

Eso Es: Toward a New Cartography of the Migratory Text¹

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Abstract

Moving from Walter Benjamin's seven-year exile to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's and Myung Mi Kim's autoethnographic accounts of colonization, acculturation, and translational violence amid nation-building, I analyze the social and political agency of personal texts produced in transit, ultimately asking: How can the writing of migratory texts provide agency for immigrants? How can a literary act of resistance materialize in a literal act of resistance? This contribution moves from the personal lyric to the theoretical critique, an endeavor to poetize and ideologize, and to show that process of migration on the page, while considering the ways in which performance and non-narrative storytelling can foster an alternative to the archive.

Keywords: Autoethnography, exile, migration, migratory text, performance, translation

1. On Identity: Missed/Taken

A. But I'd rather start with B.

B. As in Benjamin, Walter. Who was actually buried by that name: Benjamin Walter. A case of mistaken identity, you would assume, except what was mistaken was his religious state or status. The first name "Benjamin" seemed Christian enough; German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin was given a Christian funeral, before being buried in the Portbou cemetery reserved for "believers."

To relocate ourselves then, within a community of others. SOS—a call for help. *Eso es eso*.

We begin, always, with language. On language, inside of it. Language also absorbs. Reproduces and expands, re-marking what is other, before it remakes it, too, spinning off while circulating, circulating. And when we begin here—like this: on the lips, open up—we can begin to problematize notions of "unity" and "social order" by tracing the self-mythologizing of the European nation-state as cohesive and homogenous through its own

cultural, geographical, political, and linguistic diversity. We might also add the remainder of every myth, which is to say not just the epistemological violence, but the actual terror exerted upon communities and languages, first subdued then acculturated into the nation-states of the continent. What is history but the bonds between generations? And bonds, as we well know, unite people, unless they constrain them. Pascale Casanova (2004) links the birth of literature with the formation of nation-states, a literal and literary inscription of borders that underscores the assimilation of languages into a *lingua franca*, or: enforced commonality.

They say you always have to choose. I always have to choose. Poet or novelist. Fiction or nonfiction. Normative or queer. First-generation citizen or second-generation immigrant. Cuban or Polish. Brown or white. English or anything else. Almost everything I've ever committed to print and had published has been published under the categorical markers of Hispanic and Latino Literature. Sometimes my mother asks me about my being Polish. About Eastern European Studies or Polish Studies or Polish Literature. Where it is or if it exists. If it does exist then where is it, or why is it not applied to my writing if I am writing as a Polish-American? I tell her the world she comes from—which is half of me, which is not to say half of mine—is the Europe that Europe has forgotten, the part of Europe that Europe still forgets. I tell my mother Glissant was right, that the first thing the conqueror exported was his language, and in this, I tell her (or so I imagine), you did your duty, speaking all the time to me in a tongue that you yourself adopted, unless it was a tongue that was forced upon you, forced in you. It takes practice, I often heard growing up. And I knew even then that practice meant repetition, performance, mimicry; and I knew even then that assimilation would be my greatest pose. I tell her I need to keep reminding myself of this, every day. How I always have to choose. How the choice is already made for me and when. And then what? I am making a point about what is accepted and what is acceptable; I am making a point about the language of exception. I want this to be only for myself. And in being for myself this can be all of me.

Graziella Parati (2005), in her introduction to *Migration Italy*, reminds us that for critics who write about alterity it is necessary to define the subject position from which we articulate our own theories on otherness. This invitation to disclose the location and context from which we are speaking is also an invitation to close the gap between the personal and the critical in our research; often this displacement involves a method that can be both self-effacing and intimate, ethical and erotic, because it paves the way for the subject to enter the object of the text as its author. The ongoing deconstruction of academic power is a simultaneous move toward personalizing our research *to* and *for* the community on which we work, and work with.

I'm reminded, again, of another line, something that's been passed on or been passed through Benjamin: "What you want to annihilate, you must not merely know; to complete the job, you must have felt it" (Benjamin 2012a, 362). What is this but a call toward autoethnographic interventions, a move toward converging the critical and personal, theory and narrative; what is this but a detour and a deposition?

2. The Price of Performance: Erasure/Retrieval

Frantz Fanon saw the colonial simulacra as an experience of assimilation, in which the oppressed "turns into a kind of mimic man" (1963, 13) who mirrors their oppressor. But imitation has its uses; on stage or in front of the camera, I am careful to resemble the one giving me instructions; I am careful to re-assemble myself like I did so often as a child, for pure pleasure, standing before so many others to reprise what Simon Says—accounting, years later, for this necessary doubling to better understand how we *perform* all the time for one another—not necessarily in the Baudrillardian sense of simulation or manufacture, not in opposition with or as a binary to *the real*, but in the implicit, everyday ways in which we are for another or by virtue of another.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir's work on trauma theory is rooted in re-locating its discursive structure from a Euro-American psychoanalytic model and towards non-narrative, lyrical, often fragmentary meditations that are at times pedagogic and permeable, emulative and immersive—each of them capable of responding to trauma and identity in ways that conventional narrative cannot. Kabir uses the example of Phnom Penh's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum to show how, among paintings of victims and torturers lining the walls, visitors are conveyed onto a "common ground between representation and reality" (2013, 68), an effect that is equal parts imitative and iterative—an invitation to enact the past as much as to re-embody the present. The potential for these temporal implosions is realized, sentences later, in Kabir's analysis of the Angolan Kuduro dance form, the "bodily-performative practices" of the Kuduristas, her observations on how "the dancing body, playing freely with syncopated contrasts, constantly mocks this temporality [of the 4/4 rhythmic grid]" (2013, 69). Experiencing music and witnessing dance very often makes one move, too, an imitative gesture that leads to an encounter with a space or subject outside one's self, the limbo that can bear bodily sweat as well as transition. A way out of silencing, Kabir maintains, is not only non-narrative but often, non-linguistic. And at every turn, we are continually met with mimesis, even if the imitative gesture or re-appropriated idiom is meant to mirror back to the oppressor an image of themselves which they inwardly, unconsciously, inevitably recognize.

And yet: what is the price of the performance? James Baldwin confirms the toll on the mime and the trauma of mimesis in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*: "It is a very grave matter to be forced to imitate a people for whom

you know—which is the proof of your performance and survival—you do not exist” (1985, 44). We need always be conscious of challenging our own ideas, changing our own tactics, informing and updating them. Just as Fanon wrote about an organizational framework that fixes and frames bodies within twentieth-century colonization, we can re-contextualize the oft-repeated, “Look, a Negro!” of 1952’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as the everyday, insidious objectification of the ubiquitous “illegal” “alien” of 2019. For these bodies, it is not only a question of being bounded within a category or sub-category of a suspect/subject but also to be subject to unbroken immovability, or paradoxically and just as often, immediate expulsion. This is why the colonist, as in the past as for today, is both a merchant and a trafficker. This is why capitalism is a refugee-generating enterprise; the figure of the refugee as the relegated byproduct of an economy of labor and commodities, the upshot of capitalism’s global dependency on militarization.

What would it mean to work on and against ideology from the inside? Disidentification is a refusal and also an opening; a refusal to identify with one world or word and the unfolding of another one, through performance. Marginalized persons have often been able to resist oppression through the utopic possibilities of performance, a practice and a premise undertaken by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) in his book, *Disidentifications*, which explores the tactic and its use as a pre-meditated mode of survival and resistance:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz 1999, 31)

Disidentification becomes another site or sight of resistance and self-creation for oppressed persons; a gaze that is instructive and empowering, and one which relies on the agency of blinking—if only to attend to the re-staging of one’s presence within the scene. “These identities-in-difference,” Muñoz writes, “emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through this disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere” (1999, 7). And in looking back—that is, in returning the gaze—one can document one’s own oppression for the future.

This is where migration and the migratory text intersect with surveillance and the act of looking, forming a matrix together with performance and self-archival. This is where a specific form of un-formation emerges and where erasure begets retrieval. This is only where we begin. This is only where we are going.

3. Methodology as Correspondence

My student says that memory isn't what you remember, it's the last time you remember it. Each time you remember it is the memory. Isn't it the same with the reproduction of knowledge? A conditioned, self-assured, self-secure history, a history of voices drowned out or replaced by other voices, like a bad dub. The sense of having missed something urgent.

How, then, does one get out of the cycle of exchange; how does one circumvent the spotlight of history—how does one dodge time? Jean-François Lyotard, in *Just Gaming*, establishes a connection with popular tradition and its opposition to history and an idea of progress that depends upon accumulation and production. "On the contrary, in the case of popular traditions [...] nothing gets accumulated, that is the narratives must be repeated all the time because they are forgotten all the time" (1985, 39).

What is the difference between being embodied and being embedded? Lyotard says that this continual and persistent repetition makes it impossible to find a first utterer. In the summer of 2017, I decided to write letters to Walter Benjamin, while traversing each point of his exile through France and across the Pyrenees into Portbou, Spain. I read his letters; I wrote him letters back. We were communicating, in our own way, from the same spot on the earth, converging in the night before the night, guillotining the past and splicing it with the present. This essay, like all essays, is an intention, a desire for proximity and association. Reading Benjamin's letters while in exile and following the trail became a translation, out of which I emerged:

Dear Walter, the first letter began, dated June 29, 2017, en route to Paris: I am writing to you from the air. I am following you, at least as far as the Franco-Spanish station of the cross. The edge of the world, according to Walter. *Das Passagen-Werk*. There is no better subject to begin with. I am searching for the social urgency in the mobile text. Your *Arcades Project* is an assemblage of thoughts and images, a shutter roll of film developed from the negatives. A starting point for producing an equality out of history's least common denominators. In each of these endeavors, I think we both asked a similar question: How do we write about something that remains undocumented? [...] We excerpt passages. Excerpts focus and fragment interconnections, provide a route, gather parts in motion. Excerpt, from the Latin *excerptus*, from *ex-carpere*: to gather, pluck. More at harvest. [...] A palimpsest of breaths, voices, interruptions that form revelations when recalled at different points of departure.

Translation—isn't it?—is always an embrace, not a grasping but an act of holding; to go without saying means to go by way of feeling, and this *feeling it out* necessitates a finding—and losing—one's self in meaningful contradictions. What remains, endures. Or: we endure what remains. It is because the past is never past but always present in our lives that we are accountable to cut it open, see what leaks out. We are made accountable; we are made to account for the difference.

In-tend, I mean inside of it lives so much between a single syllable: to move or develop one's course in a particular direction; to stretch, to direct one's self; to pay attention; to act as an attendant (that is to serve); to listen, to await; to manage or apply one's self to the care of, to watch over, to cultivate, to foster; and more still if one were to add another syllable. I am talking about being succulent. Having a soft and generous texture, highly susceptible to impressions or emotion. Tender. A kind of presentation, an offer, a gift.

By embodying the theoretical background I am investigating on the critical level, by embedding its theorists' words into my own narrative work, by layering my voice onto theirs, by playing the track back ... I am trying to choreograph another movement. The question isn't who spoke first—it's who will speak now. The evacuation of distance is intentional, but also temporary. I can haunt my loved ones in life, the way Walter haunts me in death. I can already be the ghost. In this essay, I use etymology to invoke a return, or a departure. Another point of contact. The object of this is not to complicate the spectrum of connections, so much as to make us aware of the nature of our own capacity for providing links. Etymology endeavors to show the history of a linguistic form by showing its development, tracing its transmission from one language to another, analyzing it into its component parts, identifying its cognates in other languages or by identifying a common ancestral form in an ancestral language. Etymology forms identity but also reveals the many ways it moves through national and linguistic borders, bridging gaps but also tracing contradictions. The way words are traces of the actions they can so very often also produce.

Every encounter with space also implies a temporality, invisible time rendered physical through the intervention of the pedestrian who confronts memory by retracing their own steps. For writers on the periphery, it is not a matter of how to tell their story, but how to change it. The question moves from subject to method. It becomes not merely a question of what stories will be told but *how* such stories will be read; it becomes necessary to pay closer attention to the politics of form and the form of politically valent works; to better understand how a text's migratory context informs its disjointed, partial or piecemeal structure, an unsettling that has allowed persons on the move, as well as those who have been internally displaced, to better map their territories of experience. It is not only that migratory texts provoke a new way of reading, but in fact a fundamental re-writing of the nation.

The Warwick Research Collective (2015) suggest that the result of cultural commodification has resulted in the convergence and displacement of traditional boundaries, genres, and media. "The consequence has been," they write, "that hybrid genres and interactive platforms have retrospectively altered our understanding of the historical development of the novel, prompting reappraisal of its strategies and affinities in light of an expanding communicational economy" (WReC 2015, 16). But why limit the scope of inquiry, as WReC has, following Fredric Jameson and Franco Moretti, to the

privileged and prefab form of the novel? The collapse of boundaries between genres and media have not only altered our reading of the novel, but moreover, helped stimulate precisely these hybrid, stochastic, and interactive forms that have replaced it as an agent of potential political expediency.

My interests herein include the oscillation between I and other, citizen and non-being—the rifts, the fissures, the fabrications; the function of the fragment as a way out of totalitarianism, in all its forms; the agency of being split, halved, carved from distant bodies and yet to have only one. What we can learn by taking this discourse of the body to the structure of a work or words. How we can re-make the text in our image just as others have re-made us in theirs.

Together with these points of contact and provocations for the future, I want to continually evoke the past, too, my parents' passages of migration but also my own mestizo background, which has been at the forefront of my life. My mind is not made up. Even if everything else is; formed in mirror-lined gyms or through genetic code. And it always seems to me to be the quality that has given me my strength.

4. The Imperceptibility of Passage, the Imperceptibility of Passing

What is the difference between an alien and a monster? Monster, from the Latin *monstrum* meaning omen, from *monére*, to warn. Monsters are characterized by both their abnormal form or structure, their threatening force, or their deviation from normal or acceptable behaviors. Aliens are always extrinsic, belonging or relating to another person, place, or thing, owning allegiance to another country or government, or differing in nature so greatly to the point of incompatibility; alien from the Latin *alius*: other. Monsters evoke horror. Aliens effect incomprehension, the gap created by the uncanny.

As a child, I was fascinated by both. As an adult, I've only recently begun talking to my parents about their movement from alien to citizen, other to I. I keep listening to their stories, or what, in certain moments, their silence has to tell me.

Naturalization, what a process I often think, and really try to imagine the miracle.

My mother was born in a small village called Zawady, a hundred miles north of Warsaw. My father left Santiago de Cuba when he was fourteen. The East and the West meeting, and the arc of the explosion was a peninsula. I inherited both of their will to change, whether it meant through mimesis or prolonged meditation, a re-appropriation of negation in verse or through the virtue of dissimulation. Every adaptation is an act of translation. Translate, from Latin *translatus*, to transfer, from *trans-latus*, past participle of *ferre*, to carry. More at tolerate, bear. Meena Alexander writes that even "what is unspoken, even [the] unspeakable must be born into language" (2009, 93).

Sometimes things can't be translated, and I mean in both senses of the word. In mid-twentieth-century North America, becoming American became a process of naturalization. There was nothing natural about the process. Thanks to the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, any Cuban who reached US territorial waters was allowed to remain in the US and pursue residency a year after. But my father had come in 1959, which meant he had to leave the country, before he could become a part of it. After departing Canada, and the US Embassy in Montreal, he returned to New York with a green card, the same token of residency my mother received as a child, renewable every year, with a fee, which my *babcia* paid at the post office.

Green cards give you status as a permanent resident, but they don't naturalize you. First, my father tells me, he had to find out if he and my mother were qualified to become citizens. After being deemed eligible, they each had to complete an application, pay the application fee, file several other forms, have their fingerprints taken, attend an interview, and pass an English and a civics test. They had to have witnesses that could vouch for them; the witnesses, too, had to be interviewed. Work will set you free, under dictatorships, the same as in a democracy. If you weren't employed—my mother was still in high school—you had to present reports from the institution you attended. Then my parents had to swear loyalty to the United States government, which seemed odd, at least to me, since my father had already served in its army during the Vietnam War, eight years after arriving on US soil.

What is the difference between swearing your loyalty and swearing your life? And why did it only become real when it was affirmed by a piece of paper? Words make people do things, as J.L. Austin (1979) affirmed so long ago. Sometimes, words make people too.

Juan and Zosia had produced me and before me, my brother; each a hybrid: a person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions; something heterogeneous in origin or composition; an offspring of incongruities and uncomformity, which is to say a *break in recorded form*. Yet rather than emphasizing the hierarchical parent-offspring structure, I would like to redirect the effects of hybridity toward a framework in which everything becomes relational, a moment in which previously disparate things are gazed through another lens of connectivity, with intricate, often haphazard exchanges. Relation, from Latin *referre*, to carry back, also offers us another definition: an account, the act of telling, or self-reference. Migrancy is hybrid in its very nature, characterized by the need to move, to traverse multiple spaces at once: the here and there of spatial traversing; the then and now of time and memory.

In the white, white West-world²—so many copies, without any original—in which I live, I wield such a privilege to pass, to move, to negotiate different boundaries, the way my father was able to do, upon arriving in New York

City and eventually moving up the ranks from the mailroom to the line, as a lending officer. He was lending out his experience with credit and banking without giving up anything of himself, not all the way or not at all, passing himself off to clients and strangers—even his girlfriend’s mother, my would-be *babcia*—as Italian, in the wake of anti-Cuban rhetoric and the Bay of Pigs. “I didn’t pass myself off,” Juan corrects me today, when I read him what I’ve written. “I just didn’t correct anyone, their assumptions.” “Dissimulating?” I ask. “Dissimulating?” he echoes. “Pretending to not have,” I return, “to not be, what you are.”

I have eyes that are brown—like my father’s—or green, like my mother’s—or somewhere in between, depending on the time of day or season, the kind of light. I have dirty blond hair that turns dark in the winter, when my skin turns nearly white. I have broad lips, like my Aunt Nena; I have hardly any hair above my hips and below my chin, the way my abuelo, nicknamed “El Chino,” looked. In the photograph framed in the kitchen, I can see why the racialized designation was placed upon him, even as Cuba welcomed so many immigrants from China and Western Asia, especially Lebanon, like Tío David’s parents, to work alongside the labor brought in from Africa; even as Cuba welcomed so many immigrants from Europe, refugees and asylum-seekers among them, to white-out those slave laborers from Africa, to beautify the nation in the image of its northern neighbors, removing the stain of its sins while retaining the capital effects for national sugar production.³ As Hannah Arendt explains in her analysis of inequality through organization in 1951’s *The Origin of Totalitarianism*: “The reason why highly developed political communities, such as the ancient city-states or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination because they indicate all too clearly those spheres where men cannot act and change at will [...]” (1973, 301). And yet is it not also adaptation, and the ability to act on this revision, to alter the present so as to evade a recurrent past, that provide the staging ground for telling one’s story?

It is also true that questioning one’s own identity, and asking who one wants to become, inheres a certain privilege that precedes the investigation itself. “After all,” Zygmunt Bauman writes, “asking ‘who you are’ makes sense to you only once you believe that you can be someone other than you are; only if you have a choice, and only if it depends on you what you choose; only if you have to do something, that is, for the choice to be ‘real’ and to hold” (2004, 19). So many others, like Benjamin, did not have the choice; or rather, the choice was taken from them. Over six years into his exile, Benjamin’s German citizenship is officially revoked in July 1939. A year later, desperate, he attempts to pass himself off as a sailor, in Marseille, after administrators deny his attempt to obtain an exit visa necessary for leaving the country.

So many people are forced to live this way; to give themselves up or over to a world in which the authorities decide the law in a single stamp, checkmark, checkpoint; a world in which life is delivered and denigrated by a piece of paper. According to the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, between 1965 and 2000, 75 million people undertook cross-border movements to settle in countries other than that of their origin. And as movement in the last half of the twentieth century accelerated, so too, did the generation of those who remained unprotected by state law and human rights.

Are the contemporary experiences of freedom under democracies very different from Europe during wartime occupation? In 1937, months before annexing Austria, Hitler lays out his plans for national expansion, which required not conquering, but crossing out. In doing so, he identifies the densely populated region of Central-Western Europe as a designated *volkloser Raum* (Arendt 2006, 217), a space empty of people. What Hitler wanted was not, as he said, only a people-less space; what Hitler wanted was the inability for people to pass—a paradigm for today's camp, and the spatial and imaginary distancing it presupposes upon a general populace who can hardly fathom the unprotected person; all of us who are incapable, also, of comprehending the person in transition.

What happened to Walter Benjamin—what happens to countless other migrants today—was not so much a question of religious differences or economic instability but national interests; the cohering of citizenship and the control of the state as to how its people would be written, making and remaking them in a singular (and continuously shifting) image: a national identity. The Jewish people were only the most pronounced minority of all the millions of stateless in Europe, denaturalized and driven out from their homes. Europe, bored by its own colonial spectacle, decided to turn its imperializing gaze inward, to apply its long-practiced colonizing methods on its own people.

The connections between belonging and exclusion are useful when we think about how power becomes sedimented—and how it might be contested—in non-narrative texts, subject- and identity-formations, counter-archival investigations, and performance. Central to these is translation, or the concentration and willingness to continuously return, to the original if not also the beginning.

5. The Performance of Theory and Theory as Performance: A Case Study

A. At Universal Studios and at Disney World I remember watching everything with my eyes half-closed, trying to will my imagination to replace the image. Hoping constantly that the special effects would turn into real danger, real human fear and desire. I was five.

I was here in my imagination long before I actually came here. I find it hard myself to recall what it felt like when things were still unexpected; the

first flashes of surprise, a sense of wonderment, or a love that felt abundant, undetermined, real.

Plus a certain poetic force imbued in anything that can't be understood at all, not at all or all the way, which you could say about bad work or the imagination that wills good work into existence.

I wanted this work to do nothing if not repeat itself; a net-work re-routed by its own previous manifestations to find or form new links of connectivity, unlike the physical archive, and in revealing the faulty lens of a narrative-historical timeline, to create or capture a new system of order and representation based on aesthetic performativity: copy, paste, combine, find all, record, screenshot, transfer, transmit.

B. Barthes suggests in "Myth Today," writing in the 1950s, that in our present alienation brought upon by modernity, we have two choices: "[...] either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is *ultimately* impenetrable, irreducible, and in this case, poetize. In a word, I do not yet see a synthesis between ideology and poetry" (1972, 158-159).

Perhaps Barthes didn't account for a work's ability to transmit both; its ability to posit and perform theory, to reconcile description and explanation, a conception of the poetic mode attested to by Jacques Roubaud, in "Poetry & Orality": "In modes of speech other than poetry, meaning must be considered public, ideally transmissible; that which is not transmissible is not part of the meaning. In the case of poetry, it's the exact opposite," Roubaud writes. "Which is not to say that poems do not contain a transmissible meaning; if there is one, it's there as a surplus" (2009, 20). No ends, only remnants. Only ruins, only runes, only incantation and song, only recitation. Giorgio Agamben re-interprets Hölderlin's statement that "what remains is what the poets found" (*was bleibt, stiften die Dichter*) as a testament to poetry's ability to bear witness. "Poets—witnesses—" Agamben argues, "found language as what remains, as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking" (1999, 161).

Poetry, then, because of its liminal nature, makes possible the rediscovery of new geographies, new identities, new moments of meaning-making on and through the body. "Time sucks and blows through us and sends us reeling," Alexander writes. "Memory makes us hop and race and dance and flee. Still, the present is always with us, and our poems transfigure place by marking time" (2009, 180). Transfiguring space, of course, is as much about an environment as it is about the embodied experiences of the persons within it. I want to allow this roaming but also to allow the roaming fragments to fall further so as to become the text in question. To question the text; the text as question. For *want* is said in many ways.

"Poetry makes a dwelling for us," Alexander writes elsewhere, "a tent of words" (2009, 79). The poem I reference itemizes its actions; each number initiates description and direction, which is another kind of movement.

How can the writing of migratory texts provide agency for immigrants? How can a literary act of resistance materialize in a literal act of resistance? Antonio Negri points out that language constitutes not only a creative force in society, but also a form that might exceed any “linear relationship, and hence any absolute or unilateral control” (2008, 55)—an interchange that exceeds empire, a resistance that is itself a celebration and a celebration that is common to all forms of mobility. The desire to move is a move toward an eventual state of grace.

This essay will move from the personal lyric to the theoretical critique, an endeavor to poetize and ideologize, and to show that process of migration on the page. What happens when theories take shape, submit to investigation, and enact?

C. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung, author of *Dictée*: published in 1983, an autoethnographic text borrowing or bearing epistolary, visual, and cinematic forms to focus on several women’s lived realities amid the structuring of nation, the initialing and initializing of forced migration. Poetry, essay, diary, reportage, novel, correspondence—a choreography that includes each movement: a migratory text. *Dictée*’s opening pages—a preface to the past—read as dictation, Cha transcribing the actions of the words into language; translation of French but also the translating of experience encountered in transcription. So many Ts.

Open paragraph It was the first day period
 She had come from a far period tonight at dinner
 comma the families would ask comma open
 quotation marks How was the first day interroga-
 tion mark close quotation marks at least to say [...](Cha 2001, 1)

Back to *D*, Cha’s “Disease” similarly becomes an exercise in elocution, or the refusal to speak, or: simply refusal, of being silenced. Disease, from Old French, *dire*: to say. To show the physicality of the words in the body and on the body. The effects of each on each, the trauma. As we near the end of the preface—and the beginning of “Clio/History”—Cha fulfills the “interrogation mark” signposted on the first page, turning the Act of Contrition into a Q&A confession in which every question is actually a command, insisted upon in all caps. When Cha writes, “Rendered immortal their acts without the leisure to examine whether the parts false the parts real according to History’s revision” (2001, 28), I am reminded of the revised historical materialism that Benjamin called for in his life’s work, to open the actuality of the present with the reawakening of past possibility.

Instead, something else happened or happens. All the time. History demands the transmission of a single narrative: information, as Cha writes, congealed to make bland and mundane. The undocumented remains so, unless, as Cha does here, we “extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion” (2001, 33). Unless, as Cha does again and

again, as in History's beginning, as in the chapter's final pages, we reshape the static archive through the subversive autoethnographic act.

Autoethnography is disidentificatory in the sense that it signals a radical reversal whereby marginalized persons represent themselves by re-using the terms of their oppression under the sign of normative and dominant culture; disidentification is autoethnographic because it is a movement of the personal into the public sphere, the staging of a new political formation through the persistent intervention of self. Each of these methodologies enact a disruption and a decoding, a syncretic intersectionality that troubles binaries and the reproduction of a representational economy rooted in institutional frames that are as fixed as they are prescriptive.

I am interested in personal collection, the ways in which the personal text can foster an alternative to the mausoleum of an archive that has reshaped the past and already decided the future. This tension between memory and artifact becomes, pages later, the central concern of *Dictée's* first chapter. Memory is present, picture is past, subject to physical decay, inevitable death, finality, instead of the liminal space between life and death, instead of, as Cha writes, "dy-ing". An act, ever-present. The progression toward possibilities, even if what's possible is only the end of life.

Time stops in the halls of memory and yet Cha begins so many of her chapters by responding to photographs, as she does a page into "Calliope/Epic Poetry": "Mother, you are eighteen years old" (2001, 45)—an attempt, I think, to reconcile the outside (photo) with the inside (memory), or to complicate it, to see where each diverges, to re-write the memory or etch, instead, a caption to the image that has always been absent of one. "Mother," Cha writes, "I dream you just to be able to see you" (2001, 49). Nevertheless, she doubts the efficacy of the endeavor, or understands the limits of witnessing, upon time that is oppression itself: "The illusion that the act of viewing is to make alteration of the visible" (Cha 2001, 79).

There are limits; there are always limits in systems of inherited inequality, of who speaks and of what they are permitted to speak of, of who listens, of what gets heard or does it. "Many generations pass and many deceptions in the sequence in the chronology towards the destination" (Cha 2001, 80), she writes. But a page later, the algorithm breaks open, split and sewn back together from "the missing narrative. From the multitude of narrations. Missing. From the chronicles. For another telling for other recitations" (Cha 2001, 81).

This being only one, and only the first one, and only the pause before the next one.

"It is the wreckage of what surrounds me," Fanon declared, "that provides the foundation for my virility" (1986, 164). It is resistance that becomes its own alterity, and alterity—of conflict, of complication, of split—that becomes the tide of resistance. This is why alterity is a form of resistance as much as it is an auguring of its potentiality, a space in which difference is celebrated,

as much for its diversity as for its agency in forming an identity of opposition, a resistance in and of itself. And to resist means first to consider the measure and capacity, as well as the means and the outcome: *prepared to act*, in every sense of the word.

Friends and strangers have often asked why I sign my name by simply repeating my initials: two c's, so close to each other they threaten to cancel each other out. There is something to say about my continual response to the elision of my identity and my habitual tendency to elide it myself, but I don't know if I want to name what's next, to put it in words, to write them into the text. Why do anything if we can just hover like this, a little longer, without having to do anything but look.

"The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once," Donna Haraway attests in "A Cyborg Manifesto," "because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point" (2001, 295). The struggle is to get out of the dualisms inherent in ideology, identity-formation, acculturation—or rather, to move in and out, out and in, to inhabit separate, often contradictory locations, to be unlocatable.

On my comp card, I've redacted everything but my own initials; self-erasure here becomes a subversive response to the global flow of capital, the measurements that allow me to pass and which foster the circulation of my image as a brand; my branded image. CC becomes more, or less, than my identity, but its own Composite Character, a Carbon Copy to replace the debased original, itself a duplication of flesh.

Identity—doesn't it?—always forms and per-forms within a net, within a sieve, and yet even more, through a net's perforations. Its bandaged bruises, its sutures and fractures. A self's desire to remain stuttering, which is to say: to remain, always, in motion. And to listen to the body we hear the parataxis of form: uneven, incomplete, inchoate, intentionally delayed and accelerating; on the move. How we must always implicate ourselves in the structures we purport to undermine, dismantle, re-form. How it might feel, and feel again to be both accomplice and victim. How there is a general desire to be endlessly remembered and endlessly repeatable. A poetics rooted in (r)elation, pleasure, and the continual penetration of sensitive contact with language.

I return to Édouard Glissant, to his reminder that "the first thing exported by the conqueror was his language" (1997, 19). And it is Haraway's resistance to perfect communication, her opposition to "the one code that translates all meaning perfectly" (2001, 312) that inform the struggle against the dogma of patriarchal logocentrism and the upshot of unhindered instrumental power; the origin story or original myth; the original sin of a normative Western culture whose apocalyptic vision is already realized every day, in its ongoing endeavor to re-make others in its image.⁴

The point, I think, or one of them, is the ability to choose, the power of choice. I never had to, even if the choice was always already made for me. Fashion companies that booked me often, often said that what makes me

desirable as a model is my ability to look like no one but myself. And still, what makes a model successful is one's ability to literally be, as the word's etymology reveals, "based in something" – Latin, *modulus*, small measure – to sink in to the photo, to disappear.

Commons: a perpetually incomplete tracking of erosion and accretion, of measure and trace, which begins on the primacy of speech, on "[s]peaking and placing the speaking. To speak from the place of the word is to speak forth" (Kim 2002, 7). Myung Mi Kim, like Cha, born in Korea before migrating to the United States, *places* her work through an insistence on spatial recalibration; a cartographic alteration in which there are neither centers nor boundaries. In doing so, Kim calls into question the logocentrism and totality of language, as well as the meaning of becoming a historical subject. "In what way names were applied to things," she begins, opening her *Commons* by answering her own query. "Filtration. [...] Through proliferation and differentiation. Airborn. Here, this speck and this speck you missed" (Kim 2002, 3). Kim's work reminds us that we need new names, and moreover, new ways of naming; a critique of identification and inquiry. Later, in the theoretical notebook that constitutes *Commons'* final section, "Pollen Fossil Record," Kim makes her call for opening up language explicit:

Show stress, show beat, show alterations in pitch and accentuals.
Tempo ruptured, emended. A valence of first and further tongues.
[...] The duration of the now, the now occurring, that manifests a
time before. [...] A measure, a page, the book to embody the
multivalent, the multidirectional—a cathexis of the living instant to
the acuteness of history[.] (Kim 2002, 111)

Kim is concerned with the threshold of language, and in graphing its habitual crossings: the before and every after of enunciation, articulation. To be named is to be called. To be called is to become or come into action. If the *commons* of Kim's title is about the underprivileged, underrepresented persons characterized by lack, it is also the commons of the public: a social-political intervention and a striving toward commonality within difference among and between communities. "Consider how the polyglot, porous, transcultural presence alerts and alters what is around it" (Kim 2002, 110), she writes, echoing an earlier supposition: "All that we see could also be otherwise/All that we can describe could also be otherwise" (Kim 2002, 16). Benjamin's messianic time becomes a *not yet* and also an *always already* in a poetics of documentation and speculation. And indeed, words are indicators of more than meaning, but time. Likewise, Kim's conflation of Korean with English texts, her conjoining of English and Korean alphabets, marks the dual task of considering the possibilities of what occurs in the traversal between languages, and moreover, between nations, both lineages rich with colonization and imperialism. In interrogating not only the limits of the archive, but the primary language which constitutes it, Kim's *Commons*

becomes a correspondence between the oral, aural, and textual, a transmedial specimen meant to be read as much as to be recited, and indeed, the section titled "Works" ends with these clarifying instructions: "Hold this up/Amid listening board and gourd/[...] To change the position of enunciation and the relations within it/[...] This is to be done/This is to be sung" (Kim 2002, 99-102).

In re-membering a history of violence, Kim shows us that legibility very often becomes possible only through the echo of its absence; it is this friction, the grating and grafting of translation and transcription, the rendering of disorder and disintegration, that become integral in rendering a story, and allowing it to grow, expand, and disseminate. What is the filtration of *Commons'* opening line but another procession? To filter, also, means *to move*.

Dura, too, exists in the aterritorial space it has marked out for itself. In this earlier work, Kim affirms the materiality of the book form even as she discomposes its interior, moving from moments of the 1992 LA riots to the fifteenth-century's African slave trade, the black blood of black and white newspaper clippings of the Korean War and the structural poverty of the consumer-driven free world through the dialogue of its check-out lane, understanding that "[b]uilding is a process. Light is an element" and that, in order "[f]or this book [to] be a truthful one" (Kim 2008, 50), it is necessary to gather all the errors, to show "[t]his immediate problem of reporting" which is to say, the glitch between "[m]odels of reality compared with experience" (Kim 2008, 73); it is necessary, above all, to listen "with your eyes because here you cannot decipher what is said out of the effort of mouths" (Kim 2008, 62), and in doing so to learn by looking, since not everything that can be written down has been written down; not everything that has been felt can be communicated.

How, for instance, does one translate the first shipload of African slaves landing at Jamestown? How does one begin to examine the discrepancies between colonial histories and colonial encounters? "[The] first deleted *me* written over [...]" (Kim 2008, 92) Kim writes, in *Dura's* final section, "Hummingbird," a long sequence interspersed with parenthetical asides that open up across line breaks, remaining unbracketed, as if to say that the interiorities disclosed transgress spatial and temporal modalities; trauma, too, does not migrate in linear movements but transcends parameters of a human life, passing on the way genetic code penetrates generations.

"Hummingbird" like much of Kim's poetics of orality, begins with directions, or a command: "Translate:" — the exam-like list of source material eventually disintegrating toward the question-as-statement: "Who wrote the word on the page that is the word on the page" (Kim 2008, 92). In the lapses of time and memory and archive and institution, in the lapses of body and judgement, between error and errata, between seeing and hearing, or the effort of perception, or the effort of percussion, what does a page look like when all the letters and the languages deemed unnecessary or non-existent

begin to reconstitute themselves by the sounds they make when being felt by all the others?

6. Conclusion: In Defense of Incompletion

In the cover letter I haven't written for this essay I would begin by proposing:

Eso Es: a polysemic text whose title can be read in alternate, often conflicting and intersecting ways, emblematic of the fluidity of identity that frames the body of the work but also its concerns. Where does the transnational self exist at a moment in which ritualized surveillance and security-mandated biometrics have impeded its migratory passages? Who moves and how do they move? Who is immovable; who has to stay put? These are questions of mobility and questions that are less pedagogical as they are prescriptive. In order to pass you must perform. So many of us don't have the choice. I am working through a question of location settings; the place and conditions in which one's body becomes an object of the state apparatus; the technology or teleology that facilitates this rendition—which is always an act of translation, surrender, and extraction, without the requirement of return. I have been working through it my whole life. The way what I've inherited, more than anything else, I think, is the effects of each of my parent's exile. The way "uprooting can work toward identity, and exile can be seen as beneficial, when these are experienced as a search for the Other [...]" as Glissant points out. "Totality's imaginary allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian" (1997, 18). And the way our passages—imaginary and material—are very often only starting points; points of departure, but not always of arrival.

Any interface is both a surface and a boundary. A border and a body. A program and the possibility for connection. Two arms reaching out, but without contact. For an impossible embrace.

If I were drafting a manual for everyday life, Step No. 1 would read: *Acquire an italic identity*. An identity that is always slightly bent, leaning, turning toward the other—line or edge or margin. An identity that attracts and accentuates. An identity that resists stasis. In the kind of critical work I am interested in doing, in both the concentration and rigor, and the space meant for strolling, I have always found it necessary to be inside ideology, to insert myself, to test—repeatedly—the theoretical concerns from the very personal vantage point of performer-participant. As I form these thoughts in my notes, I am thinking of the term "performative researcher," a role that Marlon M. Bailey brushes up against in conducting "performative ethnography" of Detroit ballroom culture in his 2013 book, *Up in Pumps*. I like everything about the name *performative researcher*, especially the emphasis on research; especially that I am so indebted to all the voices who are present in this text, and the ones before it, the ones that drift and reappear,

like every version of our past selves, drafts that are tasked with the charge—and responsibility—of intermediary edging. Lines that move along this page, but which also refer to lineage; where we came from; what and whom we are moving toward.

Benjamin, who described his work to friends as comprised “almost entirely of quotations [...] the craziest mosaic technique you can imagine” (2012b, 256) also made it explicitly clear within his seminal *Arcades Project*: “This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks” (1999, 458).

The question we should ask ourselves is why. What is the function—or rather, the effect—of reading, in which thoughts and voices are continuously embedded without demarcation or pause, absent a border to signpost where the past stops to let the present in? As in any anonymous encounter, the intimacy lies in not knowing who is speaking to whom, of who speaks and who listens. The intimacy of anonymous encounters, even in public, or within publication, comes from the certain uncertainty of not knowing if I’m still me, or who else I’ve become. Of who else is becoming me, and how.

cc. This is not an addendum but my initials, which I use to sign documents, contracts, checks, books. Many people have told me that my signature, two swooping c’s, is too susceptible to imitation, forgery. I tell them that’s the point, or one of them. To be repeated is to be returned.

D. Recall Jacques Derrida’s concept of maintenance, the signature’s ability to transcend a past and present by straddling a constantly alighted presentness. Originality becomes a stamp of singularity that tethers the signature to its source. “In order to function, that is, to be readable,” Derrida writes in *Limited Inc.*, “a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production” (1988, 20). Iteration, the root of which derives from *itara*, which means “other” in Sanskrit.

“Now I wanted to talk a little bit on barbarism ...” M begins, or began, if you’re reading this now or later, and we sat and we listen. Barbarian, from *barbaros*, of Greek origins—to constitute what you can’t comprehend; what is not legible in your language—comes from the mumblings, the sounds made by foreigners, in the native’s ears. What is really in question is the fact of one’s speech, a speaking in tongues which represents, in Agamben’s words, “the aporia of an absolute desubjectification and ‘barbarization’ of the event of language, in which the speaking subject gives way to another subject, a child, angel, or barbarian, who speaks ‘unfruitfully’ and ‘into the air’” (1999: 114). But this biblical glossolalia also represents the generally ungraspable, a polylinguistic discourse which can’t be conquered or claimed; a discourse which exists, in fact, to disrupt the persistent motion *to grasp*.

“How can a living being *have* language?” (Agamben 1999, 129) Agamben asks. I would return: Is it not, instead, language which has a living being? To the extent that language turns one into an “I” through the act of becoming,

a move into subjectification and desubjectification, the unrepeatable and its repetition, within the trauma of enunciation, so to speak, or to begin to understand what cannot be spoken.

"I love the sonic body of language," M says, elsewhere, on a sort of stage, with the light shining over her, as another ambulance races through the Upper East Side in the middle of evening. "But I feel nervous about scripts."

Perhaps, I am thinking sometime later, it's because scripts imitate, but also execute. Scripts are prescriptive; once stamped or printed or codified, they automate tasks, arrange people and things. Scripts turn speech into a symbol, the language of the body into a thin sheet with borders. Nerves are under the flesh, behind it, below it, bearing us up. When I think of M now, I remember her voice; I can hear her voice as if she is reading to me, instead of my own; me who is reading her work. She who is reading back to me.

A, again, we assert and agitate the connection between language and the body, and the embodiment of self through language. In the beginning was the word, or the flesh? And was the flesh made word or the word made flesh?

Today we can see how "the right to a shared obscurity" (Glissant 1989, 161) can be used as the creation of self-expression—multilingual, multivalent, migratory—and to write one's word into existence is to write one's world. An aesthetics of rupture and connection, an aesthetics of disruption and intrusion, both and at the same time, but more than anything else, an aesthetics of movement. To be always on the move, toward refuge and fugitiveness. And it's important to not know where. The reader, the writer. *Métissage's* consequences as necessarily unforeseeable: "rambling [...] [as] an absolute challenge to narrative" (Glissant 1997, 25). The itinerary as a diary of itinerant passage.

It begins with language and ends in listening. Mimicry, imitation, participatory performance. The ploy or play of diversion is a measure to diffract and in diffracting, becoming, and in becoming, becoming something else. The way oblivion can also beget memory. The way absence constitutes not only a lack but also a release, an acceleration that is not successive but simultaneous. Modulation is the pressure to keep building through a series of changes—there is an unknown that doesn't terrify but on the contrary displays itself as a bearer of pleasure and curiosity and communion—real communion—to be put in touch, to be touched, to tell or be told. And it is not enough to think of the Other, but to alter and act on this exchange, which fundamentally, is a change, a transformation, a motion Glissant calls "the other of Thought": "the aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join the dynamics to which we are to contribute [...] the work I am to undertake, the road I am to travel" (Glissant 1997, 155).

It is our fundamental lack which opens us to errancy.

E. Emergency transmission. In Morse code, SOS distress calls have always been transmitted as a continuous sequence of dits and dahs, the long O and the short S, repeated in the same order, without any spaces in the

transmission; it could be sent very quickly, needing little power to transmit. The particular sequence was also chosen because of its recognizability; it could not be interpreted any other way; no other set of symbols uses more than eight elements. Textually, too, SOS recognizes itself through its inherent multiplicity, the way it can be read right side up as well as upside down, an ambigram that can be read from any perspective or orientation, a palindrome that can be read in reverse.

But whichever way you read or hear the call, you read or hear it again, repeated as one waits for the message to transmit, the other to return. At a moment where the freedom of movement is no longer a human right, time itself expands, unless it dissolves, becomes measureless; waiting becomes a way of life. Wait from Anglo-French *waiter*, to watch over, await, akin to Old English *wæccan*, to watch. More at wake. Which is another form of passing, to pass or pass over, another form of death, or life, a formality or ritual. The way Juan and Zosia waited every month to receive a renewal in the mail, the long, slow wait to be naturalized; the way Benjamin waited at checkpoints, checkmarks, passport control, the way he waited for two days in Marseille disguised as a sailor before returning to Lourdes empty-handed, without an exit visa, with no route to go forward or back; to wait for death then, the pills to take effect, anticipating a response, even if it is only the one within ourselves. It's not hard to see the effect of nation-formation on the autonomy of the individual; it's not hard to see how individuals are dehumanized in service of a collective (and collected) security.

Benjamin, writing his "Critique of Violence" in 1921, could only imagine the "formless" — and also faceless — security apparatus that engulfs today's police and political interventions via the invisible gaze of biometrics, yet his words again echo across the century, anticipating not merely a globalized police state but one that is both "ghostly" and "all-pervasive" (1986, 287), conflating both the image of the border police and a *police without borders*. All of this to help the nation secure and sustain itself through racialized, sexualized, gendered, and religion-specific eligibility requirements for citizenship, a system which exists to sort and separate desirables and undesirables, an instructional model for its own citizens who reinforce the importance of the nation and its exclusionary construction of citizenship whenever we uphold particular norms, rules, values, and principles, the privilege of having documents; we who are ourselves turned into texts, to be written and re-written by the state.

I would like to write an essay with many exits. With many movements, with many opportunities to get out, not so much to arrive anywhere but so as to remain in flux. I don't understand all of this, or anything. Not fully, not yet. I am making a move toward putting this on.

In this way, you are seeing things as I see them, which is also to say they are not rendered retrospectively or known in advance but only ever unfolding, a self-awareness that Matt DelConte characterizes as a "four wall

present tense structure" (2007, 428) capable of instigating the reader to ethical action. There's no border between the narrative-I and the experiencing-I during the temporal flattening of a finger on the refresh key; unlike the generic rules of the novel form, the migratory text is not pre-determined, but always (and only ever) permeates, becomes porous, unfolds and unfurls like language and its social uses; the people who use it and the promises projected out into the world through words. In its instability, its porous non-locations, its discontinuous encounters, the migratory text reflects the complex routes of its own navigation, becoming both self-reproducing and combustible, a form charged with a way of crossing; a mode which is both conditional and a condition.

Promises are so much like possibilities, the careful quiet after a wish, whether or not it comes true is irrelevant; it's the wishing that counts. The ways in which the act always moves toward desire, the ways any wish desires movement, process, participation, toward a future that must always remain outside the frame. It is—again and again—our fundamental lack which opens us to errancy. In the language of exile, even the marks of traversal, even its traces and tracelessness, even this placelessness becomes an act of saying I, in which we are carried by our experience, our dreams, our questions, our home which becomes a question unlike any other—where are you from?—and the memories that return us to ourselves: visible and invisible, inchoate and abundant.

It's not enough to say this is an experiment; every piece of writing should endeavor to test something—the root of essay comes from the Latin *agere* to drive. More at agent. More at to ride, be in motion, perform, transact. More at lead. More at impel. It is a trial, except I am putting myself on trial. The theoretical frameworks, the cultural formations, I am testing on myself. How else could you ever know a thing without feeling it? And to feel it I've had to know it, from an academic, critical standpoint. But to know it, I've had to feel it too. I suppose that is why this work, like all of my work, is self-interested, because I am interested in taking the institutional and turning it on the individual. I am interested in taking the academic and turning it to the everyday. I have no other goals but implicating myself, and in implicating myself, I implicate all of us. The theory—all theories—are not meant to remain theoretical, from Greek *theôretikos*, to look at, but are here to be touched, again and again, just the same as any literary work or object d'art. We continue to converge with them; and in our virtual convergence, it is the theory that persists, problematizes itself, remains pertinent and present, translates across time.

It's not hard to track the changes which occur within us. Like other forms of capture, it depends upon the right lighting, to show one's self in all of one's movements, as we bear ourselves through the day, as we shift, as we carry, as we are born or borne, as we pass, for instance—

Eso Es: a polysemic text whose title can be read in alternate, often conflicting and intersecting ways. I like to picture the next iteration. Eso es: this is, that is it, SOS. I like to listen for you, the sound you make, your return. I don't mind having to wait.

The Graduate Center/CUNY, USA

Notes

- ¹ To Meena Alexander (1951-2018), for making a dwelling for me, and for all you continue to impart.
- ² *Westworld*: a North American television series which premiered on October 2, 2016 on HBO, based on the 1973 film of the same name. The story takes place in the fictional Westworld, a technologically advanced Wild West-themed amusement park populated by android hosts. Westworld caters to high-paying guests, who may indulge in whatever they wish within the park, without fear of retaliation from their cyborg hosts, who exist to do their bidding.
- ³ For more on Cuba's late nineteenth-century national identity-building and its racialized discourse, see the work of Alejandro de la Fuente, especially "Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba: An Overview," from *Latin American Perspectives*, 25.3, 1998.
- ⁴ Imperialism is not only a matter of exporting language but importing it too. In this, even theories of translation—fidelity, for example—become mobilized in the assertion of dominance against another national literature. During the eighteenth century, "in-translation" (Casanova 2004, 235) became both annexation and appropriation of literary resources; by importing ancient Greek and Roman texts into the German language, Germany was able "to pretend to an antiquity" (Casanova 2004, 238), raising its status among the continent's cultural powers. By paying close attention to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Iran, and Greece, Germany was not only able to accrue literary capital but also dispossess these nations of the possibility of future internal translations, having in the meantime claimed first rights and a monopoly on Classical study. Germany's literary exploitation of the Middle East would be mirrored a century later, in the literal exploitation of the *Gastarbeiter*—persons farmed in for labor from these same countries.

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