

Stones, Rocks, and Other Objects of History:  
Aesthetic Distributions of Memories  
in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Kiyota Masanobu

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This paper explores a possibility of dividing and sharing historical memories of multiple colonialisms and imperialisms after 1945 in East Asia and the Asia Pacific that resists or short circuits the problems of the nation and nationalism. While Japanese colonization of East Asia and the subsequent American military and political hegemonic dominance in the same area have been at times critiqued and resisted by anti-colonial nationalist movements in places such as Korea and Okinawa, the latter's institutions of internally homogeneous and hierarchical national culture oftentimes reproduced and appropriated the very racialized stereotypes, thus contributing to the formations of potentially oppressive pedagogical culture. As David Lloyd succinctly notes,

The limitations of an oppositional nationalism become apparent in post-colonial states where political unification around the concept of national identity obscures continuing exploitations of class and cultural difference, and where the aim of a cultural education that retains its hegemonic forms continues to be the production of subjects fitted to the requirements of global economic imperialism. (x)

How can we remember colonial histories otherwise? What are the ways in which a historical witness resists its figuration as an exemplary instance of a particular nation-state's chronological narration of its own identity and instead distributes its fundamentally finite witnessing of the past event(s) across and against currently enforced social categorizations? What roles do works of art in general and literary works in particular play in such distributive process? My paper attempts to respond to these questions by first reassessing the inherent danger of cultural nationalist monopolization of historical memory as it has already taken place in Asian American literary studies. The paper, then, offers a brief reading of Gilles Deleuze's notion of "transcendental empiricism" and Walter Benjamin's theorization of "historical origin" as the two mutually resonant instances in which an inquiry on historical memory can be delinked from any culturalist foundationalism and instead be taken up by those who recreate and divide such memory in the present. In the last section of the paper, I will examine Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* and the "objectist" poetics of Kiyota Masanobu as the two varied instances of aesthetic production and distribution of historical memory that manifests itself as its own transformation and becoming.

### Asian Americanist Cultural Critique as a *bildungsroman*

Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996) is generally seen as a work that has significantly extended Asian American studies' geographical imagination by posting "Asia" as a "reservoir of memory" of war, occupation, and displacement that gives critical impetus to Asian immigrant and Asian American political activism in the US (29). Despite the continuous relevance of Asian Americanist attempt to embrace their critical memories and liminal positionality within the US national culture, Asian Americanist "cultural politics" since Lowe's work could potentially reinstitute a conservative aesthetic culture that teaches its students to identify with its canonical works that are, in turn, seen as the unmediated reflections of their Asian American authors' life narratives. For example, in Lowe's work, experimental forms and non-linear narratives are read as anti-hegemonic political commentaries that still verisimilarly represent the larger social reality: Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha's use of non-linear historiography in *Dictée* that evinces her *Korean American* critique of the American expansionist narrative (33), Maya Lin's anti-representational design of the Vietnam War Memorial that exemplifies her *Chinese American feminist refusal* of the nation spectacle to work through its defeat in Vietnam (4), and Jessica Hagerdorn's *Dogeater that reveals her Filipina American* ambivalence toward both the US and Filipino nationalisms (112).

As Viet Thanh Nguyen aptly points out, such Asian Americanist reliance upon some aesthetic works as examples of Althusserian "bad subjects" that resist the interpellative drive of the national culture unfortunately enacts a "gradual slide from a politically necessary strategic essentialism to a co-opted and commodified essentialism as the dominant, if not sole, form of Asian American identity" (150). A similar problem persists in other Asian Americanist books that follow Lowe's dialectical methodology. For instance, Laura Kang's *Compositional Subject: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (2002) valorizes so-called "1.5 generation" Korean North American women artists' works as they evince "[formal] tactics and strategies that actively contend with--rather than simply reject or bypass--" the discursive construction of "Asian American women" by and across various academic disciplines such as literature, film criticism, historiography, and ethnography (26). Here, Kang, perhaps unwittingly, tends to exceptionalize these "1.5 generation" Korean American female artists as their use of fragmented, intertextual, and self-reflexive forms enacts a critique of both the hegemonic discursive construction of "Asian American women" and their own socio-economic privileges. Thus, Kang's study may further buttress rather than question the exemplary status of these artists who figure as not only liminal, critical, but also *self-critical* "bad subjects" (269). Additionally, in *Imagine Otherwise: on Asian Americanist Critique*, Kandice Chuh points out the "a priori meaninglessness of 'Asian american' as the term only gains political and legal

valence within the US discursive structure. However, Chuh's espousal of "strategic anti-essentialism" and the ensuing transformation of Asian American studies as a disciplinary field in which "there is no common subject of Asian American studies ... [but are] only infinite differences that we discursively cohere into epistemological objects" retain its residually exceptionalist claim on Asian Americanist critical capacity which, instead of being based upon concrete historical origins of Asian immigrants, now paradoxically institutes its foundation upon its very lack of culturalist foundation (147, 149).

While Asian American critics have moved beyond their previous "cultural nationalist" agenda that exclusively valorized socially realist aesthetics, experimental forms are now seen as relatively transparent reflections of liminal, marginalized positionalities of Asian Americans in the transnational world. Thus, the critics commit something like essentialist formalism whereby the very forms, as markers of identities, not only interpellate the students but also limit the Asian Americanist conceptualization of solidarity with other oppressed groups in the US.

Asian Americans can articulate distinct challenges and demands based on particular histories of exclusion and racialization, but the redefined lack of closure --which reveals rather than conceals differences--opens political lines of affiliation with other groups in the challenge to specific forms of domination *insofar as they share common features*. (Lowe 70, emphasis mine)

Because the seemingly open coalition Lowe proposes quarantines in advance characteristics that are deemed too distant from or not conducive to the given group's political agenda, the said group can easily exclude or exploit differences it sets out to welcome. By keeping certain othernesses outside the gate of the community, it also forgoes the possibility that these others' presence could disrupt, question, or even at times transform the putative identities of the community's constituents. Judith Butler points out this danger whereby democratic coalitional politics nevertheless constitutes itself by excluding differences:

Despite the clearly democratizing impulse that motivates coalitional building, the coalitional theorist can inadvertently reinsert herself as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an ideal form for coalitional structures *in advance*, one that will effectively guarantee unity as the outcome. Related efforts to determine what is and is not the true shape of a dialogue, what constitutes a subject-position, and, most importantly, when "unity" has been reached, can impede the self-shaping and self-limiting dynamics of coalition. (20, emphasis in the original)

Heeding Butler's warning, we can surmise that Asian Americanist's recent espousal of seemingly open and inclusive vision of politics of difference nonetheless limits the membership of such formation to those whose subject-positions seem to be already determined as variously oppressed within the dominant society. Such rigid formulation not only excludes others whose possible interest in and desire to participate in various forms of liberatory politics do not match their putative biographical or sociologically determinable attributes as

such. Moreover, it debilitatingly delimits the possibility of those who are deemed as “Asian Americans” as they are more or less demanded to enfigure themselves as representative speakers of sufferings undergone in Asia or Asian America while the chance for them to learn from other struggles and experiences that may drastically differ from their is foreclosed in the social formation that privileges “common features.”

How can we delink the possibility of rematerializing cultural and historical memory from its putative groundedness in a particular identitarian group’s exceptionalized claim to such memory? As seen in the key texts of Asian American literary and cultural studies in the past 15 years, the critics’ attempt to valorize critical vantage points offered by those who have multiple allegiances, experienced multiple migrancies or displacements, and, mostly due to such experiences, acquired multilingual fluencies not only fetishizes the diasporic groups’ transnational aura but also posits their empirical experiences as the essentialist, quasi-transcendental ground of their exceptionalist claim to historical knowledge. But what if the ground of experience, and, henceforth, of memory does not exist as such but constitutively depends upon one’s encounter with the world that necessarily modifies the person’s perception? If each of us partially retains a power to witness history and to produce a constitutively incomplete and imperfect narration of it, how would there be a socially articulated collective of these imperfect witnesses? How do aesthetic works that produce sensible ground of *experience* contribute to such articulation?

### **Transcendental Empiricism of History: Deleuze and Benjamin**

Gilles Deleuze’s notion of “transcendental empiricism” pries open the circuit in which our encounter with the thing in the world merely confirms the currently hegemonic ground of knowledge. If traditional empiricism only provides possible variants of the thing’s phenomenal appearance, such appearance only solidifies the hegemonic doxa or other commonsensical ways of encountering the world. Intervening into such formation of knowledge, Deleuze argues that “the being of the sensible” introduces a “problematic gap” between a continuum of perception and action as its “problematic” materiality forces us to repeat its essence as difference. The following passages from Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* clarify such notion of transcendental empirical circuit in which the sensuous being actively reproduces the thing’s material appearance.

It is strange that aesthetics (as the science of the sensible) could be founded on what can be represented in the sensible. True, the inverse procedure is not much better; consisting of the attempt to withdraw the pure sensible from representation and to determine it as that which remains once representation is removed (a contradictory flux, for example, or a rhapsody of sensations). Empiricism truly becomes transcendental ... only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential

difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity.  
(56-57)

It is ... fatal that the ground should itself be no more than a simply external conditioning. A strange leap on the spot or vicious circle by which philosophy, claiming to extend the truth of solutions to problems themselves but remaining imprisoned by the dogmatic image, refers the truth of problems to the possibility of their solution. What is missed is the internal character of the problem as such, the imperative internal element which decides in the first place its truth or falsity and measures its intrinsic genetic power: that is, the very object of the dialectic or combinatory, the "differential." (161-162)

As Deleuze argues here, "potential difference" or "difference in intensity" that inheres in the being of the sensible must be reproduced by the ones who have received its problematic character that is "internal" and "intrinsic" to it. Deleuze's notion of difference here is thoroughly internal and intrinsic to that which constantly differs from itself. Thoroughly indifferent to the identitarian notion of difference as external difference between two or more essentialized bodies or groups, the being of the sensible engages itself in a creative act that realizes and extends the continuous "genesis" of its difference.<sup>1</sup>

Walter Benjamin's notion of "historical origin" resonates with Deleuze's understanding of the reproducible nature of empirical ground of history as it illuminates how such productive act necessarily transforms both the human agent involved and the ways in which it traverses multiple beings within and across the *socius*. Benjamin's early seminal work *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* advances an argument that artworks can simultaneously attend to the details of historical experiences and formalize them into more enigmatic and, hence, allegorical images. As such, artworks, for Benjamin, occupy and create an interstitial space in which empirical attention and formalist construction overlap and mutually shape one another. This is perhaps why Benjamin's understanding of art as a production of historical knowledge bears resemblance to Deleuze's later notion of expressive crystallization of history in literary texts or cinematic images. Benjamin outlines how aesthetically attentive observation of the object's "minutest" details formally individuates its uniqueness:

[A] pause for breath, after which thought can be totally and unhurriedly concentrated even on the very minutest object without the slightest inhibition. For the very minutest things will be discussed whenever the work of art and its form are considered with a view to judging their content. ... In the act of true contemplation, on the other hand, the abandoning of deductive methods is combined with an ever wider-ranging, an ever more intense reappraisal of phenomena, which are, however, never in danger of remaining the object of vague wonder, as long as the representation of them is also a representation of ideas. For it is here that their individuality is preserved. (44)

While the above passage is still unclear as to the extent to which an artwork's formalization of the observable uniqueness of the object is tantamount to its

differentiation, Benjamin's notion of "historical origin," in distinction from more chronological notion of "genesis," underscores the generative and differential characteristics with which history originates itself in the present.

Origin [Ursprung], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [Entstehung]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existence came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and its current swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual ... On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. (45)

Clearly differentiated from the mere "genesis" of "the factual," Benjamin's historical origin is an eventual emergence of the past in its processual mutation of itself and of the materials involved in its making. Moreover, the origin's fundamentally "imperfect and incomplete" appearance and disappearance necessitate the presence of other, similarly incomplete witnesses of history. Like Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of "being singular plural," an articulation and reticulation of plural singularities each of which is always already internally plural, Benjamin implies that witnessing of history constitutively requires and produces a collectivity of those who can remember partially, resulting in a formation which he elsewhere refers to as "constellation," or a unique configuration of mutually incommensurate beings each of which only partially illuminates the "unexpressed" events of the past.

Such attentive differentiation of the past also differentiates the very practitioners of historiography when their accumulation of historically fragmented objects produces a similar intensity within their bodies. Benjamin's description of a historian who amasses stones and rocks in a ruinous social landscape is also a narrative indication of such historian's attainment of a mimetic resemblance to these objects he collects.

[I]t is common practice in the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, and, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification.

Here, a historiographer's attentive differentiation of the historically (de)formed object intensifies his patient desire for social change. Historiographical accumulation articulates both its objects ("rocks") and its subject ("collector") as equally transformed material beings, co-witnesses of history that variously reimagine the ways in which they could have appeared and lived without alienation. As Judith Butler cogently points out of the fundamentally socialized nature of matter, "[t]he materiality of objects ... is constituted in and as [its] transformative activity" and, as such, opens a space of temporal transformation "of an alienated social state to a non-alienated social state" (250). As the formed and formalized objects of history, plurally singular artworks and their producers

wait and, by doing so, open a space in which their desires for non-alienated social state emerge over time.

### **Literary Constellation of Historical Stones in East Asia in the Age of the US Imperial Hegemony**

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's poetic text *Dictee* (1980) has been canonized within Asian American studies and related disciplines as a literary instance in which its putatively Korean American immigrant female narrator resists the interpellations of multiple colonial and imperial nation-states including Japan, the US, and France and instead opens up an alternative social space for heterogeneous "bad subjects" who deliberately mispronounce or fail to accurately mimic the words they are taught to speak within the imperial metropolises. A number of Asian Americanist critics such as Shelly Wong, Lisa Lowe, and Laura Kang have usefully pointed out the instances of political resistance in *Dictee* that are often enacted through its experimental forms that interrupt, question, or parody nationalist institutions of pedagogy and historiography. However, the critics' assumption that such disruptions of the imperial nation-states' ideological apparatus is enabled by an *a priori* unitary perspective offered by its positionality the narrator occupies as a "Korean American immigrant woman" overlooks the presence of multiple and oftentimes anonymous women who renarrate history through its differentiation.<sup>2</sup>

While *Dictee*, especially in its early chapters such as "Clio History," "Calliope Epic Poetry," and "Urania Astronomy," narrates various Korean or Korean American women's experiences of having to work within or resisting against the pedagogical spaces accorded by Japanese colonialism or American imperialism, these women's births or residence in Korea or Korean American do not provide them with a privileged position from which an accurate portrayal of colonial or imperial memory of Korea prior to and after 1945 becomes possible. Therefore, although the women who appear in *Dictee*'s Korea such as Yoon Guan-soon, the "mother" who teaches in Manchuria under Japanese occupation, and the "daughter" in Korea during the early 1960s have witnessed Japanese colonial violence or dictatorial suppression by the South Korean regime that was heavily supported by the US government and military, they do not transmit any heroic narrative that exemplifies Korea's anti-colonial nationalist project but instead retain their unnarratable secrets and eventually transmit them to audiences whose sociological make-up cannot be known in advance. For example, Yoon Guan-soon, who is deified in the normative nationalist narrative as the nation's anti-colonial martyr and heroine (30), wants to serve as an "appointed messenger" of the independence movement and travels to "40 towns" (30). But she remains marginal in the nationalist movement that does not "accept her seriousness [and] her place as a young woman" (36). Moreover, in all the references to Yoon made in the text, the reader has no access to the actual messages she might have disseminated in these towns. Likewise, the mother commits a daring act of

speaking Korean “[i]n the dark, in secret” in Japanese-controlled Manchuria (45) and addresses her “hidden [and] masked” voices to others. While she transmits these words under the “ghost veil” to the “south” that most likely implies the Korean peninsula, all she can do in this context is “to scatter her words” in multiple directions through natural conduits offered by the wind, the water, and the birds (48). In “Melpomene Tragedy,” having witnessed the students’ and workers’ demonstration against the dictatorial, developmental regime of South Korea in the late 70s and the early 80s, the narrator writes a letter addressed to her mother. However, the letter does not arrive at her mother and is displaced toward other addressees: first, the narrator’s brother who participates in the student movement, and, later, the conscripted soldiers who must police and arrest these students (85-87). If the constant shift of the addressees in the letter attests to the narrator’s frustrated effort and failure to communicate with people within Korea, such frustration and failure are constitutive of a non-nationalist community in which one’s address, in Naoki Sakai’s formulation, necessarily works with a possibility that it will be met by a zero degree of communication (5). If the references to Korea in *Dictée* are thus addressed to anyone, such enunciations about Korea are potentially productive of a community of those who do not and cannot share any sociologically determinable attributes.

Thus, as Viet Thanh Nguyen points out, various female witnesses of history not only “refuse to be hailed by dominant ideology [but also] refuse to be hailed by resistant ideology” that interpellates them into preformulated subject positions such as Korean or Korean American immigrant woman (157). If such sociological category does not accord one any privileged access to the ways in which historical memories originate and disperse themselves in the present, they must remake the very ways of such memories’ reappearance in the world. If many Asian Americanist critics have somewhat excessively focused their attention upon the text’s early chapters and, by doing so, attempted to stabilize the sociological identity of these women, the text’s later chapters increasingly feature anonymous female subjects of unknown geographical origins who often begin to resemble the fragmented objects of nature such as stones and rocks. For example, the text depicts one anonymous woman’s attempt to gather together various cinematic images she sees in a theater and likens it to a reformation of rocks: “The forgotten. To survive the forgotten supersede the forgotten. From stone. Layers. Of stone upon stone her self stone between the layers, dormant ....” (150). Later in the text, the reader is called on to witness a part of the forgotten, marginalized history that “[s]tands now [as] an empty column of alterity, of vein, fixed in stone” (161). The text demands that the reader assemble multiple stones on which historical forces of colonialism are inscribed so that the very objects of historical violence can be refigured as an ensemble of desires for a different future: “*From stone, A single stone. Column. Carved on one stone, the labor of figures. The labor of tongues. Inscribed to stone. The labor of voices. Water inhabits the stone, conducts absorption of implantation from the exterior. In tones, the inscriptions*



resonate the atmosphere of the column .... Other melodies, whole, suspended between song and speech in still the silence” (161-162).

Because these women’s attempts to renarrate history in *Dictee* have largely nothing to do with their sociologically determinable identities or positionalities, their efforts to collect plural historical remnants such as “rocks” and “stones” solicit the women themselves to become these objects. If their accumulations of singular matters in history singularize themselves, the narratives they weave out of these fragmentary objects cannot be appropriated or canonized by any national apparatus:

Arrest the machine that purports to employ democracy but rather causes the successive refraction of *her* none other than her own. Suffice Melpomene, to exorcise from this mouth the name the words the memory of severance through this act but this very act to utter one, *Her* once, *Her* to utter at once, *She* without the separate act of uttering (89).

In *Dictee*, one female speaker’s verbalization of her own or another woman’s past necessarily differentiates it by giving it “water” and “other melodies.” The possibility of such differential memory is virtually available to anyone who wishes to “utter” and reutter such woman’s singularly disruptive manifestation in the present.

During the politically volatile decades of the 1950s and the 1960s in which Okinawa was governed by the US Civil Administration and its High Commissioner nominated and dispatched by the Secretary of Defense, the poet Kiyota Masanobu has written both poems and prose texts on poetics in which objects as material marks of their own historical objectification evince intense desires for liberation and such intensely affective exploration of justice exceeds any cultural or ethnically unitary nationalist attempt to appropriate it as part of its pedagogical repertoire. Kiyota is known even today for his rigorous critique of the tendency prevalent among the poets of the preceding generation including Arakawa Akira and Kawamitsu Shin’ichi to produce social realist poems that interpellated their readers into a particular anti-imperial ethno-nationalism that pictorialized Okinawa as an imagined community mainly consisting of the land-owning peasants whose agrarian entitlement was being taken away by the USCAR’s enforcement of land appropriation. Kyota remained critical of such poetics which derived their legitimacy from the kind of ethno-nationalist foundation their very poems attempted to produce.<sup>3</sup> By presupposing an *a priori* presence of “Okinawa” as a unitary space occupied by its culturally homogeneous constituents, these poets instituted an internally hierarchical nationalist culture in which they are figured as a part of the representative avant-garde and their readers as the docile objects of their representation.

Directly critiquing such internally hierarchical formation, Kiyota urges his readers to recognize the then-contemporary political reality of the island whereby neither “Japan” nor “Okinawa” exists as their potential “mother country” that guarantees the possibility of harmonious social relations without

incommensurability or antagonism. Instead, Kiyota firmly believes that socially heterogeneous beings' constant productions of their "affective desires" could someday institute an egalitarian space that does not rely upon nationalist representations and representatives.

To illustrate such articulation of multiple desiring bodies, Kiyota recounts a story he remembers from his childhood spent in Kume Island of an accidental encounter between a Japanese AWOL soldier who sought protection by the village women of Kume and a veteran of the Japanese Imperial army who returns to the island and thinks that his killing of the Japanese soldier symbolically amounts to his vengeful critique of Japanese nationalist imperialism. Despite the nearly deadly crash between the two former soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army recounted therein, Kiyota thinks that the story itself evinces a peculiar temporality in which the three distinctly non-national forms of anti-colonial desires articulate one another: the Japanese soldier's desire to escape from Japanese state apparatus, the Kume Islander veteran's return from the same military, and the island's women's willingness to offer protection to the Japanese soldier as the displaced object of their familial and non-nationalist affection. Using the story as his theoretical springboard, Kiyota sums up his vision of non-national resistance as follows: "When we do not have a country to which we should safely return, there is only a willingness to transform ourselves toward a certain communality based upon our affective desires produced in the midst of struggle against the dominant structure" (15). If the story ultimately leaves unresolved the mutual animosity between the two former soldiers, it nonetheless offers Kiyota an insight into an articulability of singular beings who come to manifest no shareable attributes but their distinctive desires to interrupt any nationalist attempt to postulate transcendently presumed rights to both territoriality and representability of history.

Kiyota's poem "Poetic Fragments of a Man Called Crayfish" written in 1963 instantiates his vision whereby plurally singular beings articulate their critiques of and struggles against the American imperialist appropriation of the agrarian spaces *without* presupposing the landowners as the exemplary agents of such politics.

Not for the sake of a revolutionary army that institutes itself horizontally  
Not for the sake of lonely embraces with which people mutually hold each other  
horizontally  
You who crawl and tread upon this round earth  
do so because you want to be met by the vertical arrivals of thoughts  
which penetrate and scrape the earth's core.  
What you saw, however, was a broken harp.  
On the street where an autumnal wind passes,  
Unable to absorb the reverse flow of dusk with its flood-like quickness,  
you must travel  
along the coasts of constant vagrancy and departure. (232)

Refusing a “horizontal” comradeship that sustains itself through an imaginary construction of a cultural or socio-economic foundation, the poet desires that particular “thoughts” could “vertically” intrude into the current social context of the island or elsewhere and manifest their not-yet-comprehensible othernesses. If the poet here is depicted as being constantly banished from the potential sites where he could come into contact with such inherently problematic thoughts, an ensuing experience of his exilic wandering across the island(s) ultimately produces multiple locations within Okinawa and across its archipelago where the virtual possibility of encountering such enigmatic thoughts remains unfulfilled.

If the actual referents of such sensible problematics remain ambiguous in the poem, the poet elsewhere argues more concretely that his task is to carefully render into poetic images the landless peasants’ “hunger” as a form of embodied sensation. For Kiyota, the peasants’ hunger constitutes the unexchangeable core of their intensely personal experiences. Because it emanates from the multiple singular bodies and arises from their experiences of material and political lack, hunger cannot be appropriated by the then-dominant political party’s ethno-nationalist perspective: “When [the peasants] are alienated from the institutionalized struggle and are deprived of their visibility within society, their lived experience of hunger forces them to face their possible deaths in their quotidian lives. Hunger, then, ceases being a merely physical experience of being hungry and impregnates itself with a rigorous question and critique of the reality as such (29).”<sup>4</sup> If the landless peasants’ hunger remains marginalized and excluded from the island’s mainstream public sphere, Kiyota wants to produce poetic images of objects including human bodies and the island’s landscapes that operate as aesthetically formulated equivalents of such continuously overlooked “hunger.” The poet deploys such imagistic constructs as the vehicles of desires that rigorously critique both the American imperial administration of the island and the internally hierarchical structure of Okinawa’s anti-imperial popular struggle in the 1950s and the 60s.

Instead of instituting a horizontal comradeship, an articulation of such images in Kiyota’s works brings about their incommensurable gaps across which “a resource for sympathetic relations possibly emerges even prior to our attainment of shared sensible perceptions” (34). Instead of wishing to ameliorate such hunger through distributive justice, Kiyota wants to populate his poems with the images of objectified human beings, objects, and natural environments each of which is demonstrative of its irreplaceable experience of being hungry. The poet not only wishes to distribute such hunger across and against currently regimented divisions within Okinawan, Japanese, and American societies but is convinced that he himself must become such objectified matter if he wants to institute thoroughly equal relationships among these objects.<sup>5</sup> Like Benjaminian allegory maker whose seemingly aimless and intense heaping-up of historical fragments transforms himself, Kiyota wants to become such socially objectified matter in order to acquire the kind of critical energy that inheres in it.

The problem won't be solved by proposing a [political] prescription. Nor will it be ameliorated through the normative form of perception that seduces us to let go of our attempts to think logically. If these methods risk overlooking the very status of the object in society and, by doing so, leave unexamined the current state of our alienation, I propose instead to deepen precisely such state of alienation so that an alternative form of alienation emerges within the self and overlaps with the first form of alienation .... The logic that allows us to own "the things" that proliferate themselves on variously demarcated dividing lines of the systematized society is capable of interrupting the very alienation. Instead of fearing objectification, it is more productive to willingly become an object first and then to explore what necessarily exceeds such objectification in the space where the notion of human subject is already bankrupt as a condition of human existence.

The reality is not the only thing that changes. We ourselves are changing and will change. By achieving our metamorphosis into objects, we will be able to query into a more fundamental condition of human existence. (267)

Kiyota's notion of "the fundamental condition of human existence" emerges only when we labor to become the objectified matters which exhibit a clandestine and "alternative" form of objecthood, a state in which critique of imperialist governance and a hope of egalitarian relations are inseparable. Resembling Deleuze's empirical production of a transcendental condition of experience, Benjamin's formalist accumulation of historical details that aesthetically modifies and differentiates the very historical experiences, and Cha's literary redemption of historically wounded objects, Kiyota urges those who wish to remember colonial and imperial histories to not only assemble, differentiate, and distribute the "minutest details" of historical objects but also to become such objects themselves. Without insisting upon one's putative social positions or identities as the basis of political praxis, these literary works effect an articulation of ourselves as those who work to become objects in history and distribute and divide historical memory across multiple singularities.

## Notes

1. As Levi Bryant usefully summarizes, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism underscores a particular empirical and experimental encounter with the world wherein one's "sensibility is itself the result of productive processes that actually create or produce the qualities of sensibility" and "sensibility in general [is seen] as producing the objects of intuition rather than merely receiving them passively" (9).
2. For example, in Shelly Sunn Wong's "Unnaming the Same: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*," Wong argues that *Dictee* critiques the notion of national history and its privileging of "identity over difference" because it is what "the Korean American immigrant woman writer, marked by differences of race, nationality and gender, can ill afford at the cost of almost certain erasure" (105). Similarly, the text maintains its skepticism of both lyric poetry as an expression of the autonomous individuality and epic poetry as a representative of the dominant political community and its notion of abstract

citizenship precisely because “neither sufficiently comprehends the multiple subjectivities of the Korean American immigrant woman writer” who maintains an individual agency and yet is constrained by the external history (118). Lastly, Wong argues, disease’s deft mimicking of dominant religious, colonial, and patriarchal discourses opens up a critical space in the midst of those ideologies that otherwise “prescribe and proscribe all possibilities of speech for the Korean American immigrant woman” (121).

3. Arakawa Akira’s well-known poem “An Orphan’s Song” exemplifies the poet’s strategic espousal of social realist poetry as a privileged source of ideologically uncorrupted messages of dissent and critique, and therefore identifies the young male poet as the privileged practitioner of an Okinawa’s anti-imperial cultural nationalism.

Why is our land disappearing?  
Why are our minds crammed with lies?  
To these <?> (questions) we must answer.

“No”--to all forms of oppression!  
“No”--to all sources of power!  
We must sing in harmony with  
the people’s message, which surges forth,  
threatening to cover the entire land,  
Even today, the explosions reverberate  
Even today, smoke floats through the air,  
The sky is heavy, the ocean dark.  
The sound of waves grows loud, the evening mist drifts past.

(Cited in Molasky, 232-233)

4. For the detailed analysis of Kiyota’s notion of “hunger” as a specific modification of the similar idea already promulgated by the Japanese poet Kurota Kio, see Tomiyama Ichiro’s essay “Utopias: On a Reversion to the Object” (esp. 348-353).
5. In an essay titled “Kikan to Dasshutsu [Homecoming and Exodus],” Kiyota also enlists the members of the Zengunro (All-Okinawa Military Employees Trade Union) and a particular American officer as two specific instances in which refusals to participate in an imperial warfare traverse socially and nationally regimented divisions.

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