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"New Town is without image": Representations of Enclaves in Cathy Park Hong's Poetry

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Cathy Park Hong's 2007 poetry collection *Dance Dance Revolution* takes place in a vaguely futuristic city called the Desert. In its fictitious history, a revolution–the one from the title–took place, fomented by native residents. The uprising was smothered, and the insurgents exiled to New Town, a ghetto located on the outskirts of the city, across a bridge. We get fragments of description of New Town, which represent it as impenetrable and completely opaque: "New Town is without image. It cannot be imagined" (81). Not only are there no visual representations of this place, but it seems none is possible. In this sense, New Town matches the definition of an enclave, as a space enclosed within and distinct from another, with little to no ties established between the two.

The use of the enclave as motif recurs throughout Hong's poetry; it functions on both a literal, geographical level and a metaphorical one. Hong establishes a constant movement of back and forth between physical and psychological enclaves that interrogates the nation-self continuum, as both nation and self are defined by borders, against an Other. Furthermore, we can link this use of the enclave motif back to the broader dynamics of Asian and Korean American writing, as American and Asian American identities have been constituted as enclave of each other, which in turn has led to complex representations of the enclave as intertwined with these identities. We will argue here that, through her poetry, Hong moves towards a destabilization of the enclave motif, as she stages the porosity and fluctuation of borders that delineate the enclave, thus jeopardizing its usual definitions, and highlights the tension between dynamics of containment and expansion. Thus, the poetic representation of the enclave ties into a politicized analysis of such a space, and allows for a redefinition of the space as it is manifested and constructed socially and geographically.

Korean American Enclaves in the United States

Understanding the history of the Asian American community in the United States means understanding what Lisa Lowe has called the "genealogy of the American institution of citizenship" (*Immigrant Acts*, ix). The long list of immigration exclusion acts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which explicitly targeted migrants from Asian countries in

particular, and their apparent disavowal through the Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1965, which abolished national-origin quotas and reopened the doors of the United States to Asian immigration, attest to the impossibility of separating the conceptualization of what (or who) is American from that of what (or who) is Asian: "In the last century and a half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally" (Lowe 4). Thus, American identity, actualized in the public sphere by citizenship, defines itself as an enclave against a foreign identity, which has over the nineteenth century been embodied by the Asian immigrant. Conversely, Asian American communities have constituted geographical enclaves–Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and the like–within American territory. Their underlying foundational principle is nationality and ethnicity, against the dominant and surrounding Anglo-American structures.

Within the boundaries it has drawn for itself, American identity formation rests on two contradictory movements: excluding and disenfranchising the very subjects whose labor it needs in order to survive economically. As such, it pressures them into assimilation, into a homogenous American identity, while denying them Americanness. Asian immigrants are thus cast "both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins" (Lowe 4). The figure of the Asian, and particularly of the Asian American, is thus to be understood as a liminal site, perpetually seen as "an immigrant, as the 'foreigner-within,' even when born in the United States" (Lowe 5-6). This is particularly acute in the case of the Korean immigrant, who must deal with two complex national formations. On the one hand, the American national formation imposes upon integration a disavowal of previous cultural ties[1] while never committing to complete enfranchisement of non-white immigrant populations. On the other hand, Korean immigrants and Korean Americans do not necessarily perceive the Korean homeland as a stable entity, to which one can eventually come back.

The history of the Korean peninsula highlights this fundamental instability. The Joseon dynasty is often perceived as the cohesive movement behind Korean national formation, lasted five centuries, from 1392 to 1897, and closed itself off until the nineteenth century to foreign powers–hence its nickname: the "hermit kingdom." Still, this did not entail stability in the formation of

[1] This disavowal is not merely implied, but actively pursued through legislation, even today, from questionnaires circulating to determine the loyalty of incarcerated Japanese American men the government hoped to recruit into military service during WWII, to the current wording of the pledge of allegiance ("one Nation, under God, indivisible") which subsumes particularities of social groups into the homogeneity of the nation.

national sovereignty: it relied on economic and political support from China, and Japanese invasions started as early as the late sixteenth century. By the early twentieth century, sandwiched as it was between Russia and Japan, Korea bore the brunt of numerous territorial conflicts. As Elaine Kim noted, Korea has thus been "a perennial battleground" for foreign powers ("Home" 4). In 1910, Japan annexed the country, until 1945. The imperial rule was characterized by the exile and forced displacement of a great part of the Korean population, and the repression and eradication of Korean culture and traditions, including language, which subsequently led to the rise of a specifically Korean nationalistic ethos, that defined the nation, *minjok*, as an ethnic entity. The fall of Japan in World War II and the tussle for power by the two main contending forces, the US and the USSR, led to the division of the peninsula along the 38th parallel into two radically opposed political entities. At first meant to be provisional, this border was further solidified by the Korean War. From 1953 on, North Korea has remained a Stalinist totalitarian regime; in Western representations, it has become the textbook definition of an enclave, isolating itself and developing a reputation as a dystopian, hermetic space free from corruptive foreign influence, even though it heavily relies on aid and trade from China. South Korea in turn has known a series of US-backed autocratic regimes, accompanied by brutal repressions of social movements, until the shift to a market-based democracy in 1987. Its current role as one of the leading economies in East Asia is tributary of the brand of global capitalism the United States has sought to expand throughout the world since WWII.

The Korean diaspora, and more specifically the Korean American community, further complicates any representation of a stable formation. US immigration laws from the early twentieth century regarded Koreans as Japanese and thus barred them access to the country. This confusion was perpetuated in two ways: first with the ongoing Japanese colonization, which stripped Koreans of their national affiliation and sought to impose a Japanese identity; and second with the American proclivity to disregard national and cultural differences and homogenize disparate national formations into one entity. The Korean population already living in the United States at the time found itself torn between several national affiliations. In 1905, Koreans of Hawaii forwarded a petition to President Theodore Roosevelt, to ask the US administration to intervene on behalf of Korean independence. There was no positive response, and in fact the Gentleman's Agreement with Japan was concluded shortly after, whereby the United States would not restrict Japanese immigration but Japan would prevent it. Koreans were thus continually denied their national identity, whether they were colonized subjects or immigrant ones. Once immigration to the United States was opened up again to Asian countries in 1965, the high number of Korean immigrants accentuated the creation of geographically delineated communities where cohesion

was provided mostly by ethnicity–Koreatowns. Their conception of community was itself strongly tied to a certain vision of the homeland that has been disrupted and complicated by several factors: traumatic memory of both colonialism and national fracture due to the Cold War, the circumstances of migration, generational distance, the pressure to assimilate in the United States paired with the weight of racism and white supremacy that considers the "Asian" subject as eternally foreign and Other.

It is thus legitimate to regard the Korean national formation as an unstable enclave whose hermeticity is trumped over and over again; this characterization becomes all the more acute when we consider the Korean diaspora. The concept of the enclave develops into a highly unstable site in the Korean American imagination, defined by both cohesiveness and marginality. It exists away from the main sites of power, on the fringes of whiteness, and yet displays traits of being itself a center, bringing together as it does a particular ethnic community and replicating an identity formation predicated on the insider/outsider binary. However, it does not have to be physical, all the less so as urban ethnic enclaves remain highly permeable spaces: the borders of Koreatowns all over the United States have been constantly shifting; and there is not necessarily a correlation between the informal name of the area and the ethnic makeup of the population there. Furthermore, although there may be physical markers cementing the cultural identity of the place (like the sign in Manhattan naming West 32nd "Korea Way"), and a saturation of signifiers such as names in Hangul on storefronts and other cultural markers, Koreatowns are not entirely isolated, if at all. Thoroughfares pass through them; over the years, they may even have become culturally quaint, heavily gentrified neighborhoods and popular touristic destinations catering to a broader audience than the local one. In short, what made them originally enclaves may have been diluted in the cosmopolitan trend of major American urban centers.

Moreover, the apparent cohesion of Korean American enclaves in the United States around a shared ethnicity must not mask the exterior forces that created them in the first place. As Yoonmee Chang argues in *Writing the Ghetto: Class, Authorship, and the Asian American Ethnic Enclave* (2010), "by recasting the ghetto as an ethnic enclave, by recasting a space of structurally imposed class inequality as a cultural community, the structural pressures of race and class that create racialized ghettos recede from view and are replaced by culture, by the idea that Asian American ghettos are voluntarily formed cultural communities" (2-3). The Korean American immigrant population did gravitate towards one another and form culturally coherent enclaves, but this was a reaction to political, economic, and social forces that racialized them, and either pressured them into assimilation, or sought to further ostracize them.

The dynamics of the enclave synthesize the paradox of the American national formation towards Asian immigrants, who are excluded from the national political sphere all the while their labor becomes crucial to the American economy, and who are commanded to assimilate while being denied recognition of Americanness. Furthermore, the relationship of the enclave to its surroundings points to the subversive potential of Asian American identity formations within the broader context of American identity. If, as we have seen, Asian American identities are inextricable from the construction of American identity, the former may provide alternatives to dominant discourses structuring the latter. In this perspective, we may follow Lisa Lowe, who thematizes Asian American cultural productions "as countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture" (4). Thus, we may consider that the depiction of geographical enclaves in Asian and Korean American literatures purports to materialize these countersites and highlight the possibilities they offer in the construction of alternate discourses.

In *Cities of Others* (2014), Xiaojing Zhou analyzed most notably the importance of Chinatowns in the United States, but we may apply her conclusions to Korean American equivalents: such spaces "[play] an active, and even a subversive and interventional, role in the social and spatial formations and contestations of identities, citizenship, and the nation-state" (6). In this perspective, we can posit that not only do Korean American representations of space draw on a shared cultural memory which finds its most potent expression in the depiction of enclaves, but they also are most effective in opening up new spaces from which to interrogate and rearticulate the definitions of selfhood and nationhood on which the American identity formation is based. The instability characteristic of the Korean American subject, derived from its existence in unstable national formations, modifies and complicates the representation of enclaves. In short, the Korean American experience of homeland, migration, and nationhood has served to transfer the enclave to a mental, psychological plane reproducing modes of boundedness, isolation, and permeability, while highlighting paradoxes in self- and nationhood construction.

The main works I discuss here to illustrate these dynamics are three books by Cathy Park Hong: *Translating Mo'um* (2002), *Dance Dance Revolution* (2007) and *Engine Empire* (2012). All illustrate how the manifestation of the enclave entails a reconceptualization of the self that seeks to both go beyond identity politics and confront its particulars, root itself in its experience of difference. Hong is a contemporary Korean American poet and a major voice in redefining experimental, avant-garde writing. Categorizing her books is no easy task: the *Los Angeles Times* named her second poetry collection *Dance Dance Revolution* as one of their Best Science Fiction

Books in 2007. Hong is perceived to defy literary expectations, especially the ones weighing upon so-called "ethnic writers," who are deemed the representatives of their entire community–what David Palumbo-Liu has called the "deployment of ethnic texts as proxies for ethnic peoples" since dominant models that conceptualize "ethnic literature" assume its status "as authentic, unmediated representations of ethnicity" (12-13). As such, their writing is often immediately considered as autobiographical, or at the very least reflective of identity politics: anything they write cannot possibly be universal in scope. By writing across genre lines, by using the codes of literary traditions that have often been considered as the turf of white male authors, Hong has pushed back against any kind of literary pigeonholing, asserted her creative freedom, and revealed the flaws inherent in the assumption of "universality". She has notably denounced the overwhelming whiteness and colorblind politics of the avant-garde literary community in a 2014 article ("Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde"). There, she highlights how the cultural community perpetuates the dynamics of the national and the political fields: excluding while appropriating the contributions of nonwhite subjects and maintaining a semblance of diversity; favoring whiteness and homogeneity over discordant, plurivocal expressions of identity. To prevent disturbing the status quo, the cultural community keeps marginalized, nonwhite voices in enclaves in order to better police them. In reaction to this stultifying dynamic, Hong's poetic practice is rooted in de-enclaving, fertile cross-pollination, and code-switching, as she claims in that same article:

> For too long, white poets have claimed ownership and territorialized "the new" as their own and for too long experimental minority poets have been cast aside as being derivative of their white contemporaries. If tastemakers of poetry like Marjorie Perloff have this fear of a black planet, let us become "enemies of the aesthetic who are in the act of overwhelming" them and wrest control of the wheels of innovation. […] The voices have returned (they've never gone anywhere) as a matter of survival, and also as minstrelized, digitalized, theatricalized artifice, speaking in a mélange of offshoots, with multiple entryways and exits through the soaring use of aberrant vernaculars. The form is code-switching: code-switching between languages, between Englishes, between genres, between races, between bodies. ("Delusions", par. 9)

The use of the territorialization metaphor is not accidental and points to how effective the figure of the enclave may be to represent the dynamics at work in the formation of subjectivity and nationhood.

Dance Dance Revolution: Language, Gender, and Identity

Hong's writing grapples with the concepts of enclaves as they pertain to identity. It materializes the links between the enforcement of physical, geographical enclaves and the creation of mental ones, while interrogating conceptualizations of selfhood founded on circumscribing the self and delineating it against an "Other." Her second collection, *Dance Dance Revolution*, connects most potently these issues as it hinges precisely on the materialization of warped enclaves. *Dance Dance Revolution* is a poem-sequence primarily set in the Desert, which is a planned city, reminiscent of Las Vegas or Dubai, and thus an enclave in a larger world supposed to be ours but never really referenced other than in passing. Hotels in the Desert are miniaturized cities, meaning an entire city is delineated and literally taken out of cultural and political context to create a new bounded space that exists solely for human consumption. In a fractal-like representational dynamic, each city/hotel becomes an enclave while simultaneously reasserting the transience of space. When one is located inside the hotel, space is neatly delineated and mapped according to an outside, known referent. Yet, given the very definition of a hotel as a place in which one does not usually live permanently, anyone who entered the enclave of the hotel is bound to leave it at some point. Hong thus offers a first representation of enclaves within the bounded location of the Desert as spaces that must be entered *and* exited. By making these enclaves mirrors of actual cities in the world the reader knows, she also reasserts the need to redefine our understanding of exterior geographical and social realities through literary representation. It is also hinted that the Desert is located near a body of water and can be used as a harbor for commerce and tourism: the enclave is not completely cut off from the rest of the world in which it is inscribed. This forces us to reevaluate our understanding of enclave borders as no longer something stable and impenetrable.

The Desert is above all characterized by its linguistic vitality: the language spoken there is both fluid and hermetic, a creolized idiom built on English grammatical structures that culls its vocabulary from "some three hundred languages and dialects" (19). This lingua franca is shared and understood by everyone, yet specific to each individual; subsequently it is highly unstable since it shifts according to other speakers one might have encountered within the same day. Loosening as it does the relationship between language and national origins, it is at once porous and opaque, communal and completely singular. Furthermore, it magnifies issues of indigenous and immigrant expressions, against dominant discourse: as an individualized lingua franca, it may be used as a potent communication tool, with a reduced possibility of recuperation by official authorities. However, this also runs into limits: a poem describes the auctioning of words and phrases, such as "May I have this dance?". As the Historian notes, "so many words have become

trademarked that it is impossible to even speak without stumbling upon someone's trademark" (90). The de-enclaving dynamic initiated by the Desert Creole is still subjected to attempts at control and enforcement of private boundaries and property. In addition, the process through which the Creole came to be is not systematically represented in a positive light: "Language / First began warping when the first ship docked and they hybridized a word for money so that group 1 would understand group 2" (80). At the origins of this language is commercial trade, and these venal origins may have caused perverse alterations that, under the guise of communication, only served to reinforce certain inequalities.

Indeed, while the Desert is presented as an enclave, it is not the only one. The very beginning of the book provides us with a chronology, which indicates that the titular revolution took place in 1988, fomented by native residents of the Desert, who were then sent off to live in exile in New Town. This ghetto is represented as impenetrable and deadly to the exterior visitor: "travelers are not allowed to visit New Town" (82). Access is denied by guards patrolling the bridge that constitutes the only access to the place. Furthermore, emphasis is put on the opacity of the place: "New Town is without image. It cannot be imagined" (81). The statement by the guard warding off unwanted visitors–"get on, nu'ting to see…" (97)–is an idiomatic expression, but it can also be taken literally: nothingness constitutes the essence of this enclave. It is a black hole at the edge of the Desert, constantly threatening its cohesion. New Town lies beyond any imaginative effort to represent it. It is all around an ominous place, as tourists have been repeatedly lured there to their death by exiled residents who are trying "to wrest desert back" (98) from the clutches of the dominant power.

Thus, both spaces, center and margin, function as highly unstable enclaves. Set up as a literal utopia contained within our world, the Desert is both defined and betrayed by its language, which can be used by everyone but not recuperated. No one can hold a monopoly on it; no fixed, definitive allegiance is thus possible. This is a city defined by continuous trade and barter; unlike New Town, where "there is not a trace of trade," especially not concerning the language, which can be traced back "to the first tribe" (80). The purity of language reinforces New Town's status as an enclave, but still it is in no way stable. Its foundations are liminal: "They demolished all the ghost towns and consolidated them into high-rise apartments made of poured concrete;" its borders are constantly being redrawn, moving "a quarter of an inch east everyday" (80), as if the topography itself precluded any possibility of stability and definition.

Existing in transit between these enclaves is the Guide, a South Korean political refugee who fled Korea after participating in the 1980 Kwangju uprising, where "hundreds of civilians demonstrating for constitutional reform and free elections were murdered by U.S.-supported and equipped South Korean elite paratroopers" (Kim 6). Three years later, she moved to the Desert, and began working first as a housekeeper, and then as a tour guide. She constantly feels estranged from the place where she happens to be located but never ceases to cross borders, whether in terms of metaphorical geography or social mobility: she moves from hotel to hotel and is promoted to the rank of tour guide. By moving between the Paris, Belgrade, and St. Petersburg hotels, the Guide replicates a transnational dynamic, albeit a parody of one. Overall, in her arc from revolutionary "whose pirated radio station led thousands into the streets during the uprising" (21) to tour guide who turned informant herself once in the Desert, reporting those who started the revolution from the title, she has been displaced into the public transnational space. Her participation in political movements complicates the assignation of women to the private sphere and domesticity, since the public and national sphere is generally represented and enforced as the domain of masculinity. By being situated within this transnational movement, she offers a model of resistance to patriarchal nationalism that seeks to contain the role of women, even in revolutionary movements.[2]

She speaks her own variant of the Creole, and since she converses with tourists, migrants, and other civilians on a daily basis, this variant is subsequently highly plastic and prone to change, a collage-like assemble of various registers and levels of reference. In this context, linguistic instability mirrors closely her own shifting allegiances, as well as the link between the construction of the Guide's self as revolutionary and exiled and unstable national formations– first South Korea, which endured successive waves of colonization, as well as a geographical and national rupture in the twentieth century, and then the city of the Desert, whose cosmopolitanism belies social and political repression. The construction of selfhood for the Guide is thus intrinsically tied to de-enclaving the subject, transgressing all boundaries set by geopolitical delimitations or social expectations. Even when the Historian appears to record her story as revolutionary and refugee, she remains highly elusive: not only must her speech be deciphered, but she remains determined to speak on her own terms and not be bounded in by any pre-defined narrative. This is reiterated when she does not start speaking until the Historian's tape runs out

[2] In *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalisms* (1998), Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi highlight this in their study of gendered dynamics within Korean nationalisms: "patriarchal ideology confers neither anti-colonial revolutionary agency nor autonomous subjectivity to women. Instead, the boundaries are drawn and the terms set by a male elite, so that women, though always indispensable participants in political struggle, are relegated to the status of voiceless auxiliaries" (4).

(21): she works against the recording of history that would pin down what is by definition unstable.

Translating Mo'um: Thinking the Other As an Enclave

Hong had already explored dynamics of enclaving and border-crossing, both on the physical and psychological planes, as she placed the thorny question of straddling multiple languages and cultures at the heart of *Translating Mo'um*, her first collection. But hybridity here is not just a matter of extolling the flexibility of a bilingual mind. The collection exposes the difficulties, hesitations, and interrogations that come with being torn apart between two worlds that may entail different, or even opposite, processes of subject formation. The opening poem is the first attempt to make sense of the irreducible gap that exists between Korean and English, as linguistic and cultural entities. It starts with glosses on three syllables (*ga, na, da*) remarking on the phonetic properties of the origin language ("the fishy consonant / the monkey vowel") and offering translations of a few words: "*shi*: poem / *kkatchi*: magpie / *ayi*: child" (13). The Korean word and the English word are connected by one precarious punctuation mark, the colon, which is supposed to introduce an explanation of the term that precedes it. Yet here, the juxtaposition of the two words merely gives the illusion of a straightforward equation of equivalence between the languages. Each term remains whole and opaque to the other; consonants may be duplicitous and vowels tricky: giving an exact translation for one word is an impossible task.

As such, the languages remain impermeable to each other, with the Korean words constituting a linguistic enclave within the dominant English-language text, and thus establishing a parallel with social and political dynamics that seek to circumscribe and police the way non-English speakers express themselves. Even though the Korean alphabet is not the same as the English one, this does not prove a hindrance to reading, since all foreign words in the book have been transliterated, or Romanized; however, it does not lessen the impression of defamiliarization for a non-Korean-speaking reader. Overall, though, the "immigrant's tongue" remains obstinately reticent: silence is just as present as speech in the book–characters are mute or do not answer. When there is speech, it is often garbled and unintelligible–"gibberish" (20), literally barbaric, heightened in its Otherness–or else misunderstood, like the American GIs who think *saekshi* means "sexy" (17). The poem provides us with its actual definition: "respectable woman, / a woman eligible for marriage" (17). Cross-cultural communication cannot systematically succeed, and more often than not fails, especially for a transnational speaker whose voice always comes up against an attempt to silence and marginalize her.

The very title of the collection points to the immense difficulty of translation. Cathy Park Hong mentioned in an interview with Jan Clausen that she thinks translation is possible, and absolutely necessary, but that it is in no way a smooth process – her poetry seeks to emphasize "the collisions, kinks, and complications through that cross/cultural conduit," as she calls them ("Poetics of Estrangement" 15). "Mo'um" actually means "body," as Hong clarified in the same interview; an endnote indicates that the traditional romanization of the word is spelled m-o-m, and not m-o-apostrophe-u-m, as in the title. The title poem of the collection thus sidesteps the homophonic confusion but also gives us an overabundance of context for the translation of a single word: "mo'um is: / fur / food / heart / lust" (69). All of these relate to the body, but never give the dictionary translation, dancing around the absent center of the accurate definition, acknowledging the countless asymptotic moments of translating. Just as translating a single word is a hit-and-miss process, existing within a transnational dynamic is often composed of this fumbling around. In much the same way, "Translating *Pagaji*" looks like a traditional language class exercise: it opens with "please fill all appropriate blanks with 'pagaji'" and proceeds to give us sentences riddled with blanks (21). But the readers who do not speak Korean have no translation for *pagaji* and thus no access to the solution of the exercise, which, sieve-like in its structure, proceeds to signify the dislocated narrative of the immigrant.

Furthermore, *Translating Mo'um* articulates portraits of characters who have been traditionally viewed as freaks within the white Western perspective: among those, the two conjoined twins, Chang and Eng Bunker, as well as Saartjie Baartman and Tono Maria, who were put on display in European human zoos in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Saartjie Baartman, a Khoi woman from South Africa, was displayed in England and France, her body deemed a curiosity because of the abnormal proportions of her buttocks and genitalia. Tono Maria was an indigenous Brazilian woman, whose scars, strewn all over her body, totaling more than a hundred, presumably indicated the number of sexual transgressions she had committed within her tribe. Both women were exhibited in the context of "Venus shows" and the Western gaze of the time used them to uphold the alleged purity and moral superiority of the white woman over the non-white woman, who was in turn represented as sexually depraved and physically deformed. This further skewed beauty standards towards Eurocentric norms, perpetuated the mutilation and negation of nonwhite bodies, and continues today, as evidenced by the poem about Tono Maria, where the speaker identifies with the indigenous woman. Baartman and Tono Maria were "forced to star as a grotesque exhibit in the Western narrative of racial otherness and 'native' inferiority" as Jan Clausen notes; the poems show a growing affinity between the speaker and these female

figures whose gender and race ostracize them from the mainstream Western narrative and whose self is repeatedly figured as marginal and dislocated. The Korean/immigrant self, and especially the female self, is thus constructed as an enclave, one that can range from an entire community to a single person; this enclave originates from mirrored external and internal attempts at definition: outside defining inside as Other, inside defining itself as a cohesive Self in the face of this external assault on its identity.

Engine Empire: Dissolving the Limits of the Self

Hong's latest book, *Engine Empire* pushes further back our conception of borders, frontiers, and selfhood. It focuses explicitly on the mechanical and the imperial and addresses successively three turning points in the race to progress: first the past in the Wild West of yore during the Civil War, followed by the present age of mass production and reproduction in an industrial Chinese boomtown, and closing with a future where even consciousness has almost entirely been dematerialized and "smart snow" brings the Internet straight into and within the body: "the search engine is inside us" (68). Form-wise, *Engine Empire* continues in the same genre-bending vein that characterize Hong's previous books, weaving Oulipian, epistolary, lyric, persona, and prose poems into a heterogeneous textual tapestry. The first section in particular, is rich with period-accurate slang and syntax; the diverse forms especially–ballads, lipograms, abecedarians–point to the poetic work of pushing further and further back the frontier of what can be done with text and of interrogating the gradual breakdown of voice and consciousness as we progress through the sections.

The diversity of the self and the permutations it can go through are on full display, as the poems showcase the transformations wrought upon the individual and the collective in an age where globalization and successive waves of empire encroach more and more on the consciousness. The landscapes of the Wild West exacerbate the tension between the collective "we" of the band of "brothers" that are riding westward, spurred on by the promise of the Gold Rush in California, and the individual voice of "Our Jim," the "two-bit half-breed" boy the brothers abducted (21). "Our Jim" is half-Comanche, both a ruthless killer and a prodigious singer, but his voice is perpetually threatened, almost always overwhelmed by the force of the collective, especially against the backdrop of the emerging gold-and-steam-powered empire. Situated at the convergence of indigenous and settler identities, and located within an open, borderless geography, "Our Jim" struggles to remain whole in a world that ultimately puts a bounty on his head. Even though he is still alive by the end of the arc, his situation and fate remain uncertain;

yet he has asserted himself as a potent symbol of the indigenous element that cannot be assimilated by the dominant colonial forces.

The book furthers this erasure movement as it switches to the age of mass production and reproduction in Chinese industrial boomtowns, where industry has become the new imperial force in a state of mass surveillance: "Hail the Industrial Age, hail!" (44). Here, mechanical reproduction precludes individuality–Rembrandt self-portraits become a commodity among others (47)–and prosperity, or at least the semblance of it, does not entail an end to the precariousness of selfhood. Tthe self is caught again between the official forces that would have it controlled and dissolved into a greater homogeneity and its own attempts at maintaining individuality. However, there literally exists no space where it can perform a reclaiming of its own boundaries. Highrise 88, for example, where the characters live, has been left unfinished: "So here is my apartment without its last wall, gaping out to a panoramic view of Shangdu's river" (46). This second arc ends in death: "Then I had a most marvelous piece of luck I died" (61)–that is, the ultimate annihilation of borders and of selfhood is considered to be luck, something to be desired.

The persistent ambivalence between the self and the collective continues into the third part, which takes place in a future where the "World Cloud" has erased the very limits of the mind and of consciousness. Technology has progressed to the extent that "you can go spelunking / in anyone's mind" (69). The very concepts of individual borders and privacy have vanished; the mind itself has been colonized: the absence of borders does not necessarily mean an end to inequalities and imperialism, and doing away with enclaves does not entail the dissolution of the Self/Other binary. The last existing enclave in this futuristic world is called the "Last Untouched Town" and appears in the final poem. It is the only town to remain untouched by the "smart snow;" as such, it is supposed to be a haven for individuality and self-expression, and yet it has a totalitarian feel to it, as "the only hole in a world of light" (89). Its reclusive existence is also threatened: the speaker explains how she swallowed a grain of snow from a mysterious glacier, which supposedly has hallucinogenic, albeit fatal, properties. She stole it, even though she is forbidden by law to touch it; having ingested it, the poem, and the collection, abruptly end on "And this is what I saw" (93). The awakening of the individual consciousness incurs the ineluctable end of the geographical enclave: vision is made possible by de-enclaving the mind, but ambivalence still persists, since this smart snow signifies the loss of all and any borders, and of selfhood.

Conclusion

Through her representations and negotiations of the enclave, and of communities tussling with their immigrant and indigenous dynamics, Hong reveals a crucial paradox of subject formation: the self seeks to define itself while rejecting imposed delineation. This paradox is provided with a most appropriate site of expression in the form of Korean American literature, as it is directly linked to the Korean American and immigrant experience: that of an immigrant self, whose limits are constantly redefined but never quite pinned down. An enclave remains as such insofar as it can sustain a centripetal movement, one of cohesion around a core identity, defined by geography, language, race, ethnicity, politics, and so on. Yet, this movement is definitely not sustainable, since the enclave is defined both by the allegiances at work in the formation of a cohesive community and by the entropic force that constantly threatens to destroy it from the inside and outside.

However, Hong's critical use of the enclave goes beyond the use of a trope found in Korean American literature, since it extends to the questioning of the American national formation, and the subjectivities the latter entails. Starting with her very poetic practice, Hong asserts the need to understand, and dismantle, the territorializations of difference in the national formation, including in the literary community that serves to legitimize or interrogate the nation-self continuum. In *The Ethnic Canon* (1995), David Palumbo-Liu had already articulated the confluence between the creation of literary canons, subject formation, and the politics around difference, to highlight how cultural difference has been erased by apparent diversity: the latter "has served as a springboard for the reaffirmation of traditional assumptions about social negotiations of conflict, a reaffirmation that ironically has the effect of closing down particular sites of difference" (10). Whether teaching or creating literature, mainstream, dominant discourses in the literary world strive to preserve the equivalent of geographical "ethnic enclaves," so as to not disturb the status quo while offering a palatable appearance of diversity. Through her poetry, Hong pushes back against this dynamic, as she both demystifies and complicates the process of constructing subjecthood, relating to an Other, and understanding difference.

By rejecting the enclave as a definitional strategy, the characters and voices staged by Cathy Park Hong evade assimilation within any one community, be it the immigrant one or the American national formation which ceaselessly attempts to integrate them while still maintaining them in a marginalized, subaltern position. They reveal the self and the collective as forces that have the potential to be both subversive and hegemonic, and attempt to strike a balance between the two by becoming transnational subjects, existing at the intersection of self-defined individuality and relational communities, and whose instability and liminality magnifies their disruptive potential in the interrogation of the nation-self continuum.

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