's "wider cultural conversation" thus entails a

reevaluation of the document life cycles that disrupt, or more generally support,

sequential national histories. To this end, Brien Brothman argues in favor of effacing the

linear progression of time that creates both literal and metaphoric expiration dates for

certain documents. For Brothman, history amounts to the physical symbolic systems

associated with outdated "life-cycle" and "continuum" approaches to archival practice.

This archive-history axis represents the past as a place of insurmountable difference, as

contextual barriers limit our ability to engage with the past on an even interpretive

playing field. Brothman instead supports a mnemonic turn to the "electronic culture" of

postmodernity, wherein "Archival records…need not become historicized

representations" ("The Past that Archives Keep" 65). When viewed in terms of memory,

then, "archives must articulate cycles of continuity, recurrence, and repetition - to efface

time's linear progression" (65). Brothman's mnemonic turn is thus tied to a perspective

on archives that sees the temporal structure of history as produced in large part by the

media which record and store representations of the past.

Margeret Hedstrom further develops this perspective with her work on "archival

interfaces," which describes how archivists interpose between documentary evidence and

readers, and offers a useful metaphor for the structures and tools that create archives from

raw media and dictate their available uses. Hedstrom explores archival interfaces as "critical nodes in the representation of archives and as a means through which archivists enable, but also constrain, the interpretation of the past" ("Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past" 22). By invoking the language of "interface," Hedstrom positions archives as points of social contact that define real and metaphorical boundaries, but also permit degrees of permeability that create structured interactions between "users," "interfaces," and "archives": "Archivists could help future users understand why certain records survived and others did not by enriching the interface between archives and their users with information about the factors that archivists considered important in appraising, selecting, and describing records" (23). The stylistic hallmarks of diasporic historiography, I argue, actively produce these enriching "factors," and do so in the service of a transnational revision to public sphere theory.

The term "interface" requires more explanation to fully communicate the nature of this public sphere revision. This arises from the fact that "Graphic User Interfaces" (GUIs) currently dominate common usage of the term, as noted in essays by Adriana de Souza e Silva, and Nicholas Gane and David Beer. And while this common usage helps describe how technologies invite and shape user interactions, "interface" also signifies broader relationships between persons and media technologies that prove crucial to the archival concerns of diasporic fiction. There is a long tradition of approaching literature as a specific kind of interface in media scholarship, dating back to Steven Johnson's *Interface Culture,* which viewed the Victorian novel as the defining social interface of the period. Recent scholarship has focused on the "nesting-doll" proliferation of interfaces

and their effects on user-end subjectivity. Interface theory often invites such mirror-hall effects,[4] and yet, when we embrace these relational dynamics, "interface" becomes a powerful, practical metaphor for describing the operations of diasporic novel-archive complexes.

Matthew Kirschenbaum enumerates the several dimensions of this material metaphor,[5] which he argues invokes "the image of a 'surface' or 'boundary' where two or more 'systems,' 'devices,' or 'entities' come into 'contact' or 'interact.' Though these terms encourage spatial interpretation, most interfaces also embody temporal, haptic, and cognitive elements" ("'So the Colors Cover the Wires'" 1). There are several related concepts in orbit here, ranging from Homi Bhabha's "Thirdspace" to Mary Louise Pratt's "Contact Zone." However, "interface" is distinguished by its emphasis on material, technological mediation. Kirschenbaum's key insight is that the dynamics relating systems to interface (and vice versa) incorporate a range of relationships and facilitate several forms of contact simultaneously. This redeploys interfaces in the world of print, such that books and archives function as "layers" in systems of mediated usability, whose component parts have their own affordances and limitations. Furthermore, as Kirschenbaum notes, approaching interfaces as layers introduces a self-reflexive dimension to interface theory, which allows for different entities to permeate one another at the point of contact. This approach informs my use of the term to explore how the

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[4] Much like "media," the number of possible "interfaces" can multiply indefinitely when the abstraction noted above is given priority over the criteria of practicality.

[5] By "material metaphor," I mean to invoke his description of "interfaces" as both metaphoric and practical phenomena, particularly in the context of the digital humanities.

archive/novel dynamics in diasporic historiography confront broader questions of cultural and political agency. Johanna Drucker echoes this flexible approach to interfaces: "A book is an interface, so is a newspaper page, a bathroom faucet, a car dashboard, an ATM machine. An interface is not so much a 'between' space as it is the mediating environment that makes the experience, 'a critical zone that constitutes a user experience'" ("Humanities Approaches to Interface Theory" 10). Drucker emphasizes that interactions between interfaces and users are an embodied experience of fluid systems: a "zone(s) of affordances," as opposed to an exercise in mechanical causation. Viewing novels as interfaces does not, therefore, position them as strict rewritings of history; instead, it sets them up as "zone(s) of affordances" that prove similar to the discursive restraints associated with public sphere theories.

Drucker further discusses interfaces as sites of power and control; to this end, she cites sociologist Norman Long, whose "social interface theory" describes the material loci through which social agents express, uphold, and/or contest power dynamics. In a paper delivered to UNESCO in 1999, Long defines "interface" as "an organized entity of interlocking relationships and intentionalities" ("The Multiple Optic of Interface Analysis" 1). In his view, these relationships are centered on points of technological contact, which act as cynosures for "the linkages and networks that develop between individuals or parties" (1). In another work, Long explores interfaces as the intersection of different lifeworlds (invoking Habermasian language) which locate "social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledges and power" (*Development Sociology* 27). In this reading, interface analysis centers on face-to-face

encounters between discontinuous social groups. However, if we understand social

interfaces as points of *cultural* contact, and reframe them in terms of discursive agency,

then the objectives of social actors become more important than the constraints of what

Elke Grawert calls their "immediate capabilities" (*Departures from Post-colonial*

Authoritarianism 187) [6] This is how diasporic texts interact with archives: as interfaces

that produce points of contact which highlight imbalances of power, but also objectify

new forms of public presence in dispersed populations. They accomplish this by

repositioning archives within diasporic communication frameworks that create past

publics and carry them into the present.

Ambiguous Archives in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise*

In an essay on the relationship between fiction and history, the poet, novelist,

translator, historian and essayist Michelle Cliff recounts how, in January 1923, a white

mob terrorized the black town of Rosewood, Florida. After the attack (which resulted in

the deaths of at least eight people), Rosewood was razed to the ground; it survives today

as a single home with a sign bearing its name. Cliff reflects on this speechless archive:

> American history has been tamed. The books record no evidence of
> Rosewood or what happened there, or elsewhere. How do we capture the
> history that remains only to be imagined? That which has gone to bush,
> lies under the sea, is buried in the vacant lots of big cities. In my mind I
> erect a scaffolding; I attempt to describe what has not been described. I try
> to build a story on the most delicate of remains ("History as Fiction" 196).

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[6] Grawert addresses Long's understanding social agency more directly; he describes "social agency" in
Long's work as follows: "The capability of social actors to do things and to cause an existing situation or
process to change is termed 'agency.' Thus the notion does not refer to what people have as their objective,
but to their immediate capabilities" (187).

This description of Rosewood reveals much about Cliff's use of historical fiction: in particular, it addresses the problem of historical erasure via evocative descriptions of physical entombment and, in its final phrase, ephemeral fragility. Further, the passage alludes to the political taming that results from lost moments of resistance to such violence, and asks how we might "capture" histories that "remain only to be imagined." *Free Enterprise* offers an innovative response to this question that proves emblematic of the public-sphere oriented diasporic historiography developed in this chapter. Cliff's novel creates an archival interface that privileges the physical endurance of ambiguous signs, and in so doing, reframes inscrutable artifacts as testimonies to alternate public histories.

My argument draws on Suzanne Bost's contention that *Free Enterprise* integrates subject positions from the margin and center, resulting in a politicized postmodernist text that combines textual indeterminacy with calls to revolutionary political action. I have also benefitted from Kaisa Ilmonen's observation that the novel foregrounds historical artifice for explicitly political ends:

> Michelle Cliff's novel's identity is something which is shaped by the past, constructed from the pieces of the 'collective memory' of the past. Yet in postcolonial reality this is problematic, since history is written to serve the colonizer's purposes and hence it excludes the colonized people" (112).

My analysis largely agrees with the political function of narrative ambiguity explored by Bost, and Ilmonen's concern with historical exclusion. However, I contend that by focusing on the text's archival lacuna, we can produce a much clearer view of Cliff's media-conscious intervention in public sphere theory, and its relationship to diaspora studies.

Wendy Walters gestures in a similar direction when she describes the novel's focus on visual art: "*Free Enterprise* also asks us to consider the visual. Cliff's writing intervenes not only in history's written record but also in the ways that historical acts have been commemorated through the visual arts" ("Object into Subject" 503). For Walters, the paintings in *Free Enterprise* spur debate on the nature diasporic identity: "The novel moves black women from the position of object to subject, reminding readers of black women's abolitionist practices and narrating black women as resistant social actors, not supplicant victims" (503). Much in the vein of Matthew Kirschenbaum's work on interface theory, Walters suggests that the novel's depiction of a Turner painting resituates diasporic subject positions by foregrounding acts of representation. Specifically, the painting sparks public debate and private correspondence about the right way to discuss its abstraction of violence, suggesting a model for defining archives more expansively, as multimodal sites for the investigation of public self-genesis.

My argument connects Walter's focus on media with Erica Johnson's discussion of the ethical questions that arise at the intersection of archives and fiction; archives, she suggests, demand a posture that "is not completely subjective, but is designed to serve historical truth" ("Ghostwriting Transnational Histories" 116). Johnson notes that *Free Enterprise* flexes the constraints of historical truth, while also using such truth as a bulwark against relativism. This paradox is exactly why the novel's archival theory is so crucial toward locating its transnational critique of public sphere theory. This critique asks readers to consider why archives feature so prominently in the text, and to explore how they interact with its genre and structure. For Cliff, key debates about what "counts"

as archives trace social exclusions that become pockets of political agency through the archival interface of *Free Enterprise*; her novel-interface consequently expands the documentary record to include ambiguous artifacts within the zone of affordances constituting public sphere discourse.

Free Enterprise examines the origins and aftermath of what is widely known as "John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry." Instead of prioritizing Brown or the 1859 raid, however, the novel focuses on the relationship between Mary Allen Pleasant and the fictional "Annie Christmas." Pleasant's association with the raid has been the subject of much speculation; and yet, the novel centers on Annie, whose role in the raid, and the violence inflected on her as a result, fractures the novel's narrative, and also forms its widest frame. The novel thus adopts the archival constraints of historical fiction when treating the rebellion's known figures and circumstances; and yet, its splintered narrative structure and archival thematics also introduce counterweights that address the limitations of the extant record. When taken seriously as an archival theory, the novel's formal tensions constitute a model for inhabiting the gaps of documentary records. Surprisingly, it revisits the primal scene of archival inscription in order to privilege ambiguity, as opposed to authenticity. The former quality, it suggests, is missing from popular accounts of Harper's Ferry, but remains recoverable in physically enduring archival silences.

Years after the event, Annie regularly visits a nearby leper's colony, which fosters an internal tradition of oral storytelling. Not all of the colony's residents engage in this tradition, but those who participate as storytellers are fully committed to developing an intact oral archive, with its own collective impulses and preservationist strategies:

> Some passed up miniature golf, tennis, Bingo!; others, after a few tries,
> found these distractions tiresome, and lacked the dexterity or interest to
> sustain a game. For these story-telling became the main pastime, and, once
> discovered, was never relinquished. Stories of the original, outside world,
> and their place in it, were passed from mouth to mouth. Stories of the days
> in La Terre Lepraux, safeguarded by some of the old-timers among them,
> were released (44).

The stories told in this colony constitute the bulk of the novel's mosaic-like segments,

and Cliff's decision to roughly adjoin them develops the full, fragmenting force of the

Atlantic slave trade. The colony itself raises complicated questions of disease and

sequestration, but for my purposes, its structural function proves most salient. Cliff draws

attention to this function by explicitly invoking Boccaccio's *Decameron*; in that text,

stories are told to "pass the time" as a plague rages in Florence. Here, stories are told

inside the colony, as a way of arresting the erosive flow of national-historical time.

Cliff's novel thus employs the frame tale to situate Harper's Ferry within a wider network

of politically purposeful storytelling. This architecture creates a layering effect that

invites readers to contemplate the connection between narrative and archive; in many

ways, these communities are bound together by the uncertain aims of their oral

narratives, which offer necessary counter-narratives to dominant histories, while also

inheriting the vulnerability of speech. In the following passage, for example, two

characters discuss the efficacy of the colony's story-telling practices. Rachel DeSouze, a

Surinamese Jew who is assumed to have leprosy, despite having no external symptoms,

begins the exchange with Annie:

> 'You know that and I know that, and look where it's got us. Sitting under
> the Wisteria in a leper colony, telling stories, like a poor man's
> Decameron.' 'You don't really believe that.' ' Sometimes,' Annie said,
> 'too much of the time, I think all we have are these stories, and they are

endangered. In years to come, will anyone have heard them – our voices?'
'Once something is spoken,' Rachel said, 'it is carried on the air; it does
not die. It, our words, escape into the cosmos, space.' 'I want to be heard
here and now, on the planet Earth, not falling on deaf ears on the moons of
Jupiter.' 'We are doing what we can. All we can at the moment.' 'Who
will take responsibility for these stories?' 'We all do, Annie. It's the only
way.' 'See you on Saturn'" (58-59).

This conversation proves emblematic of the novel's central concern with accessing

dispersal, as histories of radical resistance lack the inscriptive, organizational, and

preservationist backing bestowed on testimonials to the state's narrative authority. In this

case, the mollifying notion that spoken words do not "die" provides little consolation to

Annie, but also foregrounds the fact that (per Brian Brothman) archival life-cycles are not

intrinsically linear, and should instead invoke "continuity, recurrence, and repetition."

In this way, the novel promotes a recursive meditation on the physically mediated

nature of narrative inclusion and exclusion; this interface, moreover, refuses to valorize

oral storytelling as a truthful corrective, or to romanticize its ephemerality. Instead, it

challenges received ideas of archival life cycles by illuminating enduring, material traces

of dispersion. In this way, the novel brings official archives into the perpetually redrawn

historical time of diaspora. For instance, one resident relates an inherited story about

Captain James Cook, which endures in markings on a piece of bone. The novel's

storytelling interface fills in the gaps around such an artifact, and in this way, creates an

archival record of counter-narratives that emphasize resistance to involuntary migration:

Note, if you will, my great-grandfather's omissions. The contamination of
the people by venereal disease has not been inscribed. He has, in his
words, as I remember them, and in the images he has carved in the bone,
purified the experience. He has made a monument. To our people's
innocence. Never suggesting that the women and some of the men went

along with the English sailors willingly…'The truth, I suspect, lies somewhere in between. It usually does.' (51).

The storyteller notes that his grandfather's counter-narrative engages in the same coercive dynamics underlying more dominant histories, creating a "monument" to "our people's innocence." "The truth" in this example exists not only in-between narratives and counter-narratives, but also in-between words and bone, as artifacts (or archival documents) generate new narratives, while also risking narrative reification via their auratic presence. By situating itself within a multidimensional frame tale, the novel stages a form of public sphere historicism that invokes past publics while also refusing to fix their narrative arcs.

The colony's storytellers reflect on the monumental exclusions of archives in a much broader sense, which suggests their consciousness of interpellation within national-historical time. This interpellation occurs via inscriptive acts that stamp expired life cycles onto diasporic bodies, as in the following statement: "Much is made in this version of bare breasts. The pale Englishman in thrall to the brown tits of Polynesia. We become fetish, drive them mad. They collect us in the flesh, on postage stamps, in their museums (56). The state designates these bodies as archives that speak against their will to the "inevitability" of state domination. By connecting bodies to stamps and museum artifacts (as baseline objects of ownership), *Free Enterprise* de-abstracts the violence of archival personification, which it also locates in more traditional media forms:

> The official version has been printed, bound, and gagged, resides in schools, libraries, the majority unconscious. Serves the common good. Does not cause trouble. Walks across tapestries, the television screen. Does not give aid and comfort to the enemy. Is the stuff of convocations, colloquia; is substantiated – like the Host – in dissertations. The official

version is presented to the people. With friezes full of heroes, statues free-
standing in vest-pocket parks, in full costume on main street, on
auditorium stages in elementary schools, through two-reelers, in silence –
who will forget *The Birth of a Nation*?" (16)

Free Enterprise proves both attracted to and repulsed by archival processes, which

consecrate state narratives. By verifying such narratives, archives support the state time

that occludes histories of resistance. These histories, however, must remain empirically

recoverable as a prerequisite to political action. This complex double-bind brings us to

the novel's central problematic: how do you create an archival practice that

monumentalizes lost moments of resistance, while remaining skeptical of monuments?

 Free Enterprise responds with a method for reading ambiguous archives, whose

inscrutability preserves the past as a space of possibility that nonetheless materially

endures outside the monumental time of the nation-state. The most salient example is

Mary Allen Pleasant's own tombstone, which is described as follows:

> But M.E.P. didn't follow her own advice, inscribing words on her epitaph
> which would send shivers through some and, at the very best, create
> doubts about the official version. There it was, in letters blackened in the
> white slab in a cemetery in a town known for wine in the California
> countryside: SHE WAS A FRIEND OF JOHN BROWN" (17-18).

This inscription presents several questions that converge on its ambiguity. A brief survey

of such questions would need to include the following items: given that the novel verifies

Pleasant's participation in the raid, and given that it advocates direct political action, why

would "M.E.P" fail to "follow her own advice," and instead, leave this brief, ambivalent

inscription as the sole testimony to her action? Does the tombstone become a monument

to the crippling erasure accompanying history's "official version"?

While erasure is a major point of concern, the novel's interface reads political

> Tongue hanging by a thread.
>   She looked closely and saw markings, foreign to her,
> etched on the dangling tongue, suddenly disembodied.
>   ○ ⊹ ○ repeated and repeated.
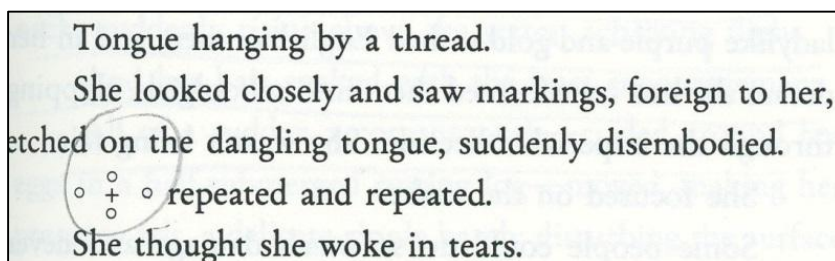>   She thought she woke in tears.

Figure 20. Cliff, Michelle. *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Publishing, 2004. Print. 24.

agencies into this ambiguity. For example, the above quote is followed by a series of

questions advanced without speaker names; the tombstone's ambiguities thus provoke a

Bakhtinian heteroglossia. In this way, archives become monuments to several provisional

narratives, as they induce public debates on processes of inclusion and exclusion in

history. This stimulus to commentary is further represented by an inscrutable symbol.

The very inscrutability of this symbol disrupts linear state time by presenting past publics

as an imminent presence. This symbol first appears in a dream of Annie's (see figure 20).

> Inside, the place was stark, dirt for a floor, a tub of shiny ordure stood in the center of the room. / / / / / / / /—the counting out of time perhaps—were slashed in the mortar between the stones.
>   In other places, more delicate engravings survived:
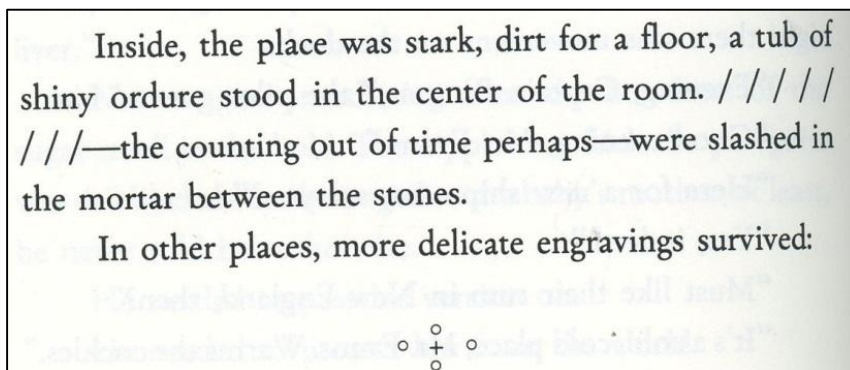>
>   ○ ⊹ ○

Figure 21. Cliff, Michelle. *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*. San Francisco, CA: City Lights Publishing, 2004. Print. 114.

The inscription invokes an unregistered archive of past experience, whose ambiguity forestalls incorporation into a set meta-narrative, and whose constitutive repetition ("repeated and repeated") intentionally confuses the past and present. Later, the symbol moves from the dream world into physical existence, scratched inside a slaver's holding cage. It is also juxtaposed with markings indicating the sequential passage of time (see

potAto
hurRicane
tobAcco
W
bArbecue
hammocK
a
n
o
e

Among the people the stages of life were incised on the skin. The hieroglyphics formed symbols understood only to initiates. As with the Kongo cosmogram encountered by Captain Parsons in the mortar of the Cage.
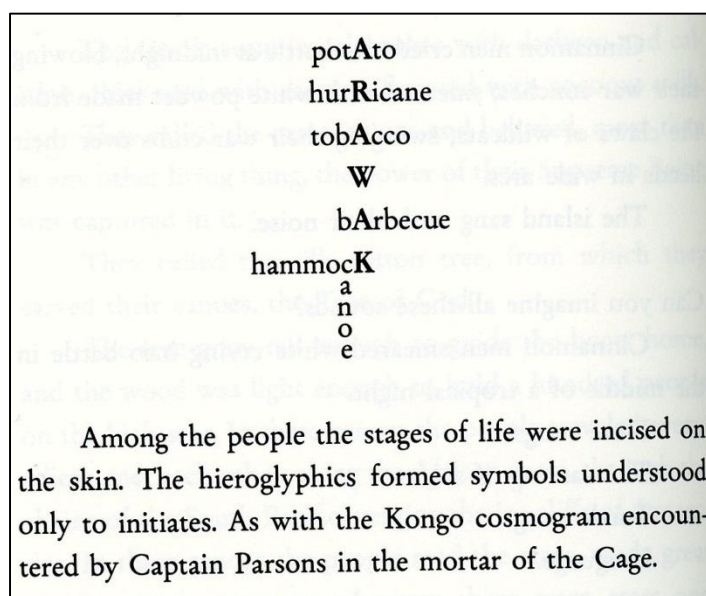
Figure 22. Cliff, Michelle. *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*. San Francisco, CA: City   Lights Publishing, 2004. Print. 124.

figure 21). The same symbol appears yet again on page 120, when "Captain Parsons," a freed slave operating a contraband resistance operation, is temporarily held inside the cage's confines. The symbol is "foreign" even to those diasporic subjects who associate it with lost homelands, languages, and religions. Other codes appear, including the following, which is explicitly linked to the "Kongo cosmogram" in the slaver's cage and Annie's dream (see figure 22). These spaces of possibility, understood "only to initiates," perform the novel's function as an archival interface by imagining spaces of unspecific

connection, possibility, and ultimately, debate about the function of diasporic past

publics. These publics exist in the ambiguous archives displayed above, which serve as

focal points of diasporic historicism. In this way, the diasporic historiography in *Free

Enterprise* confronts archival media and foregrounds their susceptibility to erasure and/or

illegibility, while also figuring ambiguous archives as interfaces for political alliance.

Adopting this archival perspective situates the novel's formal properties within a

broader, transnational critique of the historicism in public sphere theory. Moreover,

taking the archival theories of the novel seriously encourages comparative approaches to

diasporic public spheres-in-the-making. Cliff describes this position in an interview:

> *Free Enterprise* is not just about the slave trade, but it is also trying to
> show the complex relations among peoples in the world. In the novel there
> are Hawaiians, there are Maori, there are Caribbean people, Americans,
> black Americans, Africans, and it's really about how people connected and
> worked as resisters and collaborators to the slave trade" ("The Art of
> History" 57).

Such connections are ultimately activated by the novel's archival interface, which

unsettles the illusion of historical inevitability produced by state-archives, and positions

diaspora as a highly politicized and media-conscious public sphere intervention.

Julia Alvarez's Archival Erotics

Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2001) also interfaces with state histories

through an aggressively non-linear narrative structure. However, instead of Cliff's frame-

tale, which is polyphonic in nature, Alvarez intercuts between two narratives, one of

which moves forward in time, and one of which moves backwards. These narratives, I

argue, are connected through the novel's "archival erotics," which recombine erotic and

political energies through the arrangement of archival media. For Alvarez, revolutionary

political action must be grounded in affective bonds; as a result, archives that have been stripped of private devotions and sexual attachments also abandon their ability to provoke authentically transformative social change. Her novel reintroduces erotic energies into the archive as a way of disrupting the categories of "public" and "private" that populate archival collections. Alvarez instead demonstrates how archival erotics can produce new forms of multi-state nationalism for present-tense diasporic publics.

As noted, *In the Name of Salomé* alternates between two narratives. The first concerns Salomé Ureña de Henriquez (1850-1897), "la poetisa nacional" of the Dominican Republic. Salomé married Dr. Henriquez y Carvajal, who in 1916 was briefly president of the nation. The second narrative concerns Salomé's daughter, Camila, who spends the majority of her life teaching Spanish at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest, and who is given the task of organizing her mother's papers. This task instigates the novel's double-helix narrative movement, in which Salomé's story moves forward in time, while Camila's moves backwards. The two storylines fleetingly intersect towards the novel's conclusion; at this point, the text develops a newly present tense, in which Camila decides to work as a teacher in revolutionary Cuba. This structure produces a revolutionary political present out of Camila's interactions with her mother's personal archives, thereby repositioning archives as sites of emergent, diasporic public identity.

In addition to its non-linear narrative structure, the genre of "historical fiction" also factors into the novel's diasporic historiography. Salomé and Camila are both based on real people. Alvarez is conscious of the implications of historical fiction;[7] her use of

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[7] Alvarez's earlier novel *In the Time of Butterflies* (1994) also employed the genre.

the form extends to the manifesto-like introduction to *In the Name of Salomé*, which

offers insight into the novel's archival erotics:

> The Salomé and Camila you will find in these pages are fictional
> characters based on historical figures, but they are re-created in the light of
> questions we can only answer, as they did, with our own lives: Who are
> we as a people? What is a patria? How do we serve? Is love stronger than
> anything else in the world?" (357).

Alvarez advances a litany of questions concerning collective agency and responsibility

that ultimately, in the final query, center on an analysis of "love." She connects love to

the political ends of the novel, and connects these ends, in turn, to historical fiction:

> Given the continuing struggles in Our America to understand and create
> ourselves as countries and individuals, this book is an effort to understand
> the great silence from which these two women emerged and into which
> they have disappeared, leaving us to dream up their stories and take up the
> burden of their songs (357).

Note that Alvarez understands the genre as a response to the "great silence" from which

these women emerged; also note her description of "Our America" (indicating an

inclusive, but indefinite, national possession), and her conflation of "ourselves" as

"countries and individuals," which inaugurates interplay between private and public

spheres. This collapse of state and person offers an opportunity to revisit archives as sites

of intimate individual experience, and merge distinct spheres together as a stimulant to

radical political action.

Scholarship on the novel has addressed its narrative structure and political

energies; however, it has largely failed to connect these issues to its archival imagination.

In some cases, this results from overly autobiographical orientations. For instance, Julee

Tate conflates Camila and Alvarez, and argues that "*Salomé* may be read as a narrative

palimpsest in which Alvarez continues her own autobiographical project over (or under)

the fictionalized retelling of the lives of the novel's mother-daughter protagonists" ("My

Mother, My Text" 54). Other critics have avoided associating author and character in this

way; Lynn Johnson, for instance, suggests that the novel demonstrates the inadequacy of

a concept like "hybridity" to describe Caribbean women's literature. Johnson instead

focuses on the multiplicity of cultures that comprise the Caribbean and its literature,

which suggests a "mosaic" approach to ethnic difference ("The Terrible Moral

Disinheritance of Exile"). Trenton Hickman builds on Hutcheon's historiographic

metafiction, using the term "Hagiographic Commemorafiction" to describe the text's

combination of self-reflexive historiography and earnest political ambition:

> Hagiographic commemorafiction, as I define it, blends historiographic
> metafiction's attention to the postmodern novel's recognition of its own
> artifice and to its idiosyncratic constructions of historical narrative with
> older, even pre-modern models of spiritual exempla: moralizing parables
> designed to provide examples worthy of readerly emulation.
> ("Hagiographic Commemorafiction" 99-100).

Hickman offers an astute reading of the unique mode of historiography engendered by

the novel (and in fact, the function of "hagiographic commemorafiction" proves

companionate to Suzanne Bost's reading of *Free Enterprise*); however, I want to

consider the text's diasporic historiography in fuller conversation with its approach to

archives. To this end, other critics have more explicitly treated the novel's understanding

of print culture[8] and, in particular, its use of archives. Maria Rodriguez, for example,

describes the political charge of Alvarez's archives:

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[8] Maya Socolovsky, for instance, has noted that Alvarez's writes for an English-speaking market. This
observation points to the importance of transnational print culture, and its role in Alvarez's efforts to build
public coalitions across the Americas. This "re-narrativizing" of history, Socolovsky argues, is reflected in

> These women have incorporated the voices of those who were either silenced or who spoke through the official discourse; they have discovered new ways of seeing and speaking. They are now ready to challenge the authority of the appointed historians of truth with the oral and written fragments of those daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers who were effaced for such a long time ("Authority Figures as Distant Memories" 62).

My analysis draws from these observations, but focuses more specifically on the way Alvarez's archival erotics interact with theories of the public sphere.

By "erotics," I mean to evoke the term's broadest adjectival usage as "Of or pertaining to the passion of love; concerned with or treating of love; amatory." As suggested earlier in my reading of her preface, Alvarez perceives a necessary connection between love and politics. In my reading of *In the Name of Salomé*, I locate the nexus of this connection in the novel's use of archives. At its outset, Camila is given the task of going through her famous family's papers, including her mother's poetry manuscripts:

> She is taking only her suitcase and the trunk of her mother's papers and poems carried down just now by the school grounds crew to the waiting car. To think that only a few months ago, she was consulting those poems for signs! She smiles at the easy gimmick she thought would resolve the big question in her life" (2).

And yet, the "easy gimmick" presented by this trunk does, eventually, offer important personal and political forms of resolution. Such resolution do not arrive by way of straightforward re-readings of her mother's poems. Instead, it arrives by putting such poems in conversation with a host of other print materials. Alvarez describes Camila's process of organizing of the family archives, and ties this process to her future

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the novel itself, as Camila subverts norms by remaining childless, opting instead to birth new political orders Cuba. However, I depart from Socolovsky in developing the archival erotics at the core of Alvarez's past publics.

revolutionary political agency. First, however, the novel explores the distinction between

what becomes "archival" and therefore subject to preservation and display (i.e., what

becomes "history") and what remains personal. Camila, in fact, performs this very

distinction: she instructs her assistant to create two boxes for the archives, telling her to

"'Label one 'Archives'" and "just put my name on the other one'" (44). In the first box,

she collects materials associated with traditional archives. In the second box, she keeps

the physical remnants of her family's past, which are described as a litany:

> Every night she pores over her mother's box: notes to her children; a
> sachet with dried purplish flowers; a catechism book, Caton cristiano, with
> a little girl's handwriting on the back cover; silly poems from someone
> named Nisidas; a lock of hair; a baby tooth tied up in handkerchief; a
> small Dominican flag her mother must have sewn herself, its stick snapped
> off, no doubt from the weight of the other packets on it. What these things
> mean, only the dead can tell. But they are details of Salomé's story that
> increasingly connect her mother's life to her own" (45).

These materials remain 'private,' as they are intentionally cordoned off from public view.

However, Camila's obsessive engagement with such materials ("every night she pores

over her mother's box"), suggests how the temporarily private nature of these documents

eventually develops into public forms of political action.

This feedback loop between public and private spheres recurs throughout the

novel. The material set aside for public consumption, for example, is dispersed to

different institutions, in some ways mirroring the migrations of diaspora. Camila,

however, chooses to retain the materials in "her one trunk:"

> A few weeks ago, they finished sorting through the trunks. The archival
> material has been sent off to Harvard and Minnesota, the Dominican
> Republic, Cuba. Her one trunk sits like a rock in the rooms she has been
> dismantling. Someday, it will join the others. For now, she wants it with
> her, part keepsake chest, part talisman" (47).

The passage suggests that someday, this trunk will merge with the official public story.

However, the nature of this eventual merger, and its effect on the official story, depend

on the intimate physical presence of these private archives, and their curious use-value

for Camila. Camila desires to keep the trunk as a "talisman," or private invocation (in a

convenient echo of Mbembe's work); the private nature of these archives is crucial to

their talismanic function, which both instigates and fractures the narrative.

Camila's immediate response to these materials helps further explain their role as

talisman and catalyst to her late-life political action. While examining the contents of the

trunk in detail, Camila discovers a small cache of familial print culture:

> Inside the trunk, she is overwhelmed by what she finds: not just Pedro's
> correspondence but letters addressed from her mother to her father, a diary
> Pedro kept as a young boy with a biography of their mother's life, copies
> of a little newspaper that Pedro and Max used to publish as children with
> their mother listed as director, even a clipping from the Dominican papers
> she has seen before, reporting Fran's acquittal in the murder of a young
> man (244).

This cache provides evidence of her mother's interior life and her father's extramarital

affairs. Its fragments are stuck between pages deep within otherwise anonymous books,

or scratched out on draft paper; the accumulation of these private ephemera, and their

juxtaposition against her mother's highly public poetry, frames Camila's archival practice

as an intervention in the nationalist politics associated with this poetry. These archival

reminders of her mother's erotic life detach the poetry from the public profile engendered

by her stature as the national poetess of the Dominican Republic. Rather than recalling

such poems into a strictly private realm, however, Camila's archival practice produces a

new kind of public political orientation. The evidence of love and betrayal registered in

the family archives, in other words, proves crucial to Camila's decision to emerge into public political life in the revolutionary movement in Cuba.

This decision proves emblematic of the political energies of archival erotics, which reconstruct past publics in affective, physical terms. Such erotics result from the handling and reorganization of highly personal manuscript inscriptions. As noted, Camila finds evidence of mother's erotic life in these materials; this erotic life included frustration and dissatisfaction, but also physical and emotional love for her husband, which intertwines in complex ways with her feelings about "the patria." Rediscovering this erotic life spurs Camila's urge to engage in creative acts of expression:

> Several times in the last few weeks, she felt the urge to write verses. She would be mortified if her aunts or anyone else should read these confessions. Roots plunging in the earth that turn into Domingo reaching for her. Oh dear! How could her mother ever allow her private poems to be published, she wonders. In fact, in the posthumous edition of her mother's work, Pedro omitted many of these 'intimate verses.' But these are precisely the poems Camila has been poring over lately, relieved to know that her mother once felt what she is now feeling. *Put out my ardent fire with your kisses! Answer the wild longing in my heart!* (161).

Archival erotics build past publics through such creative practices. After encountering these manuscripts, for example, Camila has the urge not only to write, but also to embrace Domingo, a sculptor to whom she feels deep physical attraction. Creativity, in this sense, is at once aesthetic, sensual, and eventually, political. For the time being, Camila notes that her mother wished to make her private desire for Pedro, her eventual husband, manifestly public. These private thoughts, Camila notes, recast her mother's nationalist poetry, because they ground her mother's political thinking in interpersonal dynamics that do not participate in abstract narratives of national development. Instead,

they build from feelings of desire that approach such narratives with a creative impulse that is simultaneously aesthetic, political, and physical. The novel reinforces this perspective by switching back to Salomé's narrative and exploring the genesis of her verses. Salomé describes their composition in the first person:

> But another thoughts soon followed. I had met Hostos's lovely, young bride Belinda. Even if we had not pledged ourselves to others, I was not beautiful enough to attract a man like Hostos. I was like the branch of purple jacarandas that Hostos shook from his hand while the boys sketched the path of the downward spiraling blossoms. I served as an example. I stirred my readers to noble actions (173).

By juxtaposing Salomé's private and public personas, and by reconnecting these personas through Camila's creative archival work, the novel suggests that archival practices which separate private longings from public virtues perform a false distinction.

This distinction reinforces historical narratives which depend on visible exercises of state power; by contrast, Salomé's poetic development increasingly reveals her understanding of "national" poetry as rooted in affective interpersonal dynamics: "'I don't care!' I had started crying. With the last few poems, I had begun writing in a voice that came from deep inside me. It was not a public voice. It was my own voice expressing my secret desires Pancho was dismissing" (176). While Salomé distinguishes between public and private voices, it is crucial to note that her "private voice" will become public once it enters print; Pedro's suppression of this voice, in other words, is ultimately what raises the distinction noted between "public and "private." It is thus more accurate to understand Salomé's "secret desires" as confusing this very distinction, since both voices spring from the same well. By returning to this original site of archival erasure, the novel demonstrates how state archives effectively de-eroticize narratives of history.

As noted, Camila's encounter with these private poems puts them in context with a wider, homemade archive. This context allows her to note traces of archival exclusion, which create a de-sexualized image of her mother as a servant of the *patria*:

> A third and fourth trunk with the books the family left behind when they emigrated to Cuba have been stored in the front parlor…Her aunt shakes her head, No, your father tinkered with those. These are the ones I copied down from the originals. Some day I hope you or Pedro – since you're the ones inclined in that direction – I hope you will publish them (282)."

While revisiting these poems, Camila realizes that her own, intensely private life was defined by three relationships: the first was a long, intense, and physical relationship with her girlfriend Marion, conducted largely in private. The second was her relationship with Domingo, with whom she felt a curious combination of creative and physical connection, and which was also conducted in private. The third relationship, with an American serviceman, faltered in the face of a racist, exclusionary American public sphere. Reflecting on these relationships in dialogue with the physical remnants of her mother's own internal erotic life, Camila rediscovers an urge toward creative political action.

At the novel's outset, Camila weighs the opportunity to live with her former partner Marion and Marion's new husband. Instead, the process of sorting through her family archives crystallizes her decision to spread literacy in revolutionary Cuba. This decision is presented as a creative, interpersonal, multi-temporal act of love, transmitted from daughter to mother, and directed towards public political action. In this way, the private materials contained in Camila's trunk create new political horizons in the present. When such materials rejoin the "official story" within institutional spaces, they will modulate this story with new historical tempos and new political coalitions as a result of

Camila's efforts in Cuba. The novel makes this connection between Cuban politics and

Camila's archival encounters quite clear, when finally shifting to Camila's first-person

voice, and thereby merging their previously distinct lives:

> I tried all kinds of strategies. I learned her story. I put it side by side with
> my own. I wove our two lives together as strong as a rope and with it I
> pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt. But no matter
> what I tried, she was still gone. Until, at last I found her the only place we
> ever find the dead: among the living. Mamá was alive and well in Cuba,
> where I struggled with others to build the kind of country she had dreamed
> of (335).

Alvarez's archival erotics therefore interface with state archives to explore the private

motivations underscoring public documents. As a result of this interface, such documents

become talismanic sites of rediscovered pleasure, which bind the private and the public,

and the past and political present. To this end, when describing her work in Cuba, Camila

states the following: "The real revolution could only be won by the imagination. When

one of my newly literate students picked up a book and read with hungry pleasure, I

knew we were one step closer to the patria we all wanted" (347). Her work for the

burgeoning, revolutionary public sphere in Cuba stems exactly from "hungry pleasure."

On account of the family's diasporic dispersal, this work spans the Caribbean as a whole;

in this way, the novel's archival erotics speak to the development of diasporic publics

across the entire region of what, in her preface, Alvarez describes as "Our America."

Archival Endurance in Colum McCann's *Transatlantic*

In an interview with Joseph Lennon, Colum McCann connects his multi-polar

cultural identity to those of his characters: "But while I'm not in exile, I am displaced.

The people I'm writing about are trying to find a way home, looking for a home. The

issue of home is enormous" ("Country of Elsewhere" 100). McCann's eighth novel,

Transatlantic (2013), revisits these themes of homelessness, empathy, and the fragility of

cultural transmission, while delving deeper into the genre of historical fiction explored in

his previous novel *Let the Great World Spin* (2009). These two novels share several

technical devices, including a strong through-line which binds together the lives of

several real and invented characters. In the same interview, McCann describes his interest

in historical fiction and the thematics that arise from such a genre: "Also, this look at

'biography' questions the technology of remembering. And so it's an examination of

story-telling too, and notions of memory" (102). McCann includes memory, storytelling,

and biography under the umbrella category of "technolo[gies] of remembering;" in

Transatlantic, this list extends to archives as well.

McCann's comments indicate two interrelated concerns in his work: first, national

and personal homelessness, and second, the complex relationship between fact and

fiction. Scholarship on McCann has arguably been stymied by the canonical

homelessness of his fiction; this is evident in his ambiguous relationship with Irish

literature, as noted by John Healy: "The fact is that surveys of contemporary Irish and

Northern Irish novelists overlook – or possibly, ignore? – McCann repeatedly" (148).

However, when Ireland is understood as a jumping-off point for a broader Irish diaspora,

McCann receives a warmer reception. Eamonn Wall exemplifies this when he calls

McCann's first novel *Songdogs* (1995) "both relevant and prophetic" in its depiction of

such a diaspora. He writes:

> Nowadays, because of economic developments and the relative ease of
> travel, geographical and national boundaries have begun to disappear, with

the result that Ireland has become more of a frontera, constantly crossed and re-crossed, than a fixed nation. *Songdogs* is the first great Irish novel to explore this new world and its implications" ("Winds Blowing from a Million Directions" 284).

Finally, in one of the few book-length descriptions of McCann's now-substantial body of work, Eoin Flannery argues that McCann offers a utopian "moment of hope" through his "preoccupation with the ethical currency of the narrative act," which explicitly interacts with his interest in migration and especially life in the Irish diaspora. I continue this line of research in viewing McCann as a diasporic author; however, my reading will focus on the ways his "narrative acts" interface with specific "technologies of remembering." I argue that *Transatlantic* represents archives as living and, moreover, embodied, which keeps them alive in a perpetual life cycle. The novel restores physical presence to public historical events, and argues against understanding McCann's narrative structure as a "living conceit." Ultimately, the text refuses to privilege the semantic meaning of archives; instead, it emphasizes their physical endurance as a commentary on the continuation of culture after traumatic violence.

Transatlantic stages several Atlantic crossings between Ireland and the "New World." These crossing include the inaugural transatlantic flight in 1919 by John Alcock and Arthur Brown; Frederick Douglass' 1845 speaking tour of Ireland; and the peace talks leading up to 1998's "Good Friday Agreement," facilitated by United States ambassador George Mitchell. *Transatlantic* stiches together these three disparate strands of history through the private lives of three related women. These women provide the intergenerational infrastructure for the novel as a whole. This infrastructure becomes especially visible in the third and final section of the novel, which switches to a first-

person narration by Hannah, the last of these women. She is a divorced mother, whose son was murdered by IRA members in a robbery-gone-wrong. The switch to Hannah's narration is unexplained at first, but eventually suggests her authorship *Transatlantic*: "At my most morose, I have to acknowledge that quite possibly the reason I put pen to paper is precisely because I have nobody left to whom I can tell the story" (261). Similar meta-textual moves are made in *In the Name of Salomé* and *Free Enterprise*, which become archives-unto-themselves.

Transatlantic involves the story of a personal letter that binds the novel's three storylines together. The letter, which is less than two pages in length, first traveled across the Atlantic on the "Vickers Vimy;" Hannah, who holds it in her possession during the novel's final section, describes the lifespan of the document as follows:

> The letter has been passed from daughter, and through a succession of lives. I am almost half the letter's age, and have no daughter to whom I can pass it along, and there are times I admit that I have sat at the kitchen table, looking over the lough, and have rubbed the edges of the envelope and held it in the palm of my hand to try to divine what the contents might be, but, just as we are knotted by wars, so mystery holds us together (252).

Hannah's tactile fascination with the document underscores the physical fragility of unpreserved archives. The letter's endurance is connected in her mind with the possibility of some transcendent meaning embedded in history; while she states that she would, in a heartbeat, trade it for her a glimpse of her dead son, as it stands, the letter remains

> Tucked inside a sleeve of archival plastic. I am partial, still, to the recklenssness of the imagination. The tunnels of our lives connect, coming to daylight at the oddest moments, and then plunge us into the dark again. We return to the lives of those who have gone before us, a perplexing mobius strip until we come home, eventually, to ourselves (252).

Linear chronological continuity is maintained via the letter's preservation, but the novel's sense of historical time is, more accurately, self-described as a "möbius strip," a metaphor which holds the significant property of being non-orientable, and thus without distinct beginning or end.[9] This image deemphasizes the semantic content of archives and focuses on their physicality. At the same time, the "lifespan" implied by this physicality is made circular (and thus, non-linear) by the narrative strands neatly encapsulated by this image. Hannah consequently questions the use-value of such archives for both past and present publics. The letter, for example, remains an anomalous survivor and, much in the same way as Cliff's "ambiguous archives," a surrogate for potential:

> Opened, it could have been burned. Or dismissed. Or cherished. Scrapped.
> Left to mold in an ancient attic somewhere, the territory of a squirrel or a
> bat. Unopened, the letter is even less effective of course, except for its
> preservation of possibility, the slight chance that it contains a startling
> face, or an insight into some forgotten beauty (253).

The letter's semantic content, Hannah suggests, would in fact undermine its talismanic force; instead, unopened, it maintains a crucial "preservation of possibility." The novel seems to find such possibility not only in the letter, but in the world-at-large as well, particularly when focalized through Hannah's perspective in the third and final section.

In this section, Hannah treks through the landscape of an ancient monastic site, whose existence in the present is conflated in powerful ways with the letter itself:

> Just across the bridge there are monastic ruins ten times as old as my
> precious letter. A heritage site. Brass plates and stone stiles and climbing
> moss. The holy books were written here fifteen hundred years ago. Ink
> from the land. Parchment from cattle (255).

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[9] "Möbius" is defined as "a surface having only one side and one edge, formed by twisting one end of a rectangular strip through 180 degrees and joining it to the other end. Also in extended use."

Once again, Hannah meditates on the physical composition of these holy books — on

their visible material bodies, and on the less-visible labor inhered in their creation and

preservation. She makes an extended inventory of the catalog of supplies and imagined

manufacturing processes that went into their creation:

> The ancient monks used reeds to paint the gospels. Cowhide and wolfskin
> and the pelt of elk to keep out the weather. They ground down bone,
> mixed it with grass and soil and berries and plants. Bird quills. Leather
> bindings. Stone huts. Bronze bells. A series of walls for defense. Round
> towers for lookout. The fires they lit were small. The books they wrote
> were taken then across the lough, across the sea, to Scotland (257).

Ever the curator, Hannah clears these lived-in monastic archives of the remnants left over

from a recent rave. While doing so, she meditates on "The ancient iconography of the

Irish imagination: eviction" (265). This iconography charges the monastic site, which

seems to matter to Hannah mostly for its unexpected, and even inconceivable, endurance.

Hannah is in dire financial straits and contemplates selling the letter in an attempt

to save her house. The letter's possible connection to the Vickers Vimy and Frederick

Douglass make it valuable. She visits a professor to assess the document's potential

worth: "He knew of the letter from years gone by, but had never actually seen it. It was,

he said, the first time he had ever come upon an actual living conceit" (286). In voicing

the expression "living conceit," McCann's professor registers the meta-textual objection

that such a device might prove too artificial a construct for some readers; and yet, this

moment of self-consciousness reveals the centrality of such artifice for McCann's

archival interface. Hannah foregrounds the seriousness of this conceit when stating "I

didn't quite know what he meant, and I was tempted to rip the letter open right there in

front of his eyes, just to destroy the assertion. My life and my house didn't seem a conceit

to me at all: it was an actual, breathing place…" (286). The physicality described here

("actual, breathing") is central to the novel's understanding of archives as a "living

conceit." In fact, the professor's adjective "living" proves more applicable to Hannah's

letter than she realizes; the letter does, in fact, serve as a physical surrogate to an idea, or

conception, of connections winding through history. Hannah's problem with the

description seems to lie with the abstraction implied in "conceit;" McCann's novel,

however, suggests that framing archival media as "living conceits" provides a way of

using such media to conceive new patterns in history.[10]

Hannah eventually arrives at such a point, but only as a result of seeking

alternative assessments of the latter's value. In seeking such assessments, she takes a

particular liking to the Kenyan academic David Manyaki, on the following grounds:

> What I liked most about Manyaki is that he did not ask me to open the
> letter, nor to borrow it so his colleagues in university could bombard it
> with protons or neutrons or whatever else they might use to discern what
> lay inside. I think he understood that I wasn't interested in getting to the
> endpoint, if there was any, and that the prospect of truth was not especially
> attractive: for such a young man, an academic, he was still curiously
> interested in the elusive (285).

Hannah sees Manyaki as companionate in his attraction to the letter's elusive qualities.

For both Hannah and Manyaki, the document's magnetism derives not from its promise

of "truth" or any particular "endpoint," but rather in its miraculous endurance across time

and displacement. In this respect, the two find a common interface to the past in the

unopened letter. The obsessively sensuous physicality typifying Hannah's relationship

with the document is repeated, and even intensified, in Manyaki's case, to the extent that

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[10] "Conceit" is defined as "Conception; conceiving and its product."

Manyaki actually *eats* (and thus embodies) the letter: "Manyaki absently licked the top of

his finger and pressed it down upon one" of the letter's discarded crumbs (286). This

directly echoes Hannah's own impulse, stated earlier in the text: "It was still sealed. She

glanced down at her own handwriting. The ink had faded slightly. She put the letter to her

lip. As if she could taste it somehow" (210).

This physical interaction with documents — the desire to literally consume the

past — works as a counterweight to the documentary function of official, state-based

archives and their tendency to authenticate the "conclusion" of eras of state violence.

McCann's novel instead develops a politics of archival physicality. This politics works

through a privatization of archives that does not aimed at de-accession; instead, it

suggests other lines of historical transmission, as the novel's interface reconsiders the

historical record in terms of preserved possibility. Later in the novel, Hannah allows

Manyaki to open the letter and read it to her; afterwards, she revisits the letter herself:

> I unfolded the envelope and examined the handwriting. It was rather
> ragged. What mystery we lose when we figure things out, but perhaps
> there's a mystery in the obvious, too. Nothing but a simple note. I closed it
> again and thanked him. It was entirely mine, I would keep it now: no
> university, no philatelist, no need for archives (298).

This act prompts Hannah to sell her home to Manyaki, his wife, and their young children,

in an action directly related to her release of the traumatic stasis persisting from the death

of her son, and her ostensible authorship of *Transatlantic*. She keeps the letter, but it is

important to note that her narrative's denouement results from its utter *lack* of meaning,

and base physical endurance. This lack of semantic meaning allows for Hannah,

Manyaki, and readers of *Transatlantic* to focus more intensely on the document's basic

survival. In focusing on this survival, the novel presents a complex model of preservation

that both testifies to the past's endurance, and avoids traumatic repetitions of violence.

The alliance between Hannah and Manyaki thus opens new paths towards the

future by recognizing the physical immediacy of the past. In this way, the final section

interfaces with its previous sections, which themselves interface with the extant archival

record; at each point in this signal chain, negotiations between social actors begin anew.

Moving backwards in narrative sequence, the novel's second major section concerns

Frederick Douglass' tour to Ireland in 1845. The narrative internalization of the strains

put upon Douglass by this tour affords significant insight into the fragility of the alliances

at hand, echoing Hannah's flaking letter. The narrator states:

> He was, he knew, not the first black man to land in Ireland to lecture.
> Remond had been there before him. Equiano, too. The Irish abolitionists
> were known for their fervor. They came from the land of O'Connell, after
> all. The Great liberator. There was, he'd been told, a hunger for justice.
> They would open themselves to him (42).

This move to recapture lines of transnational communication between oppressed

communities opens new dialogues on the nature of justice, as when Douglass is called

"The black O'Connell" (65) in a shift of perspective that is at once incredibly reductive

and necessary for the success of his overall political project. Douglass means to draw

support for the American abolition movement, but crucially, he is also haunted by the

unique horrors of the Great Famine, which introduce unforeseen asymmetries in the

experiences of Douglass and his Irish hosts. Douglass enjoys his new public personhood

to a certain extent, but this identity comes at the expense of an intensely controlled

private life communicated through language of mental pressure and physical strain.

McCann uses Douglass' own words when citing his personal correspondence, and puts these passages in italics, as on page forty-nine, when Douglass writes a letter to his wife. The same holds true for his public speeches, seen in Emily and Lily's journey to see Douglass at the National Women's Suffrage Association. Here is another example of a tentative alliance centered on archival engagements. This alliance is nestled within a greater meta-narrative addressing the public nature of history in intimately physical terms. In this section, Douglass is aged seventy-one; his speech is represented as follows:

> *When a great truth gets abroad in the world, no power on earth can imprison it, or prescribe its limits, or suppress it*. She could see an orchestra in him, a whole range of instruments and sound. His voice was loud and booming. It is bound to go on until it becomes the thought of the world. He paced the stage. In and out of a pool of light. His shoes clicking on the wooden floorboards. *Such a truth is a woman's right to equal liberty with man. She was born with it. It was hers before she comprehended it. The rational basis for proper government lies in the female soul*. Lily could feel the grip of her daughter's hand, growing tighter now with each moment" (189).

Specifying the pressure applied to Lily's hand complements the italicized words in a way that adds physical context to the archival material in play: this is McCann's embodied archive at work, and provides a new interface by which to approach and understand the social actors involved. After the speech, Lily ruminates on the perceived lesson of the event: "She understood that she had come such a distance, traveled all this way, she had opened a door, and her own daughter was in the room, her own history and flesh and darkness, leaning down by the light of an ancient lantern, to read" (190). The physicality marking this passage recombines history and flesh, and in so doing, provides an interface to the "fleshy" archive that echoes McCann's comments from his interview with Joseph Lennon: "I suppose that's what fiction can do. It can braid these worlds of the

imagination and history and make them real" (111). This archival interface focuses on technologies of remembrance that testify to past publics through their very endurance across time and distance; in so testifying, *Transatlantic* further exemplifies the uniquely materialist orientation toward historiography in diasporic culture.

Conclusion: Public Development

By exploring the archival theories in three diasopric novels, my fifth and final chapter addressed the "survival" component of the communications circuit structuring this dissertation. And yet, while its focus on archives might suggest that media inevitably terminate in the dusty death of special collections (when they don't disappear altogether), the fact is that concerns about media survival provoked the composition and dissemination of these novels. The circuit's conclusion therefore restarts the cycles of media production, circulation, and reception explored in my second, third, and fourth chapters, respectively. As one might suspect, then, this project does not aim for closure; instead, it seeks to enter and engage a fluctuating cycle of diasporic publicity. Moreover, by arguing in favor of reading contemporary diasporic novels and poetry as a Möbius strip of transnational publicity (to evoke McCann), my dissertation partakes in the same project of public relations developed across its primary texts.

This resistance to closure also informs the desired afterlife of this dissertation. Throughout *Public Relations*, I have argued that the nuanced media practices in diasporic culture constitute a transnational critique of public sphere theory. This critique seeks participatory parity in the public sphere, and considers the conditions necessary to ensure such parity. The need for such a critique stems from a deep-seated correlation between

public identity and single-state citizenship, which denies transnational bodies the political

resources associated with public sphere theory. In response, I have demonstrated that

diasporic media practices examine the conditions of visibility underlying this

understanding of public identity, in order to complicate the long-standing association

between "the public" and what Nancy Fraser calls the nation-state's "Westphalian

political imaginary." I have also argued that these media practices ultimately aim to

recondition public sphere theory for multi-state political action. By proposing a

comparative framework to analyze these texts, my dissertation offers a valuable

contribution to several research fields. However, more work remains to be done within

the scope of this project. This work should explicitly pursue any exclusions arising from

such a framework, and ask whether these exclusions cancel out its basic validity.

Questions of this kind must address the diversity of identity formations clustered under

the heading of "diaspora," and the diversity of media practices that illuminate or occlude

these formations.

Future work should thus more directly engage the cross-sections of diasporic

identity that I have treated in my individual chapters. Diaspora is not a monolithic entity;

it both inherits and modifies categories of class, gender, and sexual orientation. While I

have tried to address these categories whenever possible (for instance, by demonstrating

how Junot Díaz seeks alternate languages to describe diasporic identity outside tropes of

Dominican heteronormativity), subsequent research should evaluate diasporic publics in

light of work done by Michelle Stephens, Michelle Wright, and Carissa Turner Smith.

These and other scholars have illustrated the ways that "diaspora," when applied as a

normative label, often reinforces extant racial and gender hierarchies. As a result, there is

a need moving forward to better articulate diaspora's evolving relationship to such

hierarchies, and the overall consequences of this relationship for the kinds of

participatory parity in the public sphere sought by my project as a whole. However, I

believe that the proposed framework can and should accommodate this kind of work. By

approaching diaspora as a particular mode of public sphere critique, my project opens a

space to explore how "diaspora," as a contested signifier of collective interest, undergoes

shifts in usage that may both oppose and (at times) support such hierarchies.

To address the full breadth of such shifts, research must also trace how the same

social hierarchies embedded in the category of "diaspora" are embedded in the material

technologies that circulate diasporic culture. I would especially like to see an expansion

of the comparative media studies approach employed by this dissertation. Lisa Gitelman

and others have detailed how media platforms modulate sociopolitical norms, treating

(for example) the relationship between phonograph players and gendered public and

private boundaries in the early twentieth century. Scholarship on transnational public

spheres must extend this work to the vast reach of contemporary media ecologies. *Public

Relations* contributes to such an effort by employing a broad understanding of print

culture that includes books, social media, and images. My individual chapters, then,

suggest how future readings might proceed; however, such readings would benefit from

the additional analysis of, for example, sound and film technologies. Most pressingly,

there is an enormous lacuna in cultural scholarship on the relationship between migrant

communities and Internet usage (as noted by Anita Mannur). The precise platforms and

sub-platforms through which such usage occurs are changing daily, with correspondingly rapid changes to diasporic public identity. Scholarship must therefore remain attentive to the emergence of media platforms and transnational public sphere categories that have yet to be invented, as interactions between platforms and publics create new and unforeseen coalitions of collective interest.

In this spirit of ongoing circulation, I would like to conclude by returning to the question (raised in response to Arjun Appadurai) that launched this dissertation: what is a "diasporic public sphere?" I have argued that diasporic public spheres are best understood as a form of "public relations" that very overtly work through contested narratives of affiliation. These narratives attempt to grapple with the media practices that make coherent and politically actionable what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities." The imaginative work of contemporary diasporic novels and poetry develops new languages for the expression of deliberative democracy across multiple nation-states, languages which incorporate the communications technologies that transmit political voice (and create political bodies) over distance. By addressing the conditions of visibility underlying public sphere engagements, the media practices observed in these texts explore the complex expressive agencies employed by diasporic publics living in the half-light of single-state citizenship, and orient these agencies towards a powerful critique of the "Westphalian political imaginary" of the nation-state.

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