

Reading and Teaching Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* beyond National Borders

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Abstract: *This essay discusses Cathy Park Hong's book-length poem Dance Dance Revolution (2007) in the context of the transnational turn in American studies. The essay discusses the ways in which the text thematizes history and language in its representation of contemporary global issues and argues that Dance Dance Revolution provides an important context for discussing issues and conflicts arising between the contemporary West and its discontents, and for interrogating modes of global cultural and linguistic fluidity. It then draws on the author's experience of teaching the text in an advanced undergraduate course at a Finnish university as it examines the applicability of a transnational approach to teaching US literature and cultural studies in a contemporary European context.*

Keywords: *Cathy Park Hong; Dance Dance Revolution; teaching literature; transnational American studies*

Introduction: Cathy Park Hong's Dystopian Desertscape in a Transnational Context

Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* (Norton, 2007; henceforth *DDR*) is an experimental, concept-driven poetic text that takes the form of an evolving dialogue between two figures: the Historian, a witty if often naïve observer, and the Guide, a former South Korean dissident. The Guide, who, ironically, now works in the tourism industry, offers to help the historian find her bearings in a dystopian, near-futuristic landscape known only as "the Desert," where a deracinated city resembling Las Vegas and Dubai

has been superimposed upon an actual desert landscape, forcibly removing its native inhabitants and erasing its violent past. The text takes the form of alternating sections narrated in the language of each of these two figures, the Guide's in lyrical asides preserving the hybridized idiom attributed to her (sometimes with, but often without, an explanatory gloss), and the Historian's in sections of prose memoir written in standard English. As the text progresses, it becomes clear that there is a connection between the two: the Historian's Korean father, a Doctors Without Borders physician, once had a love affair with the Guide. *DDR* is Hong's second of three books of poetry to date. It forms part of her ongoing project, initially undertaken in *Translating Mo'um* (2002) and continued in *Engine Empire* (2013), of staging strategic textual conflicts between the particular, embodied experience of the writer's own Korean-American identity on the one hand, and the pervasive leveling of ethnic difference and cultural particularity under late capitalist Western society on the other.

Through the evolving interaction between the Guide and the Historian, *DDR* raises issues crucial to contemporary global life such as displacement, migration, and cultural hybridity, and questions the seeming pervasiveness of Empire.¹ Moreover, through its creative misappropriation of language, the text enacts the very processes of cultural dislocation and creatively occupying the margins that it thematizes. As a text that embraces an experimental style without losing its purchase on sociohistorical trends, *DDR* partakes of what Timothy Yu characterizes as recent Asian-American experimental writing's combination of "engagement with history and politics that has traditionally characterized Asian American poetry" with a "burrowing into language, exploring both its limits and its creative potential in poetic styles influenced by experimental modes within American poetry" (819). As such, the text shares important features with the work of

1 The term "Empire" has important implications for the current essay – implications which I nevertheless lack the space to explore. In their now-classic definition of the concept, which resonates well with the setting of the Desert in Hong's text, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe Empire as being "presented as a global concert under the direction of a single conductor, a unitary power that maintains the social peace and produces its ethical truths. And in order to achieve these ends, the single power is given the necessary force to conduct, when necessary, 'just wars' at the borders against the barbarians and internally against the rebellious" (10). Hardt and Negri explain further that "Empire is emerging today as the center that supports the globalization of productive networks and casts its widely inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order – and yet at the same time it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and the rebellious slaves who threaten its order" (20).

other Korean-American experimental writers including Theresa Hak Cha and Myung Mi Kim, whose work, according to critic Josephine Nock-Hee Park, “invoke[s] a long history of political and military alliances between the United States and East Asia in poetic forms which themselves bear the traces of American Orientalism” (126). Moreover, Hong’s text shares what Park calls the “obsessions” of texts by these writers: “the open wound of history and its repetitions, the work of translation and dictation, and the figure in transit” (146). Where these texts are still ostensibly concerned with the particularity of experiences of Korean-American cultural hybridity, however, *DDR* distances such concerns in time and space through its construction of the Desert as a setting.

Importantly, then, the Desert is both general and specific: while it is never explicitly located within any actually existing nation-state and its features are obvious parodies of Western culture generally, the Desert is nevertheless invoked in vivid detail. Given the disorienting nature of its setting and the transactions that take place between its uprooted inhabitants, I contend that *DDR* can most accurately be accounted for within a context suggested by transnationalism as a critical category.² Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way describe transnationalism as a cross-disciplinary intellectual framework roughly united around a single agenda: “in place of a long and deeply embedded modernist tradition of taking the nation as the framework within which one can study things (literatures, histories, and so forth),” they write, “the nation itself has to be a question—not untrue and therefore trivial, but an ideology that changes over time, and whose precise elaboration at any point has profound effects on wars, economies, cultures, the movements of people, and relations of domination” (628).³ Transnationalism is, in brief, “a strategy for identifying the ideological work of the nation,” of

- 2 During the ongoing “transnational turn,” Shelley Fisher Fishkin described in her 2004 presidential address to the American Studies Association, the notion of transnationalism has lent itself to a loosely knit project of critical re-reading across the disciplines comprising American studies. “The goal of American studies scholarship is not exporting and championing an arrogant, pro-American nationalism,” Fishkin explains, “but understanding the multiple meanings of America and American culture in all their complexity. Today American studies scholars increasingly recognize that that understanding requires looking beyond the nation’s borders, and understanding how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders” (20).
- 3 They borrow gender studies’ notion of gender as “cultural ideologies applied to bodies”: “Similarly, the nation is an ideology applied to a territory, its people, and its economic and social institutions that extends far beyond the naming of a piece of land. It is, in short, another ‘primary way of signifying relationships of power’” (637).

rendering the often transparent machinations of national culture, and US culture in particular, opaque, so that they may be scrutinized, discussed, and challenged (637). Donald Pease views the transnational as an ambivalent category, both acquiescent and critical, that serves at once to reproduce and to challenge global power structures. Pease calls the transnational “not a discourse so much as it is itself a volatile transfer point that inhabits things, people, and places with surplus connectivities that dismantle their sense of a coherent, bounded identity. Drawing upon an interstitial dynamic that it advances,” he continues, “this complex figuration bears the traces of the violent sociohistorical processes to which it alludes” (13). In its ability to challenge stable iterations of national belonging and cultural identification, the transnational demonstrates the overdetermined nature of forms of identity that span beyond nation-states. Such transnational identities are marked on the one hand by their encounters with power, domination, and violence, and on the other by their transient and often ludic performances of interstitial belonging – both prominent features of Hong’s text.

Taking this transnational framework as its starting point, this essay will begin by discussing the ways in which the text addresses history in its representation of contemporary global issues and comments implicitly on conflicts arising between the contemporary West and its discontents. Next, it will examine the ways in which *DDR* interrogates the role of language, and particularly English, in constructing global power differentials, and suggest that *DDR* tacitly proposes cultural and linguistic fluidity as a force capable of leveling the playing field between the West and the rest. The essay will then discuss my experiences in teaching the text in a course offering a transnational perspective on US literature, both past and present, for advanced undergraduate students of English at the University of Turku, Finland, in which *DDR* was specifically chosen for its ability to deepen and complicate students’ understanding of the issues raised during the course: diaspora and migration, cosmopolitanism and tourism, and especially cultural and linguistic hybridization. Through the persona of the Guide, the text thematizes the process of serving as a cultural go-between, demonstrating that transnational identity is enacted by assuming forms of cultural flexibility observable in feats of inter-linguistic dexterity.

History and the Guises of “Revolution”

Hong’s text takes its name from a popular arcade game of the early 2000s,

in which players mimic the dance moves of characters on a screen, a readily identifiable reference point for millennials across the globe. Hong makes the origins of the text in the game of the same name explicit in an interview: "I was fascinated by the origin of the game—by the fact that the Japanese appropriated Western dance moves to turn into a video game, a game which was then imported back to the West with explosive success. I loved the cultural zigzagging, which seemed appropriate since the book has much of that misplaced cultural bartering happening in the imagined city" ("An Interview"). The text's title suggests at once the easy transmissibility across the globe of such disposable cultural forms, as well as consumer culture's total absorption of the concept of revolution, to the point that dancing in sync with a digital image can somehow constitute "revolutionary" behavior. Yet the text is centered on an actual "revolution," as well as an imagined one: *DDR* is anchored by its references to historical events. These include Syngman Rhee's regime as South Korea's first president, from the 1948 partitioning of Korea to his forced resignation in 1960, and the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980, a response to the 1979 military coup that brought general Chun Doo-Hwan to power, and which ended in the massacre of an unspecified number of students and residents of the provincial capital of Kwangju by government troops. These events from recent Korean history are mapped out by the chronology at the beginning of the book, so that even readers unfamiliar with such events will be given the necessary background information. For students and readers in the West, where this history admittedly tends to be overlooked, the text furnishes an excellent opportunity to gain some knowledge of Korean history in its global context.

At the same time, in *DDR*'s fictive desert landscape, local unrest among a displaced aboriginal population threatens to disturb the equilibrium of a carefully constructed consumer paradise. While the text is largely driven by the Guide's personal relationship with Korean history, her status as an exile in the Desert – the setting of the text's present, whose geographic location is never specified – suggests the waning importance of the nation-state in a globalized setting. The Desert, the Historian's Foreword tells us, "is the planned city of renewed wonders, city of state-of-the-art hotels modeled after the world's greatest cities, city whose decree is *there is difference only in degree*. This city is the center of elsewhere but perhaps that is not accurate. As the world shrinks, elsewhere begins to disappear" (20; italics in the original). The text thus suggests a leveling of cultural difference through a reduction of the specificity of place; the geographical coordinates of this

barely fictionalized city no longer matter because the Desert is everywhere and nowhere. In the non-place of a globalized economy in which one is either a guide or a tourist consuming the spectacle, any location may lay equal claim to being both center and periphery.

History itself likewise becomes flattened and commodified in the text's imaginative evocation of a place called the St. Petersburg Hotel, a deeply ironic Russian history-themed monument to consumerism reminiscent of the New York- and Paris-themed hotels in Las Vegas. At the St. Petersburg, "luxury / is eberyting," and "Blood rust has been Windexed to amber shine" (27). The features of the hotel the guide chooses to show off include its immaculately maintained arboretum, its fountain with its "whitening wad-der" that renders the drinker's teeth "Shinier den 'Merikken / Colgates" (30), its karaoke lounge, and its bathrooms, replete with "comfy, gratus latrines" that "maki ye wanna sit / en its porcelite domus y read great lititure" (31). In the Desert, a made-to-order natural setting of lush gardens replaces an actual desert landscape, while entertainment consists in singing along mindlessly to mass-produced music (an act reminiscent of the text's title), even smiles are artificially white, and "great lititure" has been relegated to the shitter. The Guide attempts unsuccessfully to deflect attention away from the region's displaced natives ("we expoit gaggle o aborigine to back tundra county . . . / Bannitus! But betta to scrape dat fact / unda history rug, so shh . . . " [26]), and signs of violent conflict lurking at its edges ("once unrest shatta'd desert horizon to ellipses, / haunted slay de flames feasted de hotels y sommelier, / feasted de lawn foliage y swim-pool, / y char de head chumps to Malaga raisins" [33]).

With its deliberate evocations of post-Soviet nostalgia, the St. Petersburg Hotel has finally succeeded in enacting the much-vaunted "end" of history.⁴ Here, history has been reduced to gift-shop curio: "If you want true history," the Guide remarks, "go watch tailor y milna / make magic. Dim more revolutionary den artist" (28). The tailor and milliner are closer to history than the artist, and revolution is no longer the engine of history, as it was in the "real" St. Petersburg circa 1917. The Guide herself is a former South

4 The triumphalism of Francis Fukuyama and others following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s concerning the "end of history" in the Marxist sense of class struggle and the concomitant consensus surrounding liberal democracy as the sole legitimate means of political organization has become increasingly challenged in the years following the September 11, 2001 attacks – a process very much in evidence in Hong's text, especially its asides concerning insurrectionary aboriginals.

Korean revolutionary, yet she is now employed at this “revolutionary” hotel. In the Historian’s Foreword the text is explicit about the role it assigns to revolution:

Revolutions happen all the time elsewhere, although we seem to think that revolutions exist in time capsules. Back then, they were an act of propulsion, of anguished, woodcut masses marching in cohesion. Now in the Desert, the pulse of unrest works unpredictably, in canny acts of sabotage engineered by exiled natives who crave for time to stand still. Here, rumors abound that migrant hotel employees are now joining them and tourists don’t know who to trust. The city of rest is also the city of unrest (20-21).

In the contemporary West, the projection of stability rests upon an insistence on locating revolutionary moments elsewhere, in spaces distant either temporally or spatially from what appears as an eternally static present. As an instantiation of this projected Western stability, the Desert presents itself to the would-be tourist, late capitalism’s subject-as-consumer, as a “city of rest,” yet this façade of comfort and prosperity, as in actual locations in the contemporary West, splinters and cracks through “canny acts of sabotage” aimed at disrupting the illusion of stability and turning back the clock on modernity by those who have been left outside its circle of prosperity, exiled and bereft of their homes. Thus the powerless assume a certain degree of power – however specious or fleeting – through their insolence as they create unrest and spread mistrust among the very tourists they have been engaged to serve.

The text brings to light the many guises of revolution as both a seizing of political control through an assertion of collective will, and an unprecedented rise in living standards through consumer-driven innovation. Yet it will ultimately wax openly ironic about the possibility of actual revolution, which takes on a connotation of the literal motion of spinning around a fixed point in a scene late in the Guide’s tour, depicted in a poem titled “The Hula Hooper’s Taunt.” A note from the Historian describes the scene: “We wandered into a stadium where thirteen hundred people competed for the national hula hooper’s contest. The last one standing won the contest. While hula-hooping, they taunted their neighbors to discourage them” (89). This mass spectacle is an appropriate image for the forms and possibilities of revolution the text envisions: the image evokes the mass demonstrations of synchronized gymnastics occurring formerly in Eastern Bloc nations and

currently in North Korea, but given the fact that the individuals comprising this mass athletic demonstration are moving in place as they compete against each other rather than moving in unison, it is finally closer to the dance marathons that took place in the US during the 1920s and '30s, in which couples competed with each other as they literally danced until they dropped. The taunt of one of the hula hoopers forms the grist of the poem:

I'mma two-ton spiker hips fast rondeau
n'ere more nay sayer feel this orbit rattle

Wipe that prattle that spittle crass pupa
gupta away you ma'man,

where you revolving solving
spin shorty shark satellitic fever

leer not, lyre I spiral atom pattern
faster than you say my turn (ibid.).

In the poem's invented slang, the hula hooper invokes several images of revolving motions to describe the solitary activity of moving one's hips to keep a plastic hoop spinning including a satellite in orbit, the electrons revolving around the nucleus of an atom, and a shark in perpetual motion. Through this and other images, the text queries the ongoing import of revolution in a global cultural context. The text's title is very appropriate as its frenetic repetition of dance could be read either as a description of an activity repeated to exhaustion or an injunction to dance. The phrase "Dance Dance Revolution," we learn late in the text, finally refers to an unsuccessful uprising of banished aboriginals in the Desert:

. . . ai, as aborigine exiled to terra new town,
molecule up to one corp . . . dim will
try to wrest desert back . . . feisty mongas
dim are . . . rise up like an arkpeelago o corks
in sea like de last time,
day o dance dance revolution . . . no relation
ta Hapanese dance game . . . ipso facto no dancing
eider in de revolution. . . . (98-99).

While we are told that there is no relation between this revolution and the title of the “Hapanese dance game,” the origins of the name are never specified as such, leaving the reader to her own interpretations in considering the odd juxtaposition of dancing and revolution. Nor has the revolutionary sentiment among the Desert’s aboriginals and its rogue Guides subsided; in the text’s final pages, the Historian is led to the edge of the city, whence she can see across a bridge, where the Guide points out “de smoke curdlim air over slag,” and where “sabotage is pending” (118).

Linguistic Hybridization as a Source of Power

Like history, language plays a crucial role in the text as *DDR*’s two main figures, the Guide and the Historian, are constructed solely through their speech. Both are given voices in alternating sections – the Guide’s in poetic monologues with occasional “Notes” from the Historian, and the Historian’s in excerpts from her memoir provided at the end of each section. The Historian’s use of Standard English sets her apart from the Guide, who speaks exclusively in her polyglot patois, Desert Creole, which the Historian’s Foreword describes as “an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city,” a “rapidly evolving lingua franca” that borrows “the inner structures of English grammar,” as well as utilizing “existing and extinct English dialects” (19).⁵ As a lingua franca – an intermediary language enabling communication between native speakers of different languages for the purposes of economic or cultural exchange – Desert Creole draws a number of elements into its orbit, all dictated by its deterritorialized setting and the interactions it generates.⁶ The creolized

- 5 The Historian goes on to give some intriguing examples of speech she has overheard and recorded in a bar: “1. Dimfo me am im = Let me tell you about him. 2. Burblium frum’ im = He said. 3. Wit blodhued mout = with his red mouth (or bloody mouth). 4. G’won now, shi’bal bato = Leave, you homosexual son of a baboon. 5. So din he lip dim clout = So then he punched him in the mouth. 6. Bar goons hoistim off. Exeunt = Security escorted him out of the bar” (19-20).
- 6 On language in the text, Hong states, “I was reading a lot of linguistic theory at the time, particularly on this idea of Creole as a language that is in transition. French, for instance, was a Creole of Latin before it became the ‘official’ language. English is always in transition, although the Standard version is more likely to be frozen in its glass cube. But spoken, English is a busy traffic of dialects, accents, and slang words going in and out of fashion. Slang is especially fascinating. I love outdated slang dictionaries—these words are artifacts that tell you the mindset and squeamish taboos of a certain milieu during a certain time period. I wanted the English in the book to be a hyperbole of that everyday dynamism of spoken English” (“An Interview”).

language of the text takes on a specific form in the speech of the Guide, whom the Historian describes as “gather[ing] slang, idioms, and argot from other tour guides and tourists (which does not explain her use of the Middle English)” (20). What we read in the text, then, are purportedly the Historian’s transcriptions of the Guide’s speech, digressive, idiomatic, and markedly polyglot (even if it more or less follows Standard English syntax). The text’s foregrounding of non-native speech connects it thematically with a longstanding Asian-American literary tradition in which, according to Tara Fickle, “the figure of the ‘native speaker’” (and by implication her non-native counterpart) “emerge[s] as a defining tropicological mainstay . . . , for it captures the crucial ways in which the minority subject experiences his or her social difference *as* linguistic difference: it is no coincidence that displacement and exclusion from the body politic is most often articulated specifically as a displacement and exclusion from language as such” (81). In Hong’s text, the Historian’s standard English contrasts with the Guide’s pidgin, as the latter becomes the linguistic equivalent of an environment in which there is no longer any prevailing normative identity.

The Guide’s linguistic hybridity is attested to at the outset of the text in her declaration to her interlocutor that “I speak sum Han-guk y Finnish, good bit o Latin / y Spanish . . . sum toto Desert Creole en evachanging dip-dong / ’pendable on mine mood” (25). In terms of both content and usage, the Guide’s declaration serves to establish the parameters of her particularized speech as it draws on Hanguk (the language of South Korea), Finnish, and Spanish, as well as various Englishes spanning the entire history of the language. (My students and I searched in vain for some evidence of the Guide’s facility with Finnish. She does recount a lively exchange with a “Helsinkiian” early on, but the exchange seems to have taken place in English.) In the end, the Guide possesses no single native tongue that would serve as a stable point of reference for her own identity: “I’s sum o all I’s rued, sum o me accents,” she tells her interlocutor as the text concludes (119).

The Guide, the text’s “talky Virgil” (25),⁷ becomes a “guide” in several senses as she leads the Historian through the text’s imagined landscape. She

7 In describing the origins of the Guide in an interview, Hong states, “In my conception of her, I was fascinated by Dante’s Virgil, and I was thinking what a guide means in contemporary times—a guide as crass tour guide, guide as poet and storyteller, guide as revolutionary, or guide in the spiritual sense” (“An Interview”).

goes on to recount her family origins (she describes herself as coming “from ’eritage o peddlas y traitors” [43], and her grandfather and father have both played shameful roles in collaborating with Korea’s foreign occupiers, her grandfather with the Japanese during Japan’s colonization of Korea and her father with US GIs during the Korean War). She also describes her early political radicalization under the tutelage of a teacher, and her role as a radio personality, the “voice” of the Kwangju Uprising – which landed her in the notorious Ginseng Colony for helping to foment an unsuccessful coup. Finally, the Historian’s purpose in seeking out this playful, idiosyncratic, and questionably trustworthy guide will become clear: the Guide was her father’s lover in the distant past. In the figure of the Guide, language and history (national, cultural, *and* personal) therefore become intertwined as she recounts the process by which her father learned first-hand “The Importance of Being English,” as the title of one poem has it. The Guide’s father, powerless to stop the GIs from destroying his home out of suspicion of his being a communist, watches in awe as a fellow villager explains himself to the occupiers in English and his home is spared. “Me fadder sees dis y decide to learn Engrish righteo dere,” the Guide explains (45). Based on this episode, the Guide’s father gives her this “pep gem”: “*You can be the best talker but no point if you can’t / speak the other man’s tongue. You can’t chisel, con, plead, / seduce, beg for your life, you can’t do anything, because you / know not their language. So learn them all*” (45-46; italics in the original). The text thus makes a direct correlation between language and power, suggesting that while the individual remains powerless against the forces of history and the successive regimes it throws up, she can ensure her own survival by exercising her cunning – which depends wholly upon her ability to utilize “their language” to her own purposes.

The Guide does just this as she recombines languages and dialects picked up in the course of her travels and her time spent in the internationalized setting of the Desert, making them her own. Indeed, her role and status as Guide rests heavily on her ability to conduct her dealings in “their language”:

I guided misbegodder fool who vacation
 en woebegone ruins. Tu, I mean, you tryim.
 To flower-arrange words so sand-piss
 ash sounds like *Melodious plot of*
beecheen green, try, nary! (33).

With linguistic dexterity comes a tendency toward linguistic slippage; her speech is inflected by Spanish, as in her consistent use of the coordinating conjunction “y” in place of the English “and,” and her seemingly accidental use of the Spanish second-person pronoun “tu” in this passage. Hong’s representation of the Guide’s speech also toys with clichéd representations of Asian immigrant dialogue, as in “tryim.” If language in the text is equated with power, it can also be equated with manipulation; the Guide’s quarry sees the version of reality she wants her to see as the former constructs a made-to-order scene through her description, rendering the ugly and barren beautiful, comforting, or exotic as “woebegone ruins” become a pleasant vacation spot. This linguistic legerdemain is not limited to the art of the Guide. At one point in their wanderings, the Guide and the Historian encounter an auctioneer whose wares are not material goods but phrases derived from various historical Englishes. “We were at the auctioneer’s tent where trademarks are auctioned off every week,” the Historian remarks in a note. “In the Desert, so many words have become trademarked that it is impossible to even speak without stumbling upon someone’s trademark” (90). As words themselves become trademarked, language – the common property of all – becomes personal property. Here, linguistic fossils are auctioned off as language itself becomes a commodity. The phrase that is being sold off in this particular poem – “*May have this dance*” – is described by the auctioneer as “a mint, a classic”: “a phrase for thy empire / waisted who know the finickeries and fineries / of a pearl, small and mottled as a current. / A fetish for yore” (ibid.; italics in the original). Tellingly, the phrase will be reappropriated by the Guide as the text’s final two lines: “If de world is our disco ball, / might I have dim dance” (119). The Guide thus seizes on a phrase that has become hackneyed and commercialized (in this case, literally) and redeploys it in her own in goofy idiom, ironically confirming the reduction of the globe itself to shimmering, reified surface.

Dance Dance Revolution in the Transnational University Classroom

Beyond its immediate aim of illuminating aspects of a particular text, transnationalism – as both a theory and a methodology – presents itself as an appealing means of contextualizing US literary history in an international university setting. The main stated objectives of a course I recently taught at the University of Turku – to learn to employ the concept of nation and related ideas such as cosmopolitanism, diaspora, cultural tourism, and im-

migration critically in analyzing literary texts, and to gain a transnational perspective on American literature and culture – were supported by readings of works by Henry James, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, and Gloria Anzaldúa, as well as Cathy Park Hong, texts specifically chosen to represent the changes occurring over time within the idea of nation and its associated concepts.

DDR was thus selected as the course's culminating text specifically for its ability to demonstrate the workings of transnational cultural identification in a contemporary global setting. Students in the course approached *DDR* from a transnational perspective, with nearly a semester's worth of readings and discussions to support their analyses. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* in particular was a frequent touchstone in class discussions on *DDR*, especially given both texts' thematization of political and sociolinguistic borders and cultural and linguistic hybridity, yet – as students made clear in comparing the two texts – *Borderlands* tends to alienate with its occasional heavy-handed moralizing whereas *DDR*'s relationship to these themes remains playful and irreverent. Another major difference students acknowledged was the fact that Anzaldúa, writing in the 1980s, still assigns cultural belonging a primary ontological significance in identity formation, whereas Hong, writing in the 2000s, wants to evacuate cultural identity entirely, assigning a constitutive role to individual acts of self-creation through cultural sampling. In framing these issues, the text takes on a capacity to motivate students to reflect on similar situations of deterritorialization and uprootedness in the contemporary West, where the decentering effects of multinational capital have become observable in their leveling of distinctions with respect to place and language alike, and where English has steadily assumed the status of lingua franca.

By their own admissions, students initially struggled to understand the Guide's speech, though most felt that with some effort, and with continued exposure, it became easier to decipher. Class discussion centered around the idea that the difficulties with which the text confronted students – advanced speakers of English as a foreign language themselves – as they encountered a deeply alien (invented) English foregrounded the possibility of non-native speakers' making inroads into the global hegemony of English by modifying it to serve their own communicative needs. Students were asked to reflect upon the various forms and registers of language they encountered in the text – standard versus non-standard varieties, creoles, and the like – and to consider how they were used, and by whom. They were

also asked to consider the text's representation of the hegemony of English through comparing the Guide's creolized version of English with the Historian's standard written English, as well as whether the Guide could be said to attain a kind of power of her own through her ability to recombine elements of various languages. Students were then assigned to write a speculative etymology for one of the words or phrases in the Guide's Desert Creole based in actual etymology. They were asked to imagine how this word might have made its way into the guide's vocabulary and what the evolution of their chosen word suggested about Desert Creole as a language, and then to generalize about how language functions in relation to power in the text more generally. Students chose a range of words from the text for their etymologies including "himbo's bubble" (33), "carpe cerevisi" (41), and "gaggle" (which occurs twice, on pages 26 and 27). Students produced imaginative and insightful analyses of these terms based in their actual etymologies, which they found in dictionaries, and applied these etymologies to the specific context created by the text – showing that, as with its creative appropriations of history, the text likewise approaches language and linguistic change as an opportunity for reappropriation and reinvention.

In the course of teaching US literature from a transnational perspective in Finland, I had to acknowledge that even if I – a US national trained in literary and cultural studies at American universities – read US hegemony critically, I still end up confirming its global centrality. Only through radical efforts to decenter ourselves as the points of observation in our pedagogy will we become able to understand our own relationships to US culture in a globalized context. Shelley Fisher Fishkin issues a challenge that should resonate with US nationals teaching American literature and American studies abroad: "U.S.-based Americanists should eschew imperial ambitions in our scholarship as readily as we condemn them in U.S. politics; reluctant to impose our own perspectives on others who may not share them, we should learn to listen more and talk less" (42). Fishkin's call for a rejection of imperialist attitudes in our scholarship resonates equally with our role as teachers, in which, rather than merely acting as ambassadors of the cultures we represent, we should make every effort to hear students' perspectives on those cultures. Put in the terms of Hong's text, teachers should assume the role of the Historian and enable students to become Guides: we should provoke thought, ask leading questions, and sit back and listen.

Conclusion: Embracing Transnationalism in Theory and Practice

In recent years, the West has been faced with a steadily weakening economic hegemony and increasingly restive and threatened populations on its peripheries. These circumstances have led to extremist attempts to inculcate fear through acts of extreme violence in major population centers, on the one hand, and to the scapegoating of vulnerable migrants by populist, nostalgia-driven retrenchments of nationalism on the other. In Great Britain and the United States in particular, 2016 and the first months of 2017 have been marked by a prevailing climate of bellicose nationalist rhetoric, with mainstream politics pandering to reactionary paranoia through isolationism and promises of aggressive policing of national borders. Transnationalism, by contrast, connotes a very different agenda: a scrutiny of borders and the ideas of nation they inscribe and delimit, and a focus on the interstitial spaces such borders would purport to exclude.

As this essay has argued, Hong's experimental text brings these issues and dynamics into focus, suggesting the damage wrought in the name of transnational capital while imagining an alternate version of transnationalism as an antidote, namely the playful troping of the forms and idioms of intercultural exchange in which the Guide engages. As a figure of transnational dis-identification, the Guide assumes and discards an array of guises in Hong's text. In the text's past as well as its present, the Guide's voice serves as her most important asset as it enables her survival and assures her some measure of power. The lessons of the Guide, as an avatar of life after the nation, have important bearings on the ways in which we present national literatures in transnational classrooms: in a globalized university setting where English is increasingly coming to serve as a lingua franca in which students conduct their work and seek their entertainment, students themselves assume roles something like the Guide's in mediating complex cultural, historical, and linguistic processes.

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