

Encounters in Psychic Everywheres
(Meditations on Indeterminacy and Our Grounds of Dispersion)



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Abstract:

I use “psychic everywhere” to articulate the explosion of our selves and entanglements in the modern era: we are hyperconnected, yet our capacities for Being (with) are limited by our terms of recognition. I understand this as a crisis of mobility—one that confuses our sensibilities towards the trauma of *transition*, thus confusing our experience of the world. In my writing, I theoretically fashion my diasporic perspective alongside Asian/diasporic thinkers, centrally Anne Cheng’s Ornamentalism, and arrive at a theory-method of indeterminacy grounded in Asian Americanisms. An accompanying installation/communal performance mirrors this collaborative process of confusion, arriving at the *feeling* of indeterminacy. Grief, of the pains of dislocation, enables this project’s circular self-mapping of a multiplicitous and multidimensional Being we encounter in our brutal intimacies. In place of concrete answers, I demonstrate perplexity as *process*, in hopes of disorienting us into new terms of Relation.

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*Tell me the story
Of all these things.
Beginning wherever you wish, tell even us.*

- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée*

Have I confused you / yet?

ou "not" + *topos* "place" → utopia ("no place")

In 2022, a wave of media attention made visible the disappearing bilingual street signs of New York City's Manhattan Chinatown. It began with a New York Times mapping project that traced the history of Chinatown through these otherwise-standard green street signs, save for the hand-calligraphed characters underneath BOWERY or E. BROADWAY. In the years since, even our most grounded local politicians and organizers have begun to defend the street signs slowly disappearing, and yet previously unnoticeable to most long-term residents, community leaders, or scholars.

I admit, though having grown up in these streets, I also reacted at first with shocked urgency—despite the fact that I have always moved through Chinatown on intuition and other markers, my forgetting street names (in English, let alone the Chinese I am unable to read) almost comical. Why was I so ready to care? Was it the symbols of Chinatown fading away, a visual token of its larger changes? Was it that realization, something akin to guilt, of not having held on closer, for longer? Was it that someone had finally identified something that felt so much our own, only in the moment of their disappearance? And who even is "we"—as in, why do or should other people care (and why am I compelled to ask from a collective)?

I ask these questions from a space of diasporic confusion: among the headlines and others' convictions, I wonder, really, what am I meant to think about this, these cultural objects I am only peripherally familiar with? And the question of "why is this meaningful to *me*" becomes incredibly difficult and I am not yet ready to let go of trying to answer. I suspect a search for meaning or self manifests differently here than the Enlightenment traditions of the West, even if that may be present. We all are conditioned by an accelerating pace of migration and circulation of the past few centuries, some more intensely than others. The exponentially-increasing energies of paradoxically frantic movement and stricter borders entrenched in profit-driven attitudes have ruptured, indelibly, relationships to place, one another, culture, ourselves; such that our orientations (and I speak now specifically as an Asian diasporic subject) can become deeply conditioned by the patterns of the dominant class. Theorist Rey Chow wrote, *It is the permanence of imprints left by the contact with the West that should be remembered even in an ethnic culture's obsession with "itself".*¹ So let us take that relationship to *meaning* seriously: as conditioned by the terms of relation, potentially leading one closer to their multiple worlds, and to themselves. In other words, how can we begin to weave, or recognize, the patterns of our own worlds, as complicatedly involved with patterns of violence and loss? What tools do we have to make something meaningful for ourselves?

Because my relationship to these street signs is more aesthetic than functional, and I speak from my singular experience as the child of immigrants in this particular moment, while recognizing that it is not quite a *singular* experience, nor could I really speak for anyone else. And because I recognize, still, that our diasporic existences (as Chinatowns, as people), is indeed traced

¹ Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 27.

by immense loss: of unknown dialects, of socialities and intimacies, of knowledge we can attempt to but may never fully recover. An almost unfathomable loss of one's figurations and the possible worlds they gave access to. And what if I learned it all (the history, the languages, the alterities so distant now), to be left still craving, still confused on how to feel and how to think, how to be (with one another)? We are prescribed this loss, in a way, such that we seek it. But really I'd like to start elsewhere, somewhere *thicker, fuller*. I presume this question of trying to understand ourselves—not in pursuit of an 'authentic' or 'true' self, but toward meaningful relation to our compromised selves, and the things and beings of our compromised worlds—goes beyond the Asian/American/diasporic subjectivity I am writing from (that itself being an unwieldy force). We are all oriented, I believe, toward an insidious numbness that we can only hope protects us from the destructive pace of the modernizing world. And if we were to place our faith somewhere else?

Then this is the process, perhaps, of locating...myself, and those around me, the worlds we have touched and keep touching. Of the indeterminate ways even the most permanent of imprints *travel*—of multiplicitous desires, sensations, affects, energies. To write through an arena of ambivalence indeed requires a certain, heightened sensibility: a keen awareness of what is ideal to a world, and what is abject, and what is one's own (and is it simply the sensibility that is mine? Is it all that I encounter?). I am *wandering* in the radical place of transition with the ambition that *to wander* is as much the destination as *we* are my destination (*we*: an orientation outwards, that relies on an assuredness of the self to surrender to others). I am *wondering* who or what I'll encounter, that may share my confusion (with suspicions of a *we*). To write a way out of confusion conditioned by loss, towards better *terms of relation* is to fashion myself with the various theoretical and affective threads I have let myself seek, to practice disorienting (myself and you) even as I attempt to make myself legible (to myself and you)—to uncover a style of not just writing or creating, but Being (self and collective) in the world. I am not yet sure where I may arrive.

Where should I begin?

I am still now anxious.

They all walk in and sit on rearranged seats under warm and unfamiliar light. I motion this way, and they rustle past brown paper walls and sit in the audience before strange lights. I stutter to introduce this space: myself.

I am even now anxious, when time passing has shuffled them into free-flow, in-between. I can catch the dissonance traveling in the channels between the two parts of the room. Chatter leaking into the other's silence (though sometimes, people snap, and the projector chirps bird sounds). Intentional stillness leaking into the other's conversational flow. If you stood at the edge, at the meeting point, you could see how different they were, one and the other: but they were porous, so oddly close. I am not sure where to focus, and I let all else choose.

THE PSYCHIC DESPAIR OF NOWHERE

I first encountered the term “psychic nowhere” in my friend Seowon’s lecture performance following her studies on landscape and comfort women during a semester in South Korea. The project is not about her, per se, and yet she narrates discernibly as a woman of Korean heritage born in the United States momentarily returning to her familial ties in South Korea. When she referenced the words, from the work of literary scholar David Eng and psychoanalyst Shinhee Han, I looked around at the others in the room, a crowd of almost entirely Asian and Asian American scholars and peers. This reaction was visceral—accompanying a twist in my pulse was the instinctive turn for mutual validation, as if to motion, *Did you feel that, too?*

The words are charged with a loneliness, disorientation, and untraceability that felt familiar, or perhaps triggering. Eng and Han coined the term in *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation*, in which they explore the social and psychic lives of Asian Americans through clinical case histories, prompted by the immense depression and suicide they observed in their own students—which is to say, the stakes are terribly real. Grounded in their analysis of parachute children (the underage students who have been moved abroad, alone, often to the West and often from Asia), “psychic nowhere” as used here doesn’t only allude to the lack of geographical standing, but also to the lack of a critical vocabulary to understand and negotiate these transnationalisms and one’s own passions (that become arguably incomprehensible in such un-standings). It is more broadly grounded in their theory of racial dissociation, building upon Philip Bromberg’s conception of dissociation as *the loss of capacity for self-reflection, the inability to process emotionally charged mental conflicts, and the disconnection of the mind from the psyche-soma as a (paradoxical) defense to preserve a sense of selfhood and self-continuity*.² They argue that psychoanalysis must be contextualized in larger structural formations: theirs in the history of the racial (Asian American) subject, and in the moment of neoliberal modernity. So I wonder, with the study’s demographics, how applicable this may be for larger populations of people that consider themselves diasporic, Asian in America, Asian American, while acknowledging the resonance of “psychic nowhere” within myself—not as a first-generation parachute child but as American-born, but also as an Asian American student struggling ‘psychically’ in a privileged site of education.

For the words, to me, are also charged with certain fatality. A nondirection perhaps as damaging as misdirection. A pathology that, in its almost comforting prescription, may render and reproduce that paralysis. There is immeasurable violence done, to be sure. Yet to orient around loss or nothing or belonging/existing/arriving nowhere, even if in pursuit of a somewhere, implicitly (or rather explicitly) denies wholeness to our living, what has already been lived, and what can be lived—and upholds the pursuit of wholeness. It’s tempting to diagnose the fractures (the realities of mental devastation that are lived beyond the case studies, that my and other diasporic Asian communities may know too intimately) by way of our critiques of the structures that commit such

² David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Duke University Press, 2019), 121.

fragmentation. But what if the starting point was not all that is lost, but what remains—what is alive, and ours?

* _ * * . . . ~ * . _ *

I am guided by the possessive with respect to Mariana Ortega's work building on Latina feminist thought to develop the concept of a 'multiplicitous self.' In her *mestiza* theory of the self, she interpellates the complexities and disorientations of modern existence as *worlds* that are travelled. She expands María Lugones' 'world-travelling' and also draws heavily from Gloria Anzaldúa to articulate the self not as multiple selves per multiple worlds, but as a process of a singular self in the multiplicity of worlds that are, themselves, incomplete and differentially sensed. But this singular self is not homogenous and not contained, accounting for the lack of coherence in any subject: *Despite this self's multiplicity, temporality and mineness allow for an existential continuity of experience that captures a sense of oneness despite the confusing, ambiguous, or contradictory moments of a life in-between.*³ *Mineness*. This sense of self-possession, a recognition of a material experience of being that cannot be lost by systemic dispossession or theoretical abstraction, felt revelatory.

And we would be reinforcing the violences that dispossess us if we forget that all that is material is social, and has a psyche—across scale, from ourselves, to our parts, and to our collectives. In examining metrically 'successful' gay male Asian American students, Eng and Han detail the somatic dimension of racial dissociation, or the "neoliberal regulation of the self", which manifested against the backdrop of contemporary colorblindness and queer liberalism as severe panic attacks. Yet where they can name this materiality is also the psychoanalytic diagnosis of living through dispersed origins (for Asian diaspora and our psychic pain) as one that reaches psychic 'health' in an adaptive illusion of "unified me-ness".⁴ But I wonder if the illusion of me-ness is a foreclosure itself, of the expansive possibilities of selfhood and the realities of our splinters' endless engagement with their worlds.

Ortega's multiplicitous selfhood emphasizes a particularly confusing and violent multiplicity for some more than others, allowing her to name the specificity of her *mestiza* selfhood as I similarly interpret that diffracted nature of Asian diasporic existence. *Mineness* counters the need to adapt to a sense of cohesion. *Mineness* starts elsewhere, rather than nowhere. *Mineness* is not *me-ness*: it starts from *what is mine*, rather than *what am I (and what is lost from me)*, not in terms of pursuit or property but from the dispersed perspective of *response*: encounter. When we shift the understanding of self from a coherent whole to our fractals' existence in and encounters with many worlds, we are obligated (to ourselves and that which is around us) to sense differently, engage differently. We thus transform the difficult and unending question of recovery or repair, into one of attuning our sensibilities for an awareness of self interacting with the worlds we travel across and through, flexible and permeable through time.

³ Mariana Ortega, *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (State University of New York Press, 2016), 80.

⁴ David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation*, 139.

But to sense mineness is no easy task, in a society delicately calibrated upon alienation. Many poststructural and progressive thinker-creators uphold porousness as a politic of interaction: where boundaries are not rigid, and allow for exchange. But a quality of openness can still be violently imposed: in Anne Anlin Cheng's analysis of hybridity in David Wong Louie's "Bottles of Beaujolais" (1992), she describes his articulation of a *threateningly and seductively porous world* where, *In such a world, we find a crisis not of discrimination, but of indiscrimination*.⁵ Louie's narrator perceives others as constantly in-between worlds, fluctuating between (re)presentations of femininity, animal, the literal and the allegorical. Here is the crisis of indiscrimination in a porous world: the simultaneous incomprehensibility and radical accessibility of that which flows in-between, or off-center—multiple and fluid, yet untraceable and indistinguishable. So (how) do we aim to be porous? Even if the exchange lets in harm (exclusion, exploitation, death enacted through the carelessly indiscriminate ways our bodies are interpellated)? Cheng reads this quality of porousness in her larger theories of the "yellow woman", destructively curated into thinghood by means of her racialization—her personhood displaced elsewhere. Though I will return to this process she names "Ornamentalism", I allude to how the terms of our uneven relations have already foreclosed certain subjects into *presumptive* decipherability, yet still indeterminate and inscrutable. So the challenge of porosity in a porous world does not stem from lack—rather, an overwhelming and sometimes violent fullness. If the marginalized are denied the grounding center of coherent me-ness (that distant Western ideal), if they have been turbulently scattered such that they *feel* nowhere and nothing, what would it mean to ground the pain of dispersal in the circulation of our trace bits, and in the traveled impressions left by the pressures of worlds traveled and inherited? Not as fragments in isolation, but in their felt intensity, visceral and embodied? What would it mean to sense the pain of dislocation (from lived alterity to the ways we present and are represented, from migration and spatial movement) as acute, even potentially devastating, but as *ours*, as *yours*, as powerfully *mine*? What worlds of insurgent care, intimacy, joy, rage, living would that grief open up?

Having grown up in the core of the US enterprise, the grounds on which I have walked, anxiously and with a hesitance too disembodied to be called caution, vaguely promise its masses safety and/or opportunity. Yet we are suspended in thick, polluted air, treated with the managing anaesthesia of American hegemony. But I was also raised by those who moved here for that 'better life'—such that every dream and desire is underlined by the material urgency to survive. Do we risk devastation from heightening our sensitivities, when all that is known is hard-walled 'resilience', a resilience valorized by neoliberal self-sufficiency? But are we already risking devastation by expecting our defenses to turn us sense-less? I am not suggesting wholly free flow—eco-feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana uses the term 'viscous porosity' to emphasize the membrane, or the resistance and frictions differently enacted.⁶ *Viscous porosity* accounts for our boundaries existing in relation and encounter, tending to the material agency that constitutes Being amidst structures that distribute power unevenly. Viscous materialism is grounded in porous interactionism. If we can

⁵ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 121.

⁶ Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, (Indiana University Press, 2008).

build sensitivity to our protective resistances specifically in their complex relationality, is that a different mode of resilient survivability? Can we better see and condition our worlds as our collective implications, and recognize something intimately accessible (familiar) in all those we have walled off as strangers, even within ourselves?

As a deeply feeling person in the diaspora, I am curious about what has been lost and the rhythms we have learned to survive through. But the many questions I ask are more an effort to reorient and to map through time and space my own *mineness*, as a Chinese-American daughter, sibling, peer trained deeply in (self-)estrangement; I have begun from this most personal chasm of isolation, even if I suspect that I must spiral through the similarly-strange sites in which I have been interpellated on my way out. So these questions are also a testament to the particularities of Asian diasporic thought that may confound the foreclosures of dominant paradigms, as it has always and continues to confound itself. I speculate that one of the most powerful (if painful) orientations of the fragmentation and dislocation complicit in 'Asian America' is the leading of ourselves to the world through ourselves—'I', and my *mineness*, are a manifestation of that. The world of the American empire is not one that knows how to grieve—to hold pain, or recognize it without numbing, 'fixing', or fetishizing it. And thus careless structures of violence keep spinning. In a moment that increasingly compresses the fact and time of circulation into globalized and radical interconnectivity, while also demarcating the qualifications of personhood through stricter borders and ideals of citizenship, to speak of and from (Asian) diaspora opens up necessary questions about our ways of being (with one another). There is something quite insidious about such accelerated interconnection without relation, that proximity hasn't fostered the vulnerable intimacies I believe necessary to better hold ourselves and one another. I aim here not to know or name myself (rather, the opposite), but to meditate upon my sites and psychic pain to open us all up to worlds that have been changed by other worlds, to the others shaping these multiple worlds, and to myself. I expect to be met with friction and the thickness of feeling and multi-layered subjective meanings, and to then release. I aspire to reorient, then disorient—to be disoriented. The grief of the world groans with each of our every breath, and my practice is one of becoming intimate with it.

Here we traveled, in projections onto the fabric, its remainders onto the wall behind. A stitching of the moments light danced upon waters and trees in the corners of the world I have seen. I folded in the tourist's picture of children walking, and the tourist's picture of umbrellas crossing a street (can you tell which Chinese diaspora is where?). I folded in a corner of two streets (can you guess why here?).

We can't control them, these places. They'll appear, and they'll pass, and I wonder if you feel the urgency before it transitions elsewhere, too. The observer can attempt to pattern them (but stage fright makes one forget). Yet we cannot expect, or know, the perfect alignment of moment and shadow that transforms the moving image and the intended action. Even if the performer is unaware, or even if they are incredibly aware, this predictable, looped-over video becomes a ghost in another's performance—of place(s) that travel.

MY ANCESTRAL TRADITIONS: TRAVELING

When Chinatown's bilingual street signs were first made in 1969, organizers solved the question of which translation and which dialect to use through community submissions. At that moment in the multi-layered, multi-dialect process of becoming-Chinatown, the names were written predominantly with Toisanese and Cantonese phonetic or literal translations, which follow the Chinese traditional writing system. Toisan, nestled in Guangdong of the greater Pearl River Delta in Southern China, was a key port for China and the global stage—present across global Chinatowns, from its role in the beginnings of Chinese out-migration in the late 18th century, Toisan has considered itself the “Ancestral Home of Overseas Chinese”. As immigration policy opened up the US to Asia in 1965, the sounds of Chinatown echoed more of Standard Cantonese with the influx of immigrants from Guangdong and nearby Hong Kong, and continued to evolve with the arrival of immigrants from Fujian and other regions of China. By the second wave of these bilingual street signs in 1985, significant in demarcating not just language but also the boundaries of Chinatown space, the neighborhood had rapidly diversified and grown, yet the signs still reflected Toisanese and Cantonese dialects dominant in the shadows of its already-gone past.

I grew up among these varied dialects of Chinatown, but mostly around Cantonese and Toisanese—or rather, these were the dialects I learned how to (at least sparsely) listen to. My mother, Shu Mei, had immigrated with her family in 1985 as the eldest of three children from a village in the Duanfen township of Toisan. She was about fourteen years old when they arrived in the New York/New Jersey area. My father, Kevin Lin, left Hong Kong for the University of Oklahoma in 1989 before transferring to Pace University and building a life in New York City. It would be impossible to trace the figurings of myself and of Chinatown, without framing development—that globalized modernity which has made our dislocated existences possible.

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Since China's economic reform and opening-up in 1978, Toisan hasn't developed at the same rate as the rest of China but it is precisely because of the role they have played historically in global development: Feng Zhang, who examines Toisan's transnational development pattern since 1978, figures the site's historical situatedness for emigration, writes: *This development model, a different strategy from industrialization which has dominated and been proven effective in most parts of China in the last two decades, is the manifestation of the Chinese transnational mentality, and in turn, justifies and strengthens such a mentality.*⁷ While its geography had always made it a site of passing through and contact, it was the destructive modern touch of Western forces that made possible mass migration, technologically and ideologically. Capitalist-colonial ventures in China—the Opium Wars, territorialization of Hong Kong, legally enforcing the coolie trade, among much else—did not just bring Chinese peoples all over their global exploits, but also continued to drastically shape and accelerate China and its people's conditions of survival. Toisan in particular

⁷ Feng Zhang. “Remittances, Donations, and Investments in Taishan, China, since 1978: A Transnational Development Pattern,” (2011), 26.

exemplifies an orientation toward emigration, its space dispersed: transnational networks of people and self-organized establishments kept the diaspora intimately and financially connected to home.⁸ Tethered economies and localities in Toisan's villages and under the violently exclusionary constraints in the rest of the world have been structured by and continue to figure a subjectivity of movement whose spatial and psychic landscape is always-already scattered, global, diasporic.

While Toisan is more often descriptively observed, theorizing Toisan, for me, is not abstract—it is lived, as I know it in my family, Chinatown, myself. Hong Kong, on the other hand, has been a fascinating object for the intellectually curious, for its peculiar postcoloniality. Formal annexation in 1842 (in the treaty following the first Opium War), transformed it from a small fishing village to a Crown Colony, and accordingly the biggest depot in East Asia for opium smuggling, human labor shipments, refuge for those escaping China's natural and political tumults, and global imports/exports. As Hong Kong began to rapidly industrialize and later commercialize in the mid-1900s into the hyper-capitalist city the world became familiar with, it existed in exchange, of people, capital, ways of life, with the globalizing West as it did a revolutionizing China seeking stability. Ackbar Abbas, who writes on Hong Kong culture and politics, articulates a 'port mentality': *The city is not so much a place as a space of transit. It has always been, and will perhaps always be, a port in the most literal sense—a doorway, a point in between—even though the nature of the port has changed.*⁹ And so, in the hyper-speed of development as a colonial enterprise, a historical-political imagination narrows into market space and logic; or what some have coined 'doom' (the increasingly distant possibility of 'democracy' or political dreams) and 'boom' (the 'freedom' of economic self-interest).¹⁰

The 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration confirmed the handover of Hong Kong back to China set in 1997. Alongside the impending repression felt in China's 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, Abbas posits this double-trauma alongside Hong Kong's golden age of commercial and cultural production of the 1980s, his thesis being that *This is very precisely a culture of disappearance because it is a culture whose appearance is accompanied by a sense of the imminence of its disappearance, and the cause of its emergence—1997—may also be the cause of its demise.*¹¹ My father's adolescence aligned with this emergence, and he brought it up with me, too—the movies and music, food and curious customs of a place that came to define and defend its temporal and cosmopolitan confusion. The cultural mood was indeed one of contradiction: Abbas describes *how the city dealt with dependency [of being a crown colony] by developing a tendency toward timelessness (achronicity) and placelessness (the inter-national, the para-sitic)* but amidst urgency, they also felt the contradictory need to establish a cultural identity before the handover.¹² In the decades since, Hong Kong has undergone radical changes to their language, political formations, and ways of life upon their reintegration under Chinese sovereignty, and the people have reacted: the Umbrella Movement, the millions marching

⁸ Feng Zhang, "Remittances, Donations, and Investments".

⁹ Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

¹⁰ Abbas, *Hong Kong*.

¹¹ Abbas, 71.

¹² Abbas, 76.

out in the 2019-2020 protests, COVID-19, an outmigration of around 500,000 in the past four years alone. I have always been struck by his way of reading Hong Kong as a *space of disappearance*—in part because I feel I carry fragments of it with me somehow, but intertwined and perhaps overlapping with that is the familiarity of a politics of disappearance in the precarious patterns of development globally, in New York, in diasporic existence. Out of his critique, he coheres the realization of a Hong Kong postculture that relies less on found modes of culture or social change and more in embodied, dispersed anticipation of paradox and disappearance, to let the culture emerge: a surrender to, and freedom of the *now*.

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The culture (that came) of disappearance and a transnational mentality exist in diasporic bodies and collective spaces alike, and beg a new question of relation, under the conditions of *transition*. Chinatowns were formed out of necessity: a transitional space for those forced or coerced out of a clamorous China, and facing racial violence upon their arrivals since the 1850s. But the contemporary political and economic moment has evolved Chinatown space, when ‘culture’ becomes a package-able commodity sitting on desirable space (or property). Looking specifically at Manhattan’s Chinatown, its accelerated development since the 1950s—the ongoing post-industrial urban efforts to substantiate corporate hubs that enclaves often emerge near, real estate developers backed by both government officials and community organizations, lack of consideration from the government that has prompted much of the community’s valorized self-mobilization, transitions in labor economies (ie. the retreat of garment factories and restaurant industry that once sustained the majority of residents), crises uniquely affecting a vulnerable Chinatown (primarily: 9/11 and the COVID-19 pandemic)—reveals the hegemonic use of Chinatown space as expendable, its cultural commodification useful only as much as it is a means of extracting capital. At least for now, we can understand the familiar foreignness of Chineseness as manifested in a neoliberal, profitable embrace of culture: Lisa Lowe writes that, *The Terrain of multiculturalism is then marked by the incorporative process by which a ruling group elicits the “consent” of racial, ethnic, or class minority groups through the promise of equal participation and representation.*¹³ But this being-made-foreign, even when ‘desirable’ is always contingent on our material histories of exclusion, and the ever-present, ongoing specter of material displacement and exclusion.

We have perhaps confused the question of what should be preserved: is it the images of Chinatown, violently obstructed by the overt luxury towers popping up in place? The images of Chinatown that are in part sustained by an enabling consumptive ‘creative class’, the hundreds of galleries and second-hand stores, the trendy restaurateurs carousing the streets with unknown names as to maintain the Chinese-language, working-class factory signage aesthetic? Is our community anger at these sites provocative enough? Chinatown is only going to continue to evolve, as an enclave that was always contingent on local and transnational contexts—so what are we driven to speak on, and how (and why)? The outflow of residents and the developments of Chinatowns in Sunset Park and Flushing, alongside other increasingly diverse experiences of

¹³ Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996), 42.

living/being in Chinatown, should make all of us ask ourselves and one another, what does it mean to speak of Chinatown now? What is Chinatown? In the past few years, our most grounded local politicians and organizers have begun to defend the street signs slowly disappearing, the fact of which was previously unnoticeable to most long-term residents. Chinatown has come to mean many worlds, at times conflicting: even when organizing around the many current issues facing the space and its residents, folks range from cultural producers to elderly tenants, those who grew up in Chinatown and many of those who live outside. It has become a space of representation, interpellated through its images, and yet its ever-changing lived nature perhaps defies that.

*A space of disappearance challenges historical representation in a special way, in that it is difficult to describe precisely because it can adapt so easily to any description. It is a space that engenders images so quickly that it becomes nondescript. [...] Such a space defeats description not because it is illegible and none of the categories fit, but because it is hyperlegible and all the categories seem to fit.*¹⁴

Abbas attempts here an incalculable methodology, but one that is apt for global spaces of excess: refusing definition even as it is already-staticized, flooding itself with threads across time and geography even as it is already-historicized. In Hong Kong, as in Chinatown. The language of 'disappearance' seems to fail his realization of a hyperlegibility—in a similar way to how Eng and Han's 'psychic nowhere' stems, discouragingly, from irrefutable lack. In fact, Eng writes elsewhere of postcolonial Hong Kong as a subject of melancholia but these theoretical labels—disappearance, melancholia, precarity, nowhere, symptoms of, or perhaps constituting, modern space—throttle us toward a timelessness and placelessness. But in writing the permeating -lessness, the space of disappearance clearly becomes a debilitating -fullness: a 'psychic everywhere' that is less an abstraction than it is an explosion of our selves, our entanglements, our deaths and ongoing lives. So *if we are to evoke [...] rather than claim to represent*, then I must tend somehow to a particularism of place, of self, that is meaningful, thoughtful, political, felt.¹⁵

So I have struggled here to provide context, laying out the patterns I hope to evoke. I travel in seemingly vague hops through political economic histories of various spaces of *transition*, and the multiscalar ontologies I attempt to tease out of a reading of place(s), as a reading of 'self'.¹⁶ If Chinatown is not a space of disappearance, then it is a descendant (and wouldn't that make it, too, a strained sensibility? In its own particularity, but which still opens up onto the world, other worlds?). A lineage of dislocations, and I have inherited the psychical workings of these sites in my theoretical meditations—and it is no wonder the first questions we ask upon the recognition of dislocation is who, or what has been displaced; what has been lost. They are helpful questions, at least at first. This pain is ancestral—as is the wisdom. So is there a way to grieve, differently if at all,

¹⁴ Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 73.

¹⁵ Abbas, 74.

¹⁶ I use transition since disappearance seems to tether space to geography; I am defining space, and self, more broadly than its individual spatial units.

that registers the trauma and violence of mobility in its innately webbed, relational, uncontrollable and unintelligible and thick existence? That doesn't simply move on, but insists on moving (with)?

She is delicate, unpainted, mobile. I have named her Ti. By the time I reach her, she seems to have fallen apart, and has been put back together several times. Raw edges, meticulous sutures.

Are you anxious?

There you sit, between light casting onto light and your hands, her body, her props only visible to you: we can see no more than the shadows (do you know that we can see your shadow, too?). The fabric is layered, and it is opaque. I hope you feel safe inside, protected, private. I hope it is intimate even when you remember that there are faces facing you, when you forget sometimes because you cannot see. Are you nervous? Are there two of you? Light playing with light. I wonder how much you can see (I wonder how much of you I can see).

DECORATIVE DIASPORAS: BODIES AND SPACE

The ghosting of these women's bodies—through both physical custody and the cloaking logic of Orientalist female visibility—veils the profound crisis of mobility that in fact conditions these women's lives.

- Anne Anlin Cheng, *Ornamentalism*

In 2024, architect Philip Poon wrote an article titled "Seeing Chinatown as a Readymade", calling upon the conceptual turn of Marcel Duchamp's modernist art and his "readymades": found, mass-produced objects an artist has elevated, through isolation from its intended use, to the status of art. Though he doesn't explicitly engage with Cheng's *Ornamentalism*, she, too, depicts the visibility of Chinatown as aesthetic object (or space). She begins by picking apart young German photographer Arnold Genthe's fascination with the San Francisco Chinatown at the turn of the 19th century, analyzed alongside a series of late 1800s mugshots of Chinese residents to introduce Chinatown through their shared touristic gaze, undergirded with forensic voyeurism and assumed criminality. Genthe found exotic glamour in Chinatown's labored slums, particularly through the juxtaposed Chinese female subject, whose ornamentation he spectacularized. In pursuit of authenticity, he even edited the English of their street signs into Chinese—the "othering" revealed in the execution and valorization of his photos is deeply classed and gendered, and clearly racialized.

Cheng's *Ornamentalism* is a theory of being in which 'personhood' displaced of its own flesh is construed through the ornamental, synthetic, artificial. Through Asiatic femininity, she attempts a new vocabulary that deepens the undeniability of millennia of violent objectification with *the material insistence of object life*, wherein the "yellow woman" exists ambiguously in known terms of

recognition¹⁷—between thinghood and personhood, imagined and conditional, insensate and embodied.¹⁸ In Genthe’s visualizations, it is the decorative clothing from home stylizing their racialized bodies that have committed them to the Western violence of being-made-artifice: *The Asian female body, by virtue of what is on its sartorial surface, is posed teasingly as liminality itself, connoting both inaccessible interiority and inviting exteriority, inscrutable and yet all too legible.*¹⁹ Through the lightness of their gaze, the yellow woman is emptied of personhood into a walking decoration through the also-liminal Chinatown space. Through the image of Asiatic femininity, bedazzled with symbols of the Orient, Ornamentalism accounts for the seductive threat that Asia, and specifically China, has always posed to the West, then imposed upon these superfluous bodies both in their homelands and dispersed elsewhere: *Indeed, “Chinese” has become the metaphor for dead beauty, the living dying into ornamental life. And it is precisely this dynamic dying that lends these inhuman objects their melancholic human beauty.*²⁰ The continuous deaths *she* (the feminized visuality of China/Asia, the woman, Chinatown) suffers arises out of the paradox between an apathetic refusal to build a relation with the other that deems them inscrutable and unknowable, and the projection of knowledge and reckless desire through fetishization. But Cheng reads, in the tension of the subject’s simultaneous anonymity and legibility, an accidental documentation of their distress—their liminality not just of objectified subjecthood but a real material and social dislocation, compressed as deathly bodies in unwelcoming space, into unwelcomed space.²¹

Today’s philosopher-photographers are still enamored with the working-class aesthetics of Chinese elders and symbolic remnants of a rapidly gentrifying Chinatown—particularly at the start of many careers, likely even in some of your peers’ portfolios. Poon urged the lens of the readymade as an opportunity to read the little interactions (and even the bigger tenant or landscape changes) that can be taken for granted or inevitable *as is*, or as lived and moving, and deserving of our keen attention for how change could happen.²² He reads into the static, the breadth and breath of fluctuating dynamics at work, as Cheng similarly does with the ornament. I find the work and words of Mel Chen helpful in broadening a reading of the object: by “animating” it. In a notable part of *Animacies*, they examine how certain (racialized) humans have been animalized, and how the representations that these bodies have already been assigned to are used to delegitimize their political claims. But animacy theory, they explain, takes seriously a being’s complexities, even of their animalized representations: that animacy arises out of the inevitable and constant interaction of matter with one another, and thus they challenge myths of immunity, containment, or repair that have been deployed against not just entire populations of humans, but of objects and symbols, too.

¹⁷ The term itself brutalizing, used by Cheng and myself not in an effort to reclaim or normalize but to illuminate such aesthetic trauma, and the flattening of certain representations of various (East) Asian peoples into one inaccurate, incoherent template.

¹⁸ Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 157.

¹⁹ Cheng, 56.

²⁰ Cheng, 104.

²¹ Cheng, 60.

²² Philip Poon, “Seeing Chinatown as a Readymade,” *Untapped*, November 18, 2024, <https://www.untappedjournal.com/issues/issue-14/philip-poon-seeing-new-york-chinatown-as-a-readymade>.

It feels best articulated in their preliminary definition of affect, unbounded and embedded: *Affect inheres in the capacity to affect and be affected.*²³ Then, to take seriously the synthetic (and even organic) extensions of the ornamental self, or the representations and thick play of meanings (violent as they can be) that come to stylize the corporeal, designates *animate life* not simply as the moment of selfhood, but as the *layers and mediations of 'otherness'* that make possible self-possession.²⁴ These terms of relation convey the undeniable liveliness spurred by subjective affect, that is as much everything it encounters as it is oneself.

The violence of becoming ornament is representational and material, and one of mobility; implicit is also, significantly, the violence of political alienation one experiences in their dislocations. If animacy is life and relation, the aesthetic deathliness of ornament cordones personhood through severing connectivity and sociality, as well as our critical discursive capacity of remembering that the *crisis between persons and things has its origins in and remains haunted by the material, legal, and imaginative history of persons made into things.*²⁵ What Cheng asserts is that our inability, especially in the Asian diaspora, to politicize conversations of the aesthetic is of the same amnesia masking those dynamic histories of thingification and their seemingly static futurities. It seems to me a similar struggle in the preservation of Chinatown and its residents, when neoliberal urgency for capital pushes for the reproduction of legible representations of Chineseness, colliding with a diasporic grip on the very symbols and culture we fear disappearing. I am compelled to ask what is getting swept under: the people, dialects, ways of life displaced because they don't fit a readymade representation. But I am more compelled toward rearranging the fixedness we are prescribed, and the confusion that comes from the crisis of mobility against the obligation of representation and recognition.

We are (in) the presence of beings and space that are spectral (because they are more than flesh, more than body): *The Asiatic female visibility is thus a figure whose materiality is acquired through the imagined projection of the real that in turn relies on an ongoing fluctuation between presumption and facticity. This is why what is at stake here is a question of Asiatic female visibility rather than visibility* (Cheng 2019, 37).²⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff defines *visibility* as the surveilling authority over what is see-able (and not see-able)—the counter is not censorship but more so the limits of interpellation, of our terms of recognition, representation, and identification. Western or modern logic functions on this recognition, such that recognition—with all its entrapments and containments—sets the terms of relation. In a world that demands recognition to simply *be*, the yellow woman is hypervisible: we are meant to observe her. But if we are to follow Mirzoeff's counter to visibility, we must seek to *exchange a look*: to enact the relational encounter with one another and our unrepresentability in the *right to look*, an autonomous *claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity.*²⁷

²³ Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke University Press, 2012), 11.

²⁴ Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 44.

²⁵ Cheng, 106.

²⁶ Cheng, 37.

²⁷ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 473, <https://doi.org/10.1086/659354>.

She who experiences the violence of mobility is conceptually nullified of that, too: of her histories, animacy, collectivities, politics, and self that becomes from the gaze in return.

The relationship to loss that she figures is thus not only the imprints of her many deaths, but also one of psychic alienation amidst the ways she is interpellated: an indeterminacy of what is lost and what remains, and what is hers. The possibility of exchanging a *look*, I wonder, may lie in how we (can) respond to her(/our) loss, or how we grieve—although I speak of the “yellow woman” and write against a totalizing “we”, she holds an intensity of the patterns of loss, representation, and grief that we all encounter. I articulate grief specifically, not to deemphasize the necessity of desire, joy, anger, love, or dreaming (they weave and flow as if porous to one another) but, to echo Judith Butler in their assertion of grievability: *there can be no celebration without an implicit understanding that the life is grievable, that it would be grieved if it were lost, and that this future anterior is installed as the condition of its life.*²⁸ A life can be regarded as life, and can matter, when it is grievable—Butler argues that our obligation to one another does not arise from our death but instead from our sociality, and thus our shared condition of precariousness, that makes one grievable. The struggle to locate oneself is inextricable from our relations and our (capacity for) grief. So if we can transcend the ornament as more animate and affective than the fixity of representation, if we can argue that she is indeed grievable, I stumble to ask if the indeterminacy she faces is also within the grieving. Have her terms of life and death been too obscured for her (us) to grieve? Are her violences too diffuse, too confused for our fields of visibility to make possible a *look* with grief? Does she (do we) know what to even grieve? How to?

I gave you her script on gold and silver foiled paper. Did you understand what it meant (to me)? Tell me, what it meant (to you).

My family burns this paper when we grieve. Be careful.

And be quiet, when we make it outside. They are meant to burn. I was worried, almost, when yours fizzled out, but you had burnt something else by accident. Did you disrupt our grief?

Each person, each paper was inconceivable to me. I was held by our connective threads, even if it meant I might not know you beyond this feeling of my-our collective grief. No, it's okay, don't worry. Here, take the lighter, try again.

²⁸ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2016), 15.

GRIEF WANDERS THROUGH BRUTAL INTIMACIES

The hegemonic response to loss isn't totalizing, even if it is differently negotiated by those who have lived otherwise—a transnational mentality formed of disappearance or transition, for instance, must negotiate loss within immediate contexts of neoliberal control. We live in a time where the dominant structure of whiteness is *melancholic*: theorized by many race scholars including Eng and Cheng, melancholia or melancholy is a structure of affect and a condition defined by its psychically-stuck relationship to the lost object.²⁹ Jinah Kim, who writes of the afterlives of the Pacific in *Postcolonial Grief*, argues through analyzing US militarism and its psychic structures *that the individual and the West are traumatized by the violent insertion of Others into the Self, this regressive rhetoric of therapy creates a value and hierarchy out of our trauma, such that we are living in a time when we are encouraged to be in a state of melancholic attachment to our own sense of loss as opposed to the loss we cause others.*³⁰

While Kim importantly signals that Western melancholic attachment to that 'self' is visualized through the illness, brokenness, and suffering upon the Asian body that has lived through incredible violence, I'm also attentive to how the Asian body's 'post'-trauma (diasporic, healing, grieving, etc.) holds against the melancholic tendencies of the American psyche. Here we are prescribed linear narratives of closure, where 'growth' supposedly evolves us away from the past that holds our lost objects (or replaces them, or provides us with the illusion of such). These structures appear even in the multiplicitous realm of Asian America—for instance, Eng and Han insist that melancholia is not pathological, but the language they use is still inherently diagnostic; and the more sincere critiques of certain 'diasporic poetry' can signal to a tendency to self-contain and self-prescribe: voicing *grievances*, as opposed to *grief*.³¹

Nor is 'grief' in itself enough; it can be weaponized, and it can also throttle us into timelessness and placelessness. Kim writes on that incessant attachment to loss, the danger of the *proximity such a state allows between violence and insurgency, death and the living, the past and future [...] when [grief] does not "seek," but sits in the morass of melancholia, or never-ending mourning.*³² One's relationship to loss can become boundless such that the networks of affect, singularities, moments, places, deaths, afterlives seem to dissolve into one another, the self-in-process untraceable in an imperceptible void: condensing into the feeling, and stifled sensibilities, of nowhere. *Politicizing the structure of grief simultaneously requires the recognition that the force of grief does not itself imagine or desire freedom. And yet it is impossible to think about grief and mourning without imagining freedom from loss and thus the impasses and the incommensurability facing the insurgent drive for freedom.*³³

²⁹ I will use "whiteness" to speak alongside "the West" or the US, the latter differentiated by its particular militarized, multicultural, capitalist deployment of patterns of the West, or whiteness.

³⁰ Jinah Kim, *Postcolonial Grief: The Afterlives of the Pacific Wars in the Americas*, (Duke University Press, 2019), 10-11.

³¹ Grievances being an injustice suffered, grief being the immense emotional response to loss suffered. I think grievances, too, are important even as I believe we are far more disabled by grief—per my focus in this project.

³² Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 11.

³³ Kim, 9.

And so what would it mean to let grief seek? Seek what? Grief seeking not a way out of itself, per se, but out of loss's chokehold, if it is to seek anything (and perhaps the seeking is enough)—toward *what remains*, not with the hope of moving on, but with the unpredictability and unknowability of grief as its own ballistic force, its affect wavering in intensity across time, space, but always there. To let grief seek is to *look* with eyes wiser, deeper, unfathomable, unforgetting—so that patternings of its remnants come into focus, and navigation becomes more possible amidst an *everywhere* that can come into our visibility. The affective presences animating what remains in memory and trace bits carry a potential insurgency in their phantom breath: to make conditions of life more possible, through a solidarity grounded not in oppression, but in relation. For we are already defeated when we walk on the emptied grounds of lack, (the failure and ideal of) wholeness, and self-containing wallows of grief. The memories or the phantasmic that return unbidden don't need our direction; if grief is *seeking*, let us wander through the crises of mobility with its insistent ability to *look*, toward new-old collectivities with the remains and the imprints, new-old relations.³⁴

Because, in many ways, part of what I argue we are grieving (as “yellow woman”, as my woven subjectivities, and beyond) is the loss of our groundings, cultures and ways of knowledge, life, Being—the state of dispersion. So we shall think of the experience of each and every dislocation as a death, embodied or inherited, but for our own survival, we must also see that even in its most regrettable and violent conditions, a new sinew is formed. Kim writes that one of the things at stake is the *recognition of a radical intimacy—due to the temporal heterogeneity and spatial dislocation that is a condition of shared being—between the postcolony and the U.S. liberal nation-state*.³⁵ Intimacy does something crucial to her postcolonial work: that the postcolony is not clean of its traumatic past nor of its oppressor. It is the identification of the *radically intimate ways* in which the postcolony must negotiate not just the aggressor's ‘past’ material investments, but its *psychic* ones; as the aggressor (say, the melancholic West) must also do. In the constant (re)production of forms of domination, this sensitive negotiation—inevitably with each other—has the potential to visualize new forms of relation, as it does that reproduction. Here the postcolony stands in for the diasporic as well, or more broadly for any multiplicitous imperial subject that could ever be considered an ‘other’ (and I will even speak to that multiplicitous interior, or the versions of us within that have been othered).

Attention to our grotesque closeness, that which attachments to loss have foreclosed, makes more clear: *The appearance of the “other” launches the shock not of difference but of intimacy*.³⁶ When we imagine the ornament or the readymade *as is*, we begin to see that the hybrid, the object composite, opens up unto many, many worlds, such that it, too, is in dynamic flux with all that is around it, and *becomes* in that perpetual state of encounter. *Viscous porousness*. Let us focus on the quality of openness rather than their noun forms: so we engage with the subject-object-being differently, and

³⁴ new-old: that which has always-already existed in imperceptible relation to one another, but newly articulated configurations.

³⁵ Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 13.

³⁶ Cheng, *Ornamentation*, 122.

they engage with us differently. We can hold grief while holding ourselves, without narrowing our visual fields and our scope of relation. A radical intimacy at its-our pores.

Again, the ideal of subjective agency thus fails, not only because one's 'personhood' is already compromised but because we are hyperconnected. If the worlds we live in are so often violently porous such that we are made transparent and life is more precarious, let us remember to be viscous—protective and resistant, even as inter-flow occurs. We are already opened up through radical intimacies. The forging of more careful and caring ones, or the conditions for such, demands collaboration, if not yet with the aggressor then with the phantom forces that remain in our wavering presents (wavering presence). *Viscous porousness* is the coalitional protection of our collectives and right to life, between *mineness* (my unassimilable sensibility, ever-attuning itself to what remains) and the multiplicity of worlds, my mineness and yours, all that is learned in our object flesh, and all we do not know. This thickness is *opaque*—drawing through Édouard Glissant's call for opacity, he set a terms of Relation in which we are compelled toward difference through the right to be unknowable, to not be wholly or consumptively understood (by ourselves, and by others). Opacity, which is multilayered and thick, is not obscurity.

Collaboration on these more embracing terms demands, too, our multiplicitous traveling—not just between the worlds that Ortega sees, but across *dimensions*, or the *layers* of our selves and these worlds. To travel through dimensions is not only spatial, or tangible: it is psychical, it is accessing the seemingly same world(s) differently, the same self (selves) differently. Can we trust that grief's incalculable force can enable the encounters that lead us through obscured and quivering layers, back to ourselves and one another? Not of devastation, and not simply of sadness, but such that we may hold grief's complexities without suppression or ignorance, toward more life. To carry grief as we carry our selves. So if we truly consider the patterns of circulation that constitute our opaque and viscous membranes, dimension-traveling may better articulate and locate our transient selves, among the psychic-somatic-object that effuse into that frenzied and jumbling psychic everywhere at the unit of affects and atoms (dis)locating and animating one another. Against the charges of our aggressors (and of aggression), let these patterns intensify such that we can surrender ourselves to the other and receive the other, within and all around us, to intervene with, forge, and illuminate new world-makings.

Maybe you never read the instructions, my intensely personal words on grieving paper or the playbill I gave you on copy paper. It is okay. I have asked nothing of you.

But how did you meet it? The words that are so indecipherably mine. How did you feel your way into movement? There is so much you don't know, but so much I don't know. No performance could happen twice—imitations, perhaps, but time, person(s), projection, text were variable. An encounter, and the performance that is your own. Your ten-fingered shadow hand dances; you have flipped her into a cartwheel. Are you okay if we watch anyways?

THEORY, OR PATTERNING THE FRAGMENTS

It is perhaps unclear in my writing where Asian diasporic thought separates from other lines of thought—I have hopefully woven my subjective self-mapping so it may *theorize* that which is always bigger than myself, my audience implicated even and especially when I talk of something unidentifiable for them, like the Asian American, or the “yellow woman”. In other words, when I speak of my conditions, I speak to shared ones. So I have arrived, oddly but perhaps unsurprisingly, back at “Asian American” with the belief that there is something critical in the scattered indeterminacy of the term itself: who it could speak for and who it doesn’t, from terminology into the patterns of its expressions and desires. Rachel Lee explores through *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America* this compulsion toward the fragment and posthuman ecologies in Asian American cultural and theoretical work. She teases out *the Asian Americanist understanding of biosociality as also the living of oneself electively as fragments—as cuttable and extractable bags of parts—and as highly attuned to operability as the critical ground of agency and citizenship* (28-29).³⁷ The (pre)condition of embodiment, here, is an already-disembodied, indignant force *circulating* its visceral amputations and object extensions.

Patterning the fragments (imagined, somatic, synthetic) rather than thinking of the parts themselves, Lee writes, is particularly useful in provoking Asian Americanisms *paradoxically, due to the amplified sense of the designation “Asian American” as a fictional (discursive) construct—only ambivalently, incoherently, or “problematically” linked to the biological body* (CITE). She alludes to the tension in naming the biological facts of Asian America, because they are indeed ambivalent, incoherent, or problematic. So Asian America’s relationship to the biological (the fragment, the ‘posthuman’, even the use of the term “yellow woman”—if we can take seriously these conceptual fixations as lived curiosities of being ‘biological’ that upset hierarchies of selfhood) mirrors Asian Americanist tendency to distort borders and structure.

The Western episteme hinges upon its separation of description/practice and theory: the same logic that can claim to “read” the yellow woman (as ornament) or the global other (as transparent) is the same logic that seeks to absorb their abjectness: Asian Americanist Kandice Chuh writes succinctly, *This kind of multiculturalism manages at once to sediment Asian Americanness in a narrative of otherness that achieves cohesiveness through an emphasis on (previous) exclusion and powerlessness, and to erase the continuities of the materialities underwriting such positions by insisting on the irrelevance of the past.*³⁸ The Asian/American’s legibility is a denial of mobility, staticized even as our bodies are breathing, ‘adapting’—such that the fact of mobility becomes all the more violent. This

³⁷ Rachel C Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies*, Sexual Cultures (New York University Press, 2014), 28-29.

³⁸ Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: on Asian Americanist critique* (Duke University Press, 2003), 6.

legibility also denies opacity, even as it obscures them into inscrutability (or they can exist only abstractly, as projected image). So the subject, then, is really denied theory—thought, patterns, politics. And yet I crave it.

My question is less about how we reach for theory than it is about how the incoherence of Asian America and its subjects lay a critical groundwork, at once escaping assumed decipherability as well as visualizing deeper and subversively meaningful ways of being and relating. Chuh advocates for a *subjectless* discourse: *By emphasizing the internal instability of “Asian American,” identity of and as the other—the marginal, the marginalized—is encouraged to collapse so that the power relations to which it referred may be articulated anew, as the basis and effect of an Asian Americanist discourse grounded in difference.*³⁹ There is a critical potential for insurgent solidarity when we release the ways we have been other-ed, implicit in the confused assemblage-ing of “Asian America”. The assuredness of internal instability (for the individual and the collective), that can really situate a world beyond an “other” in an embrace of porousness and mutual affectedness, should indicate that the ‘collective’ has always transcended the already-vague bounds of Asian America.

* _ * * . .. ~* . _ *

So to seek ‘wholeness’ or coherence is a sort of containment. *In short, the ethical challenge presented to the (former) imperialist subject who eschews the racism upon which the expansion of imperial whiteness is founded is to act the host to (and have tender feelings for) even those unfamiliar others who remain opaque, unknowable, and, thus, still affectively alien or strange.*⁴⁰ She posits the situation well: even those that can refuse the violence done upon them may not necessarily let that grief breathe beyond the borders of the individuated unit. Take, for instance, Lisa Lowe’s critique of how diasporic cultural expression is often interpellated: *The reduction of the cultural politics of racialized ethnic groups, like Asian Americans, to first-generation/second-generation struggles displaces social differences into a privatized familial opposition. Such reductions contribute to the aestheticizing commodification of Asian American cultural differences, while denying the immigrant histories of material exclusion and differentiation.*⁴¹ Lee’s attention to our fixation on the fragment reframes the family unit, around which the condition of migration tightens the experience of intimacy (and the care and conflict that it entails).⁴² If we conceive of the family unit, or of “Asian America” itself as susceptible to individuation and fragmentation from the networks we live in, we should interrogate any reductionary tendencies; or we fail to visualize an embeddedness in broader communities, and we fall deeper into the trap of the fragment.

I sense my work is deeply Asian Americanist. It often lingers through the convoluted intimacies of my family—even if I have revealed them less explicitly here. Indeed, I always sought *intimacy* with my parents, my brother, my grandparents, ancestors I don’t know how to locate, and I

³⁹ Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*, 9.

⁴⁰ Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse*, 220.

⁴¹ Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 63.

⁴² I define ‘family’ expansively, in the multiple ways diaspora must imagine kin (without needing to critique Western ideals).

have always known this as a political and relational endeavor. It was our collective psychic ruptures that made for an un-feeling of closeness, despite proximity, seeding something sad and not-yet-profound and potentially vicious deep within me, clawing into a Void. I recognized the tenuous fastenings of my family unit as the arena for the world's indiscernible currents to collide frenetically, until the grief I held could sense and crave *meaning, feeling, closeness*. Repair and cohesion used to fuel me, with much vigor—but the disappointment will often lock one deeper in melancholic paralysis, narrowing what I already could not see as it was, as it is. I could never undo the fractures of our compromised existences, and the essence of our junctures are ever-changing such that dislocation is more a continuing fractal than any singular event.

Besides, there is too much dislocation, too much spillage to think in terms of “other”: I write on Hong Kong and Taishan because they helped raise me and my dispersed thoughts, and I write on Chinatown and myself and my theoretical subjects because I am curious about what of mine informs these psyches splayed out into an everywhere, of our many entangled dimensions and worlds. This project began from confusion, of myself and how to be in the world, meaningfully, intimately. But it really began from the immense grief of observing the world, and the confusion that I have realized enables the far reaches of an all-consuming empathy, even if I was missing the feeling of intimacy. So if I am seeking to locate myself, then it is only to better experience that feeling of closeness among the radical intimacies at our dislocations, a ballistic threat if we cannot sense from *what is mine* that is encountered, if we cannot locate *what is mine* to sense encounter—and thus let *what is mine* live on in that perpetual state of transition, of transformation, of transience. To locate is not to name: I trust in the unpredictable chance encounters and affective ghosts to lead me/us *closer*. We have exploded in modern time: I trust our fragments will lead me/us to our entanglements, might it all be felt more so as *circulations*, organic material from which we exist as an echo, a stutter, and muted translation. I trust that surrender to one another lets the grief that lingers within or that we are met with, seek an otherwise.

We have lost track of time here (it may be time to go). I have been an observer tonight. I won't impose. (But I have performed, in the fabrics and sculptures and stagings and words that carry my echoes). I have made myself vulnerable. I can never really simply observe.

They said world-time has slowed here. They have performed, and observed; they have held their own intimacies by doing both, becoming intimate with others by doing either. We have practiced holding dissonance tonight, together, in this surprisingly slowed stage of transition. We have found elsewhere, otherwise in our collaborative confusion (when it turns into ash, remember it).

PRESENT-ING: THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL ASIAN AMERICA

anaesthesia → *an-* ‘without’ + *aisthēsis* ‘sensation’

In this representational-ontological challenge to surrender our terms of identification and recognition, along the lines of Asian American indeterminacy, my turn to aesthetics is imperative: hoping to return to ourselves *sensation* and the capacity to be affected, and to affect, all that is around and within and on us. Though I conceive of aesthetics in this ubiquitous manner I am grounded in the wisdom of those Asian diasporic artists, creatives, and aesthetic thinkers that help us jump dimensions and sense the world differently through their *poetics*.

Dictée by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha is a seminal text in Korean and Asian American discourses, and one of my project’s core consultations. The experimental novel is composed through several women— Korean revolutionary Yu Gwan Soon, Joan of Arc, Demeter and Persephone, Cha’s mother Hyung Soon Huo, Cha herself—and their struggles with their nations, intentionally disembodied, and woven onto the page. I cannot attempt here to translate it, but I’ll allude, if partially, to what it offers. She writes *otherwise*: it is sometimes verse, sometimes destabilized prose, handwritten notes, photographs, or calligraphy. And because she pulls from a whirlwind of historical material, and of what she pulls and how it is re-presented, the novel is held together by fragments and violently jagged edges. But really, it is held together by the patterns, reiterations, and citation that makes porous her figures and their worlds, leaking into the materiality of each distant other. Their trauma, though visceral and material, refuses to be located, fetishized, or fantasized through disembodiment modernist grammars of the sentence and of self and time, utterly useless. *Dictée* offers us a series of parables, dramatizing the various forms of social interpellation as working precisely through echoing our desire for the echo—that is, our desire to repeat.⁴³ It is a powerful autoethnography even as it proves itself to go beyond its self, an ongoing practice in patterning the matter that has traveled through our pores, and how it transforms upon (re)iteration and (re)reading. I am disoriented by it still—leaking through me, I am porous to each of her words and I am encountered by the intensity of certain intimacies: *She allows others. In place of her. Admits others to make full. Make swarm. / Water inhabits the stone, conducts absorption of implantation from the exterior / Lift me up mom to the window.*⁴⁴ In its imitations, admirations, confusions: *Dictée* echoes far beyond the words and breath of Cha.

So I begin again at an everywhere, that must lead also to an everywhen. Filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes of the “Asian American”: *The multidimensional desire to be both here(s) and there(s) implies a more radical ability to shuttle between frontiers and to cut across ethnic allegiances while assuming a specific and contingent legacy.*⁴⁵ There is perhaps something particular to Asian American indeterminacy that we might not just *learn from*, but *imitate*. Multidimensional

⁴³ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*, Race and American Culture (Oxford University Press, 2000), 158.

⁴⁴ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée*, (Panam Press, 1982), 3; 161; 179.

⁴⁵ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Routledge, 1993), 159.

indeterminacy—dimensions broader and deeper and more opaque than worlds, or perhaps permitting us the ability to see our worlds differently. As the patterns begin to emerge more clearly from the imprints and echoes of all the thinkers before me alongside me, I find the question of the necessity of a poetic aesthetics for the Asian diaspora (that seeks to unsettle rather than commodify) pieced thoughtfully by Cheng, as Ornamentalism's key implication lingers in her reprise of a question we have now many times over asked: *What happens when we accept that style, mediated through yet detached from a racial referent, may not be simply the excess or the opposite of ontology but may in fact be a precondition for embodiment, an insight that challenges the very foundation of the category of the human?*⁴⁶

I imagine *style* affords one more of themselves and more of that *mineness* than ornament implies, even as it must necessarily interpellate the violences done within the realm of the visible and the representational. Style as inherent to our Being sutures the severance of theory with ease—style as an ontological mapping leads us elsewhere, with different imaginations, desires, possible interventions, relations. And so I ponder on a teaching from Ocean Vuong what I desire of and for my style, of and for the multiplicitous styles of Asian America:

*We hold the doors, we nurse, we put our heads down, we wash the feet, we do the nails, we press the clothes, we iron it. We accommodate. And I think, because of this, when it comes to Asian American talent, it is only legible when it is seen in service of Bach as prodigies, or Beethovens. You can play the piano well as an instrument—a talented, finely-tuned instrument of Western art—but when it comes to your own thinking, your own creation, you will not be legible. You will be inconceivable. [...] Be prepared to be inconceivable, and then be prepared to innovate beyond that.*⁴⁷

It feels almost like a dare, and then I realize that the process of striving for the world through oneself is a negotiation with our own doubt, that psychic conditioning of self-denial. There is also the doubt of the world's patience and tolerance, and then the doubt of our ability to communicate. The confusion this project loops its way through is in many ways an examination into my own doubt, as potentially a grief improperly contained, that which is seeking these questions, and craving the energy to flow more freely throughout. And I can remember, then, that I am multiplicitous and multidimensional—I am passing through this world, leaving echoes through these words. What these dislocations have given me is a sensibility to the conceivable, and to the inconceivable—I am the intimate meeting point between. Vuong does not say to *be* inconceivable (which is presumed), but rather to be prepared. A condition that knows, intimately, constant flux such that we do not have to be devastated by the inevitability of our self in the world(s). And then, we innovate.

⁴⁶ Cheng, *Ornamentalism*, 98.

⁴⁷ Ocean Vuong, "Ocean Vuong: Artist-in-Residence Welcome Event," (panel, The Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU, New York City, NY. October 2, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNqIyjfO5I>).

I have attempted to translate my psychic force into prose and I have quantum-jumped through space and time on theoretical threads, between the shattered remainders of my kin and distant homelands, onto land and ways of life that I cannot claim, sheltered in the painful refuge of dislocation. I might again affirm my understanding that ‘my psyche’ exists in a collective psychic landscape in which I cannot really separate ‘mine’ from everything else, for ‘mine’ is a constant weaving, overlapping, joining of forces—and yet that sensibility is mine, such that *I* am obligated to the life around me. I hope to be subjectless, even as I am patterning that which I know—as “yellow woman”, Chinese, Asian American, Asian diasporic, diasporic, American, Asian, global, alive, animate. It’s likely confusing as I dip in and out of these subjectivities without verbal warning. Yet the instability of these constructs (as their borders begin to vibrate outward in our conceptual deconstructions), allude graciously to *their* psychic porousness, upheld by their particular lexical viscosities that makes following my theoretical dimension-traveling paradoxically harder (because the bounds are not articulated) and easier (because this ‘style’ is what the theory speaks through).

When I first explored an idea of Asian America as Method, I knew it would be a theoretical rather than a programmatic endeavor. So I propose not my wavering writing style, but the questions and ways of knowing, being, relating that I have circulated through and around as methodology. I have cited many thinkers, but as happens, I encountered in their texts threads and words that articulated ideas I had already made intimate—echoes of our shared collectivities that came to me in other lived and critical forms. When I eventually came upon Laura Hyun Yi Kang’s “Asian Women as Method?” and Chen Kuan-Hsing’s *Asia as Method*, I found helpful their provocations of a certain imagined community as a way of reading not just the subject, but what it implies for those outside these ‘identities’. For Kang, writing method *could and would have to think and think again through “Asian women” as bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing rather than resort to benevolent, nominal inclusion or empathetic identification with those bodies in pain*.⁴⁸ I am insisting that Asian America be taken seriously as ‘bodies of knowledge’ that decenters their place as the other and makes more possible the conditions of relation—in which *bodies* (expansively conceived) that hold and circulate knowledge are taken seriously as well.

The particularity of Asian America, its profound non-sense and many-sense and condition of dislocation, is why I use this term despite (but really, because of) my and many others’ contestation of it—the language is not ‘adaptable’ per se but becomes a contestable one. I am perhaps not theorizing Asian America as much as I am theorizing out of it: seeking Being through the notion of indeterminacy I have felt as particularly Asian American, or being Asian in America. And if we politicize this, such that it is also always a condition of patterning and an attunement of sensibilities, we see that these ways of living are real and possible. We struggle through the indeterminacy not so much of our unfathomable losses but more so of our remains: and here we may find new orientations to the constant deaths and rebirths in matter as in the echoes and imprints that keep going.

⁴⁸ Laura Hyun Yi Kang, “Asian Women as Method?,” in *Traffic in Asian Women* (Duke University Press, 2020), 35.

And if the collective falls apart? The Asian diasporic subject is a concentration of the globalizing, rapidly developing world's anxieties: Michel Foucault wrote, *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.*⁴⁹ Alongside my critiques of the US or the West or whiteness, I am not only asking for more consideration (though maybe it is that simple). I am asking people to ponder their own learned self-containments, if they can even sense their own grief, let alone that of their neighbor, or the world. I am asking people to grieve the pain of mobility, and let grief seek. The subjects I theorize through are critical even and especially in the moment when the fractures of American hegemony are quivering louder and crumbling, as this nation's ghosts threaten to knock us all down.

But even if Western dominance were to falter, the context of circulation as well as the global majority's 'post' (or recovery from the West's colonial exploits) reveal that the West is also porous, its structures of precarity, grief, containment leaking insidiously. We are called to recalibrate the stabilizing of the hierarchies themselves, rather than rearranging. Provoked by *Dictée*, Cheng wrote: *This relationship between self and community is not one of pedagogy but one of citation, with all its successful and unsuccessful imitations.*⁵⁰ In teachings, we seek the chorus, and a relationship to their wisdom, such that it iterates and reiterates when we speak (even if the echoes are not always name-able, even as I practice citation). I have carried hauntings I could only cautiously begin to apprehend through their ghostly pulses, through articulations from those before me, as I seek new (forms of) articulation—and of communication. We are embodied and embedded through reverberations, self-possessed through constant encounter and dispossession.

I think it is an important thing to be sensitive—my parents would say I didn't used to be like this. Through the grief of the world(s), we encounter new-old patterns, and learn to exchange a look with the invisible: transience itself. I have found where I began as I reach the end. The wavering of the present relies on noisy interference, so let us be comforted in the style of their songs, if we can learn it as such, that reminds us we are far more intimate with our worlds than we can conceive of, and we are obligated to enable more life with our echoes. We are singing of better worlds. Surrender to our own inconceivable selves, and all inconceivable others—surrender even the status of self and other. If we strive to be sensitive, we may also let what is particularly and differentially viscous continue forming, forming what is mine, yours, ours; forming strength in our grounds of dispersion and the thrumming of our ghostly webs.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," trans. Jay Miskowiec. *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, no. 5 (1984): 1.

⁵⁰ Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 148.

CODA, THE REPRISE

The project task of letting my grief seek led me to my making practice, or the accompanying work I attempt to describe as an installation-conversation-communal performance. I felt the *insurgent drive* to create something that unsettled our terms of relation, and I sought a manner of Being such that I could not simply write. Yet the style I have translated onto these pages—in spirals, in overwhelmingly-multiple layers and components—also made it to my spatial inquiry. It is open-ended and receptive, even as it is deeply vulnerable (and even as I encode myself in theory and poetics). The event and my writing entangled with the same desire: tracing a process of confusion guided by curiosity rather than paralysis, to arrive at a feeling of indeterminacy, at a place where we are able to hold dissonance. So this holding space (for holding ourselves, one another) was created to disorient, through encounters and transitions into new ways of Being.

In the vein of relation and circulation, I mediate my difficulty in explaining an experience so ephemeral and experimental with the words of others in conversation with this project, as well as my own language elsewhere. I have left fragments of experience throughout this paper: pattern it. As for my intentions, I left this collaborators' note in the "playbill" I distributed (citing from Eiko Otake's "Delicious Movement Manifesto"):

collaborators' note:

I present this, a puzzle, of intimacy (radical, uncomfortable, disorienting)
and imitation. I ask only that you

Move in and around thresholds of different space at a speed that feels
your own (and if we are running out of time)

Honor silence (and if you speak to communicate)

Respect what is beautiful (you are obligated to perform)

Listen for the echoes

screaming + laughing + crying in the weaves of your confusion

Have I confused you / yet?

I wish for the experience of encounter

with you

(I will ask nothing of you)

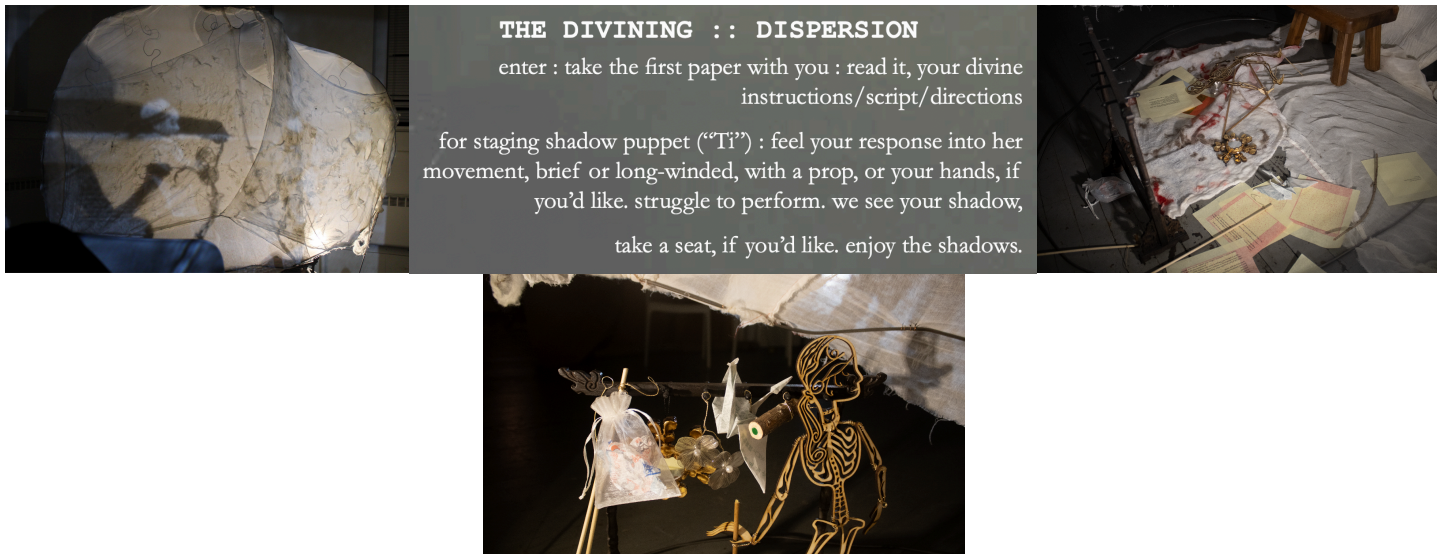
for you, too,

I wish for you to sit with us, join us. *Please add your own.*

* ~ ' ~ * * ' ~ * ~ ' ~ * ~ ' ~ * ~ ' ~ * ~ ' ~ *

Is my desire to Be (with) clear enough yet? But I am arguing it is not so simple, not in this world that operates through recognition, and that is what I hope to confuse.

In woven layers, I pieced together the theater for a shadow doll-puppet on one side of the room. Chairs were set up for an audience, and the 'stage' was a sculpture welded from fragile wire and patchworked with layers of fabric, much of which was tediously felted together by hand. The stage worked as both a performance screen and a giant lantern-tent-chrysalis-confessional-shield-veil (words collected from others): folks were asked to enter and play with the doll-puppet and her props, and thus perform a shadow show. They were prompted by this guidance:



THE DIVINING :: DISPERSION

enter : take the first paper with you : read it, your divine
instructions/script/directions

for staging shadow puppet ("Ti") : feel your response into her
movement, brief or long-winded, with a prop, or your hands, if
you'd like. struggle to perform. we see your shadow,
take a seat, if you'd like. enjoy the shadows.

The 'instructions/script/directions' are my verses, their palpable vulnerability encrypted in poetic language and the reader's unfamiliarity with me. They are not meant to encounter me, per se, as much as they encounter an echo, language itself: the force of intrigue coupled with the obligation to participate makes one curious and more sensitive, if not to the text than to their own imprints that could make possible interpretation, and performance.

Yet I can only stage so much—who is to say that folks were following? The act of Being in this space, then, broadens the possibilities for encounter *through the layered conditions of not knowing*, into deeper sensibilities of the space, of others and their interactions, of materials, of oneself. For the performance entails a certain anxiety: from the awareness of being watched (by the audience, by the recording camera), and from the illuminating projection of a video collage that casts light back onto light, whose transitions (re)locate and travel the sculpture-performance with uncontrollable urgency. That discomfort is dissonant with the safety-intimacy-vulnerability- comfort (words collected from others) encased by the sculpture's opaque skin—but the shadows caught in between lights enact the freedom of surrendering recognition, interpretation, expectation, to hidden others.

LEAKINGS :: RELATION

over this collaboration, towards elsewhere:
let the words, colors, ideas, perplexity spill out.
stutter, and absorb; ask, converse.

say : how lucky to run into you! run into me!

ask : what do you mean? what do you mean? what do i mean?
and other important questions.



My deconstruction of the space sought to disorient our familiarities with the building, and on the other side of the wall was a rearrangement of light and circulation to foster *intimate conversation*—generative, not violent, disorientation. We reoriented this space as to deliberate and decipher intentions and meaning through relation: questions, banter, and presence that practice consent (not consumption) in knowing more. The acceptance of not knowing empowers the exchange of a *look* with another, with all that is unknown: new-old spaces for new-old relations.

And yet, in all the ways these spatial components (within the sculpture, in the audience room, in the conversation room) leak sound, meaning, bodily movements through one another, one must attune themselves through a sensitive awareness of the space's fullness and its viscously porous separations, such that a spillage may always unexpectedly interfere with our attention or our assuredness of Being in a particular place-time. What is separate (in space, our bodies, materials) are radically close to one another, and they/we are *becoming* by means of encounter, in constant transition. Warm lanterns hanging over conversations collide with cooler tones creating shadows, but we carry better the indeterminate ways we are affected by different, multiplicitous energies.

:: OFFERINGS

stay until the end, until now, if you'd like.
a practice of grief for *- ** .. ~* . - *

and the fact of mis-understanding.
fold the paper with intention; can you feel it all around
yet? a feeling of closeness --- it is all y-ours.

The papers upon which I have printed my verses is called joss paper, or spirit money: paper offerings Chinese people burn to grieve their loved ones. I was hesitant to use this paper that is commercial to some and spiritual to others, and turned to my elders, as I sensed it would be crucial to the depth of my intention. They are charged with the grief-power of release, an aura of deathliness that I would have to be cautious with: don't write down names or places, ensure each slip is burned. This final act transported us from the layered, porous spaces inside elsewhere, gathered around a small metal bowl. I looked around me at many non-Chinese faces, unfamiliar with this practice, some intimately familiar. And yet, we all stood with a quiet intensity, attuned to our own intentions empowered by the collective grief we were drawing from. The vulnerability of the poems, the spirituality of the material: to be grounded in this tangible release animated all our other encounters that evening with life, liveliness. Grief made the ways we moved differently with dislocation and with one another that night *real*, a reorientation of the possible as grievable.

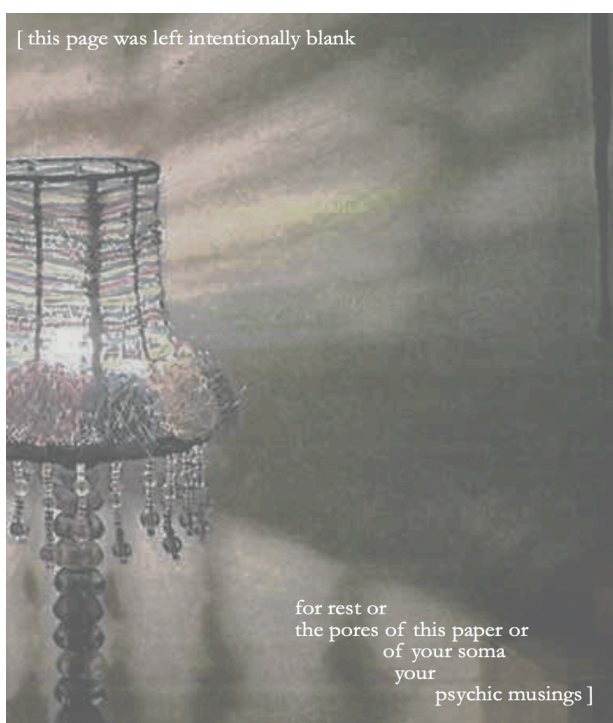
My hope with my creative practice is that it can make one *feel* and encounter themselves in it, through and despite difficulty theory and personal intention. I fear perpetrating inaccess, even as I remain cryptic—in fact, I am seeking *you*, us. The psychic that I have dwelled in with heavy cries and sleepless nights, materializes in my shaping of an experience, but how it is experienced? That is on you, us, to please, enter on y-your own terms. *I can only hope to evoke, rather than claim to represent.* Meditate through your affective forces, towards what they articulate differently than our conscious

minds can. The theories I apprehend are not merely heady thoughts. We have to approach orientations and reflexivity as a way of living, that I hope we experienced in this most ephemeral moment, in the articulation of a space for participation and intimacy that would soon disappear.

I was most curious about the dissonance between witnessing and performing (and also, conversing). The shieldedness of the sculpture and separation of the rooms seemed to have made switching feel more apparent, and the burning ritual seemed to collapse all three “modes.” In truth, I never entered the sculpture in front of the crowd. Perhaps it was nerves, or a hesitance to model my own interpretations, or simply the curiosity of witnessing others move, unexpectedly to me (and why). I had wanted to experience the space as others did, but here we were in my object extensions, my self vibrating the space with my breaths of life. I *was* performing: a delicate holding act, far more potent than the bounds of my body. At which of these points are we able to just Be?

And I did experience the collision of these radical intimacies—practice holding them. A friend who tends to think and move very materially, with intention and a purpose, described to me their experience of having to surrender to the *feeling of not knowing*. Not in acknowledgement of, or in pursuit of, and not alluding to the feeling of anxiety or acceptance that may come from not knowing, but *not knowing* as itself an affective force. I am still confused by this installation-conversation-communal performance—gratefully so. I wonder how far this project has transcended beyond myself, so I can keep becoming intimate with it, being encountered by it, in hopes of returning to Being through the felt force of our inconceivable indeterminacy.

This is the final page of my playbill: for if you have taken notes with me, for if you would like to share. I will also leave my verses here in expectation of encounter, echoing Édouard Glissant, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Ocean Vuong, my mother, my grandfather in my poetics. I hope to hear from you, too.



VERSES

Can you point the way?

**A Special District designation is about preserving the
unique character of the community, ensuring future
development is compatible and benefits existing
residents, businesses, workers, buildings, and cultures.**

Which way did you want to go?

Can you repeat the question?

In the final moments she falls, fails. Focus,
Focus. She has focused all-strength into her frail, failed
fingers and
there is nothing left to refuse. they quiver. a tremor.
It took twenty years with to still her hands.
Now without guise that she is the one who labors,
labored. Reuse. Inherit stilted flow. She filters, flitters.
It is your eyes that shake.
Smoother than a stutter. A sigh. You have completed
breath one.

don't flip the coins, or throw the cards
you should already have the wisdom inside you to know what to do

and if i don't?
if i am all the threads of every dimension mangled up and
even you read the stars, my wrinkles, my moles

be careful

i am,
being careful, i have learned it all from you
having trusted you, always

And yet i am threaded with a certain terrorizing urgency to read to you.

explain myself make

myself non-in-discriminate. my elders tell me

Be prepared to be inconceivable

and my elders tell me

喂, 阿女, 呢排學廣東話冇用

don't you understand i want to speak to you? please let me understand you

please? please understand me?

sorry,

i have given you instructions, guidance, context. i have given you the

answers to your questions before you ever asked, i have given you the

depth of my words and strung it with yours ten thousand times over

because -

let me explain. i'm sorry. i'm sorry.

would you promise to be patient with me?

can i start over?

[translation, clean: " Hey, daughter, learning Cantonese is useless these days "]

philosophizing
progressive
photographing
peers
portfolios
peer
pictures,
please?
permit
prey ing
promise ing
plead ing
permittance

can you hold me?
when you're done, no rush
no, don't worry i'm so okay
no i'm serious, take your time! really
there's no rush just
whenever you get a second
oh no nothing's wrong
i swear, i swear

exhale, little one. if it is staggered, don't
resist. he is a mirror or
a vessel. transformer,
transforming. are you breathing?
she lets others in, become you. let them
take you in shadows in flesh and sinew so
their breath becomes your bones. she gives
you to the world. can you hear yourself
breathing? taking, take, too.

diffract light, such that vision may seek imbalance.
do eyes find a footing?
stop.
must we neglect stasis?
destabilize sense, for my inertia is waiting to be

when the moon waxes red:

she closes her eyes, she is in heat
i think fluorescent lamps have confused our synchrony
(they say it's a myth)
our bloods coursing out of one
into

after images collide with blue light
(the insomniac generation)
did you know eyelids thin as we age?

fat pockets mark me with its excess

i lie awake at night and close my eyes
and bleed

but we knew better the rhythms of the moon

[look away. you don't even know]

[I beg you listen to me]

[obviously]

[I'm sorry. I know you cannot understand me.

Please, can you try this one on?]

i am merely an echo
[lucky to turn into ink into
ash into]

the last name that means connection, and i am too scared to say it
(don't let them take me).

layers of translation mean that you could never tell the difference
between me and [your] masses.

the last name that means forest, and i am proud of my singularity
and i am jealous of their congregation.

two trees together whereas
i belong to the carriage and the boat.

i allude to heaven's grace.
i pray the dead can't reach me here,
opaque in this language
the only one i know how to speak.

sharpen your words, tighten your tongue. enunciate. i cannot understand you, do you understand?

teeth slightly over teeth, overhang just enough to evade

Overbite. there is softness to the hissing in your intermissing, interstices. a lisp registered only if you linger.

pause, and catch yourself.
missing articulation over and

over and

over and

over a-

gain what

are you seeing?

seething, until you

find it but

then tell me i want

to understand

Let the right to opacity;

we only stay here for temporary, we're going to move out soon

there's a lot of thing that I have - I really get, I really have to get to see, is not how I dream. Maybe this country is not something that - how they promote it on a newspaper or, and the, when you see on the TV or magazines so.

I want you to grow up to be confident, to know who you are,

be a lamp watching over our poetics.

vision would start
working. an intuition forgotten

and I'll see the ^{cloud} ~~disappearing~~ gray
Tast ~~drifting~~ ^{til it} ~~disappearing~~ ^{can't} see it anymore

but the stars are shining brighter

and there are more and

more

i know what it feels to float

to know we will be okay

even as i fade back into

start lost; feel the depths still

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