

**Multi Consciousness: Simultaneity, Splintering, and Structures of Feeling in
Contemporary American Fictions of Displacement**

Yasmina Jaksic

A Dissertation Submitted to The Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in English
York University
Toronto, Ontario

October 2023

© Yasmina Jaksic, 2023

Abstract

Multi consciousness is a cross-cultural and cross-temporal affective structure which poses questions regarding how different modes of displacement (enforced relocation, immigration), erasure (social and political), and violence affect formations of consciousness, and how representations of subjecthood or lack thereof alter perceptions of self. I unpack the metaphor of the multiplied, fragmented and split as it is repurposed in contemporary American fictional works of displacement to understand how multiplicity resonates more destructively with displaced and marginalized individuals. Multi consciousness accounts for and contains double, triple, and *mestiza* consciousness, and furthermore articulates the complexities of marginalized subjecthood in the contemporary moment—in the moment of ever-present technology where everything is instantaneous and multiplied, in the moment continued and ongoing racial and identity politics.

I will discuss multi consciousness as a shared structure of feeling, as a practice of assimilation and mourning, and the various metaphors of multi consciousness that contemporary American fictional works of displacement engage in. The dissertation works through Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020), Eric Nguyen's *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021), Charles Yu's *Interior Chinatown* (2020), Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018), Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998), *Arrival* (2016), and *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once* (2021). I look to these works to outline the condition of multi consciousness: mourning, the sense of being haunted, displacement and diaspora, multiple competing ways of inhabiting the body/being in the world, the sense of inhabiting multiple timelines/worlds, the presence of

whiteness as consciousness, seeking/creating a double of the self, and disassociation. Through this varied bibliography, I argue that multi consciousness surfaces as an evident cross-cultural, cross-generational, shared structure of feeling within contemporary American fictions of displacement.

Key words: multi consciousness; double consciousness; displacement; diaspora; contemporary fiction, contemporary film

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Preface: Inherited Memory, Displaced Consciousness—Rea Tajiri and Toni Morrison	1
Introduction: Multi Consciousness: Simultaneity, Splintering, and Structures of Feeling.....	6
I. Divided Consciousness(es)	6
II. Multi Consciousness as Shared Structure of Feeling.....	9
III. Multi Consciousness as Psychological Framework: A History of Doubles, Egoic Formation, and The Mirror Stage.....	11
IV. Multi Consciousness as Philosophical Framework	22
V. Multi Consciousness as Intersectional Framework: Reframing Double Consciousness—Mestiza, Triple, Multi	25
VI. Miming (as)simulation and Mourning: Multi Consciousness in America.....	33
VII. Multi Consciousness as Contemporary Technological Structure.....	44
VIII. Moving towards Multi Consciousness: African-, Asian-, and Indigenous-American Contemporary Fiction.....	47
Chapter 1: To See Through White Eyes—Multi Consciousness in African-American Literature.....	52
I. “A World of Clean Comfort”—Toni Morrison’s <i>The Bluest Eye</i> (1970).....	58
II. Whiteness as Contagion—Danzy Senna’s <i>Caucasia</i> (1998),.....	76
III. What Does Hybridity Look Like?—Brit Bennett’s <i>The Vanishing Half</i> (2020)	98
IV. Conclusion: Black Girlhood—Of Double and Multi Consciousness.....	111
Chapter 2: Intersecting and Interlocking Performance in Asian-American Literature....	114
I. Degrees of Separation and Degrees of Multi Consciousness— Eric Nguyen’s <i>Things We Lost to the Water</i> (2021).....	119

II. Model Minority Performance—Charles Yu’s <i>Interior Chinatown</i> (2020)	140
III. Acts of Impersonation—Viet Thanh Nguyen’s <i>The Sympathizer</i> (2015)	151
IV. Conclusion—Diasporic Multiplicity	164
Chapter 3: Fragmented Souls, Spirits, and Ghosts in Indigenous-American Fiction	166
I. The Distance Between “I” and “Myself”—James Welch’s <i>Winter in the Blood</i> (1974).....	169
II. Body and Flesh—Otherwise Worlds in Leslie Marmon Silko’s <i>Ceremony</i> (1977).....	182
III. Indigenous Futurism: Tommy Orange’s <i>There There</i> (2018).....	197
IV. Conclusion: Non-consciousness and the Third Space of the Virtual World.....	206
Chapter 4: Multi Consciousness and the Multiverse.....	175
I. Transgenerational Trauma in the Multiverse: <i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i> (2022).....	208
II. Multiple Languages, Multiple Worlds: Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998) and <i>Arrival</i> (2016).....	225
Conclusion: New Metaphors of Multi Consciousness.....	238
Bibliography	246

Preface: Inherited Memory, Displaced Consciousness

In 1991 Japanese-American filmmaker Rea Taijiri released *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*, a documentary chronicling her family's experience being interned in America. Taijiri's father and mother and their families were interned at separate camps following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, even though her father served in the U.S. army (9:51). Taijiri's paternal grandfather's house was condemned by the U.S. government and was later ripped out from the ground and stolen (9:51). Throughout the film, Taijiri collages different snippets of American propaganda discussing the project called the "relocation of Japanese aliens" (10:04). The documentary uses multiple modes of narrative, one of which is screenplay-like descriptions of scenes about her family from an omniscient third-person point of view. The film begins with rolling text that declares:

December 7th, 1961

View from 100 feet above.

Street lights and tops of

trees surround the view

which is comprised of a

strip of grey concrete

with strips of green grass

on either side...

The tops of the heads of a

man and woman become visible...

(The spirit of my

grandfather witnesses

*my father and mother as
they have an argument
about the unexplained
nightmares their
daughter has been having
on the 20th anniversary of
the bombing of
Pearl Harbor...)*
(0:25-1:12).

Taijiri experiences recurring nightmares of a specific image: a woman standing at a faucet, filling a canteen. She knows this woman is her mother, and she can describe specific sensations: “the water’s really cold, and it feels really good. And outside, the sun is so hot” (1:25-1:53). She also describes specific affects: “I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born (13:09-13:35). The contradiction causes her great pain, confusion, and division: she has memories of a life before her life began, of another life that is not hers. In the opening scene, Taijiri speaks through her grandfather’s spirit, appearing to inhabit him as he watches her parents speaking about Taijiri herself. The image of her mother, and the sensations that accompany these disjointed memories, haunt her consciousness. It feels tangible and lived, but at the same time, dislocated: “I don’t know where this came from” (1:25) she states.

Interestingly, Taijiri’s mother has no recollection of her time at the internment camp. She cannot locate the specific details her daughter brings up. Taijiri shows her mother clips of the internment camps from American television programs—as the clip plays, Taijiri’s mother’s voice can be heard saying: “They didn’t have a canteen...I don’t remember this” (10:56) or “I

don't remember any of that stuff" (14:50). Taijiri has come into the possession of a transgenerational traumatic memory—one that her mother, the subject of the memory and the original owner of the memory, has repressed. Despite never having been to the internment camps herself, Taijiri feels as though she knows the place intimately: "We had been moved, uprooted...I had no idea where these memories came from, yet I knew the place" (13:09-13:35). As a result, Taijiri describes the phantom presence she feels she has taken on: "I felt lost, ungrounded, somewhat like a ghost that floats over terrain, witnessing others having their lives, yet not having one of its own (22:07-22:13). Taijiri has become the host through which these traumatic memories are stored, giving her a phantom-like sensation, as though she is possessed by the memories of her mother and family. She feels dissociated from her own memories as they are memories of lives she has not lived. Taijiri feels ungrounded because she exists in multiple places, in multiple timelines, at once. The image of the woman at the canteen plays over and over in her life as it does throughout the film. She has inherited the memories, and as such, consciousness, of other people.

Taijiri's experiences recalls a passage in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) in which Sethe, an escaped slave, and her daughter Denver discuss what Sethe calls "rememory":

"I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened."

“Can other people see it?” asked Denver.

“Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else (17-8).

Morrison’s concept of “rememory” poses an etymological complexity. The prefix re- indicates something is occurring again (redo) or something is moving backwards (return). With rememory, we have both simultaneously—Sethe describes the process of remembering as an experience of not just reexperiencing the past, but physically returning to it. Rememory is an internal and external experience—traumatic memories haunt their sites and transport those who encounter them back in time. Trauma wounds the fabric of time and consciousness—memories supersede the individual and become tangible. The past demands to remain present and as such, haunts the victims and their offspring.

Morrison’s term has been used widely in memory, race, and feminism studies. Delphine Gras describes rememory as a “global” concept that combats the “historical amnesia characteristic of a post-racial discourse” (270-1). Kimberly Chabot Davis cites Morrison’s rememory as a “hybrid vision of history and time” that counters the “spatial or flattened out” history Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Francis Fukuyama theorized in the contemporary moment of inhabiting a “perpetual present in which images of the past are merely recycled with no understanding of their original context” (242). As such, while the situations of Taijiri and Sethe—Japanese internment and African-American slavery—are vastly different and incomparable, the descriptions of transgenerational trauma, inherited memory, displaced consciousnesses, and haunting however, open up avenues of discussion between these disparate

groups and the effects of enforced displacement, national racism, and encampment. Taijiri and Morrison provide an understanding of traumatized and displaced consciousness in which a subject can be infiltrated by consciousnesses that are not their own, and that the rupturing of displacement and trauma can multiply a subject's experience of time, space, and selfhood. They describe a shared after-effect: multi consciousness.

Introduction: Divided Consciousness(es)

I come from here, and I am
neither here nor there. I have two names that come together but
pull apart. I have two languages, but I have forgotten which is the
language of my dreams.

—Mahmoud Darwish, “Counterpoint”

One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body...The History of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

—W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*

The between-world condition is a duality that is characteristic of all people in a minority position. Many scholars have noted it and have given it various names in various contexts. Between worlds is the “divided consciousness” that W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 noted...It is Mary Helen Washington’s “divided self, woman split in two (which is closely akin to double consciousness)...found in literature by women, white and Black.” It is Elaine Showalter’s “double-voiced discourse” that “always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted [female] and the dominant [male].”

—Amy Ling, *Between Worlds: Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*

Mahmoud Darwish plays with the complex resonances of a “counterpoint” in his description of a life lived between two worlds and two selves. A counterpoint is a point of contrast to an idea or argument, but in music theory, it is also the combination of two lines of music that are distinct in rhythm and melody yet are harmonically interdependent (Laitz 78). Steven Laitz goes on to define a musical counterpoint as the “relationship between and movement of two or more voices” (86). The “contrapuntal motion” can be contrary, similar, or parallel (90). Darwish’s speaker begins in New York—a counterpoint place for the self-described “foreign soul” of the speaker. The poem plays out as an imagined dialogue between

the speaker and Edward Said—a Palestinian writer like Darwish—who expresses the harmonious discordance in his doubled self:

I have the English language with its accommodating vocabulary to write in. And another tongue drawn from celestial conversations with Jerusalem. It has a silvery resonance, but rebels against my imagination...

I cannot meet loss head on. Like the beggar, I stayed at the door. Am I going to ask strangers who sleep in my bed for permission to spend five minutes in my own home? Will I bow respectfully to the people that occupy my dream of childhood? Will they ask: who is this stranger who lacks discretion? Will I be able just to speak of peace and war among victims and the victims of victims, avoiding superfluous words and asides? Will they tell me that two dreams cannot share a bed?

Said and the speaker delineate the experience of being point and counterpoint. Strangers now sleep in the beds they have left behind, in the homelands no longer theirs to call home. These strangers are both them and not—counterpoints, parallel selves that could have been, past selves that continue to haunt and remain present. The aftermath of their left-behind lives runs clear through their minds. Yet, the familiar faces they meet in dreams of their childhood no longer recognize them. They are moved by and approximate to the violence that occurs in their homeland, yet too far removed to understand it as their relatives and friends do. They are self and counterself, two voices, two selves, that move in one consciousness.

Said's own work dissects the concrete division between East and West and examines how such division leads to the problematic of Orientalism: "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe...[it is] one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other...the Orient is a

Western construction, one of presumed “ontological and epistemological distinction” (25-6). As Said explains:

Dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (26).

To destroy an identity to recreate it as your Other and lesser is to wield power over it: “because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action” (27). As Fanon argues, this process is the production of colonial subjects—when the colonized become their own colonizer. The Other cannot conceive of themselves without the totalizing lens of their Otherness.

However, Said moves through this divide in the poetic voice Darwish gives him. Point and counterpoint lose their distinctiveness. Identity is no longer a counterpoint—two lines of music, each with one’s own rhythm and melody—but rather the totality of each occurring in simultaneity and multiplicity. Darwish’s Said says:

A margin moves forward and a centre retreats. The East is not completely the East, nor the West, the West. Identity is multifaceted.

It is neither a citadel nor is it absolute.

Said moves towards multiplicity as a way of reconciling the divided self. The absolutes that exist externally—East, West—and the divides they create within the self dissolve internally when one moves toward an idea of the self as multiple. “It is we who fashion our identity, it is not heredity. I am manifold” the poem’s Said declares. In mathematics, a manifold space can contain many self-intersections; they need not to be connected nor closed—manifolds are open-ended, uncountable. To be manifold is to be various, simultaneous, and multiple.

As with Darwish's poem, this dissertation too will move from discussions of the divided and doubled self to the multiplied self in contexts of displacement, with particular focus on African-, Asian- and Indigenous-American texts. I propose multi consciousness as a cross-cultural and cross-temporal diasporic affective structure, a "shared structure of feeling" which Raymond Williams defines as a "common element that we cannot easily place...a particular sense of life," a "connexion" that is part of both the "dominant social character" of the period and "emergent or embryonic" from this social order, preceding articulation (*Revolution* 61). In "Counterpoint," the speaker moves from two names that "meet and pull apart" to a manifold—a consciousness that makes space for the multiplicity and simultaneity of the temporalities, languages, spatialities, and serves a displaced subject inhabits.

Multi Consciousness as Shared Structure of Feeling

This dissertation will analyze works of fiction and film for the ways in which they bring to surface the emerging shared structure of multi consciousness. Various metaphors—ghosts and hauntings, doppelgängers, twins, split and fragmented selves, virtual reality, cyberspace, time travel, and the multiverse—are employed to discuss the condition of multi consciousness as a form of lived and inherited diasporic rupture, emerging as a common thread throughout contemporary diasporic texts, communicating the dystopia of a consciousness pressured to collapse by multiple competing and conflicting forces, and conversely, the potential for emancipation via multiplicity. I unpack the metaphor of the multiplied, fragmented and split as it is repurposed by contemporary American fictions of displacement to understand what multiplicity represents for displaced and marginalized individuals.

With varying discussions of multiple consciousnesses as a result of multiple jeopardies, I'm interested in examining multi consciousness as yet another reframing of split, fragmented, and multiplied consciousness, and a new way of reading contemporary American fictions of displacement. As such, I explore multi consciousness as a cross-cultural and cross-temporal shared structure of feeling. Raymond Williams defines a "structure of feeling" as the "culture of a period"—this structure may not be "possessed in the same way by the many individuals in the community" but is a "very deep and very wide possession" and is not "in any formal sense, learned" (*Revolution* 64-5). Williams notes that structures of feeling tend to characterize specific generations and attempt to articulate "unsolved problems of the society: often admitted to consciousness for the first time" (86). Such structures can "fail to be fully understood even by living people in close contact with it" (66) as it at the edge of our semantic availability, on the plane of the ineffable—it "lies deeply embedded in our lives; it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art...that it can be realized" (*Preface* 865). Williams observes that the structure of feeling is a "connexion" that ties various artists and writers of a period together (*Revolution* 84). In addition to articulating suppressed and ineffable problems, Williams identifies structures of feeling as also communicating the mood of the period. He draws upon *Brave New World*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and *Fahrenheit 451* for their discussion of the "experience of isolation, of alienation, and of self-exile" that is an "important part of the contemporary structure of feeling" (*Revolution* 307).

The structure therefore poses questions of how different modes and contexts of displacement (enforced relocation, immigration), erasure (social and political), and violence affect consciousness formation and experiences of selfhood, how representations of subjecthood, or lack thereof, alter perceptions of self. This dissertation engages with multi consciousness as an

emergent affective structure, and as such, examines the transition from discussions of double consciousness into multi. As the dissertation works within the time period of 1970-2022, major historical events and changes raise various questions regarding the influence of ever-changing technologies and shifting cultural and identity politics on the movement from double consciousness to multi consciousness. The various historical moments these texts speak from and ask whether double consciousness exceeds its limits as an adequate framework for understanding contemporary experiences of displaced subjectivity. The movement towards themes of plurality, hybridity, and the multi in both critical and fictional discussions suggests that multi consciousness is being inhabited as a new form of minority subjectivity in the contemporary moment.

In thinking through multi consciousness as an emergent structure, the problematics of framing such a fragile ideology become apparent. In this dissertation, I will discuss multi consciousness as a psychological and philosophical framework, an intersectional framework, and a technological framework.

Multi Consciousness as Psychological Framework: A History of Doubles, Egoic Formation, and The Mirror Stage

The discussion of fragmented consciousnesses and the divided or split self has a longstanding history. We begin with the phenomenon of doubles: Gordon E. Slethaug notes that the preoccupation with the concept of the double can be traced back to the first written records, perhaps even earlier (100). Slethaug credits the “relative rareness” of twinship for the superstitions and general wariness that culturally came to follow the image of twins and doubling (100). This wariness around a second self then gains enough traction to provide the basis for

many nineteenth-century folkloric traditions, namely the doppelgänger in which one who meets an apparition of oneself then faces imminent death (101). To exist outside of unity, to be confronted with the self, to be in multiple places at once, was seen as an omen of annihilation. While fear surrounds the anomaly of twinship and doubling, the duality of identity and personhood begins to emerge as a pressing theme in literature, art and philosophy: “In *The Symposium* Plato used twinship as a metaphor to explain human origin, sexual preference, and the need to bridge the physical and spiritual orders of the universe” (Slethaug 100). Fragmentation is a fundamental and universal human experience. Duality seen this way, as a condition of humankind however, presupposes the end-goal always being a united self, where separate entities become one.

The doppelgänger appears as a recurring image throughout American fiction, perhaps most notably used by Edgar Allan Poe for his frequent deployment of the device (from “William Wilson” to “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Cask of Amontillado”). Paul Christian Jones describes the “spectrum of uses” for this device in Poe’s work, namely to describe the “battle between counterparts of the same identity” or to “evade or eradicate” or even to “destroy an individual’s conscience” (236). Toni Morrison offers a different reading of Poe by naming him the most important writer to the “concept of American Africanism” (32). The doubles that Morrison traces out in Poe’s works are between black and white—“These images of impenetrable whiteness” illustrate “extraordinary power, pattern, and consistency...they appear almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control” (33). Early American texts that represent “young America” were haunted by this “dark and abiding presence” they could not so easily “extricate” (33). As such, the body of literature emerging from a young America was haunted not only by the fear of

the splitting of the self, but was furthermore disturbed by encounters with the “Other” and racial dread.

Sadeq Rahimi credits the improved mirror technology of the 16th century for the increase in interest in the topic of doubles and split selves (455). Rahimi identifies the proliferation of “double vision,” or schizophrenic vision, in literature as being associated with the uncanny double, now in clearer view via improved mirrors (456). Thus, in dreams, art, and literature, anxieties about the dislocated double and fragmented body emerge and convey a primary instability in the formation of self-consciousness, a fragmentation and splitting, that is both necessary for the formation of self-consciousness while contributing to feelings of alienation and despair. This trend continues and heightens in the 20th century with Freud beginning discussions of the uncanny in 1919, and Lacan proposing the theory of the mirror stage in 1936.

With Freud and Lacan, the recognition of the self is a primary step in the development of the self-conscious, followed closely by the detachment of the self from the outside world, and the fragmentation of the self from the self—the “I” loses its unity. A unified consciousness, as Freud and Lacan theorize, does not exist beyond the infant stages. For Freud, it is contact with unpleasurable experiences that marks the infant’s encounter with his own ego and the uncertainty of the exterior world:

An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world...He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings...Other sources [of excitation] evade him from time to time—among them what he desires most of all, his mother’s breast—and only reappear as a result of his screaming for help. In this way there is for the first time set over against the ego an ‘object,’ in the form of something

which exists ‘outside’ and which is only forced to appear by a special action (*Civilization* 13-14).

As Freud notes, this is the way in which the ego “detaches” itself from the “external world” and the infant progresses past the stage of “undifferentiated unity”—“originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself” (15). The rupture between the ego and the external world marks the dissolution of a primary “oceanic” (11) consciousness in order for the formation of self-consciousness to occur. This self-consciousness is selective, as the ego aims to expel any displeasure from its “shrunk” internal world (15). Whether or not the infant actually experiences feelings of unity is, of course, purely speculative, and whether or not this initial separation is indeed a real breach in cosmic unity is also unclear. Freud does cite the experience of a friend discussing the “oceanic” sensation he and others have felt, a type of religious ecstasy, that brings about a “sensation of ‘eternity,’ a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded” (11) as an example of “being one with the external world as a whole” (12) in adulthood, though notes he has never felt the particular sensation himself. He furthermore looks to the experience of falling in love as an unusual state in which the normally clear demarcations of the ego are temporarily done away with as the boundaries between “ego and object threatens to melt away” (13). The provided examples, while perhaps not inductive of a true cosmic separation at infancy, do suggest a universal drive to achieve ecstasy through unity, to overcome a primary isolation and division.

Returning to the root of this primary separation and alienation, Lacan observes the phenomenon of mirror recognition in children from the age of six months onward (1) marks the event as one that shifts human consciousness. Mirror technology “reduplicates” reality, “the child’s own body, and the persons and things around him” (Lacan 1). The encounter with the

reduplication of reality and of the corporeal self results in a shift in consciousness—“the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (2). Lacan marks the initial stage of assuming the image as a “situation in the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as a subject” (2). The image of the infant belongs only to the infant in this primary stage. The infant exists in relation to no one but themselves. Lacan calls this form the “Ideal-I” (3), but this “form of the body” and the “power” the child gains from it is a “mirage” (3): it “symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination” (3)—in which the infant no longer belongs to themselves, and no longer will act as a cohesive unit with their image, as they enter the symbolic matrix, subject to the gaze and configurations of others.

In 1807, prior to Freud and Lacan’s discussions, Hegel offered a theory of identity formation concerned not with the duplication of the self, but rather the power struggle involved in recognition via the Other—the Other as mirror. In his master/slave dialectic, the individual becomes a subject by recognizing and being recognized by another subject. Hegel’s inversion of the master/slave structure is that the master desires recognition from the slave—the recognition of his absolute power reifies his identity as master. A master cannot exist without a slave. Lacan and Hegel converge in their discussion of power and recognition—Lacan notes the loss of power as the infant no longer belongs solely to themselves, and Hegel draws out recognition as a source of and loss of power—the powerful must be recognized by their subjugated as being in power in order to maintain the dynamic.

Discussions of doubleness and power struggles in relation to conceptions of selfhood circulates in literature and critical theory of displaced peoples with additional resonances. The

concept of the double resonates as an apt descriptor for marginalized experience, with W.E.B Du Bois first coining “double consciousness” in 1903 to describe the “peculiar sensation” of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (5), a sensation he observed within African-American diasporic communities across the United States. Double consciousness for Du Bois explains the cognitive split of the displaced subject wherein a black subject’s relationship to themselves is mediated by dissociative repulsion, viewing themselves through an internalized white gaze. Shamoan Zamir discusses Du Bois’s reframing of and departure from Hegel in his work on double consciousness:

Self-consciousness goes on to greater self-realization through a struggle with another self-consciousness (the famous “Master and Slave” dialectic), and then to an internalization of this struggle in the form of the “unhappy consciousness.” The first proper resolution of this divided self is achieved in the freedom promised by national culture, what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*... The passage on “double-consciousness” corresponds to Hegel’s commentary on the “unhappy consciousness.” And Du Bois’s recognition that “double-consciousness” can be overcome only when the black American can become “a co-worker in the kingdom of culture” mirrors the state of *Sittlichkeit* (114).

As Hegel describes, the unhappy consciousness itself “*is the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature*” (126). For Hegel, consciousness is thus double by nature, but has the potential for unity via integration into and participation in the national culture. Du Bois reworks this internalization in double consciousness: double consciousness is the internalization *of* the other’s consciousness—the

white consciousness of repulsion, differentiation, cannot be overcome as the national culture is not one in which the black American is an equal “co-worker.”

The condition is the affect produced when one’s existence is coded “Other,” as foreign to one’s own home and subsequently one’s own body. Du Bois describes his own childhood confrontation with the reality of his otherness:

It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England...In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil (I).

The childhood incident of rejection and encounter with the self as Other drops the veil before his eyes and marks the entry into a world outside of undifferentiated unity amongst his peers, a world of deep alienation. Du Bois himself exhibits his own double consciousness in *Souls* as he attributes the problem of the colour line both to the racial prejudices of white Americans and the “backwardness” of black people (VI). Du Bois discusses the potential of the “talented tenth” (VI), a class of black people he deems a cut above the rest. Gooding-Williams notes that Du Bois’s answer to the problem of the colour line creates further division and subjugation amongst black people (48). Du Bois conceives of democracy as a process where the masses authorize an aristocrat to rule, someone who adheres to the conventions of the ultimate “model minority.” Du

Bois sought hope for his people, and yet, still held onto racist ideology in thinking through the political and societal future of black people.

Du Bois engages African lore as well by calling the Negro the “seventh son,” (I) born with a veil and gifted with second-sight. In African lore, the seventh son of a family is the one who may see ghosts, and a child born with membrane or placenta over their heads is said to be gifted with second sight that allows him to see the otherworldly and into the future. For Du Bois, double consciousness is the inherent condition of black Americans, and is not just the warring of two identities, but an opening up of perception that allows the subject to see beyond their own reality. They may be haunted by ghosts and memories of the past, see future visions, see the lives that run parallel to them, on the other side of the veil.

John. P. Pittman explains double consciousness as a “sensation which falls short of ‘true’ self-consciousness, but is a consciousness of one’s self nonetheless,” one that is not “episodic or occasional” but fixed and persistent—a “socio-cultural construct rather than bio-racial given” (*Stanford*). As such, double consciousness is not a pathology, as Robert Gooding-Williams argues, but rather a condition of living within a matrix of domination that oppresses a subject from multiple angles. Patricia Hill Collins describes the “matrix of domination” that “regulate[s] the actual patterns of intersecting oppressions” in the United States through social institutions: the “overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained” (228). This matrix exists alongside the axes of identity, it is “structured along certain axes—race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation” and “operates through interconnected domains of power” (Collins 288-9). As such, deviations from the axis of dominant identity and power result in different degrees of domination and differing experiences of oppression. These degrees of oppression, working within an interlocked structure, at a certain point produce the condition of

a split consciousness. As such, double consciousness is the revoked ability to perceive one's self through a "true" self-consciousness, one untainted by oppressive distortion, and form as soon as the black child enters the world.

Kathleen Marie Higgins underscores three other components critical to double consciousness: "1) the sense of being identified by virtual of a single trait (skin colour), and thus being invisible in one's particularity, 2) the sense of being under the surveillance of parties predisposed to be unsympathetic, and 3) the internalization of the mechanisms of surveillance and the adoption of associated self-disparaging judgments" (54). As self-consciousness forms from the fragmentation of the primarily united "I," double consciousness further forms from shrinking of one's identity possibilities due to the colour of their skin—the racialized subject is denied "true self-consciousness," as Pitman notes, as they are unable to view themselves without the totalizing and essentializing lens of race.

The development of a true self consciousness is intercepted by forces of self-surveillance. For Foucault structures of surveillance and judgement appear in all forms of social space, and as such, become easily internalized. Foucault theorizes the panopticon; the all-seeing purveyor that is ingested, becoming a part of the self, watching and reprimanding the self as an Other, as perpetually criminal. Again, while panopticism is a part of all contemporary consciousness, locating surveillance and judgement within an intersectional context creates a deeper layer of dissonance within the subject's consciousness. The threat of racial violence, violence against women, violence against queer people, by police or other government authority is substantially higher, and thus the presence of surveillance and judgement within such subjects is, consequently, also substantially stronger. The opaque Othering and criminality of subjects whose

selfhood depart from the “American” axis of identity produces a more severe form of consciousness fragmentation and identity dissolution.

Du Bois points directly to the effects of slavery and the aftermath of emancipation as providing the grounds for double consciousness to occur. Having undergone a traumatic oceanic transformation, African-American subjects then found themselves in a post-emancipation situation in which, as Du Bois stresses, their identities are rebranded instead of remade. Hortense Spillers uses Freud to describe the Middle Passage as a process of deindividuation and disidentification:

Those African persons in “Middle Passage” were literally suspended in the “oceanic,” if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet “American” either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, where in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also nowhere at all...they were culturally “unmade”...Under these circumstances, one is neither female nor male, as both subjects are taken into “account” as quantities (72).

Freud associates the oceanic with religious ecstasy, falling in love, and primary narcissism (12-13), but Spillers provides a far more violent context for the process of oceanic rupture within African-American consciousness. Spillers takes the double meaning of oceanic here as those suspended across water lose their homeland, lose their foothold and grounding, and through this aquatic passage undergo are stripped of the identities they have formed—they are “unmade” as Spillers defines the process. The African-Americans trapped in this Middle Passage are unified through colonial objectification, made out to be nothing beyond a mass of labourers. Cedric Robinson similarly unpacks the etymology behind the identity given to the African slaves:

The “Negro,” that is the colour black, was both a negation of African and a unity of opposition to white. The construct of Negro, unlike the terms “African,” “Moor,” or “Ethiope” suggested no situatedness in time, that is history, or space, that is ethno- or politico-geography. The Negro has no civilization, no culture, no religions, no history; no place, and finally, no humanity that might command consideration (122).

Displaced from their homeland, oceanically unmade, and transplanted onto a new land in which they are objects of effacement has effects on consciousness formation that persists through generations.

Du Bois notes then the transition from slave to criminal, as he viewed Emancipation as the transition between one form of black enslavement to another:

The police system of the South was originally designed to keep track of all Negroes, not simply of criminals; and when the Negroes were freed and the whole South was convinced of the impossibility of free Negro labor, the first and almost universal device was to use the courts as a means of reenslaving the blacks. It was not then a question of crime, but rather one of color (IX).

Without any form of social support, with a policing system structured for their continued imprisonment, the black subject was freed from the label of slavery to then live in fear of their next form of incarceration. Du Bois illustrates that the effect this transition has on identity formation and consciousness on black Americans is extraordinary disruption—the dissolution of cultural identity, language and land, the internalization of inherent criminality result in a “painful” self-consciousness and exhaustive double life:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American...a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy

which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Colour are changing...but not at the same rate, not in the same way...Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism (325).

Du Bois observes this doubleness especially in worship: “his religion, instead of a worship, is a complaint and a curse, a wail rather than a hope, a sneer rather than a faith” (326). Du Bois notes a darkness and a “note of revenge” (315). The double coding of the songs of worship resonates with the oceanic consciousness of the Middle Passage—there is no religious unity here, but rather divide, as songs of worship are tainted with anger. The bodies, skin, and consciousness of black people have been fundamentally ruptured: “The narration of slave torture indicates further resonances of the whip: not just to lacerate the skin, but to tear out small portions of flesh, specifications of rupture, of altered human tissue” (Spillers 67). The fragmentation of the body and mind persists and forms a new type of consciousness, one haunted by the traumas of slavery, of national racism, dissociated by the constant confrontation with themselves as an Other, divided by the parallel realities and futures they perceive but cannot live.

Multi Consciousness as Philosophical Framework

Isolation, alienation, and exile remain pertinent themes in present literature, and as such, I investigate further how these themes, as they characterize the contemporary period more generally, resonate within contexts of displaced communities in America. As Anzaldúa notes in her definition of *mestiza* consciousness, one’s perception and relationship to the self and the world are fundamentally disrupted and altered. She describes the shifting relationship with perceptions of the world around her:

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface... Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense... When we're up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away (39).

This alternate way of experiencing and being in the world is an example of the fundamental evolution that has occurred in the consciousnesses of displaced and marginalized subjects. It is to see between worlds and to perceive alternate or parallel resonances in everyday objects and encounters. It is to see and experience a multiplied self. The myriad of affects associated with isolation, alienation, and exile within the context of displacement under the matrix of domination, result in the complex object of fragmentary consciousness.

As noted, double consciousness has undergone several forms of reframing in order to articulate the particularities of marginalized experience. From triple consciousness being taken to describe the intersections of race and gender or race and sexuality in the above examples, to Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness to describe the intricacies of queer, female of colour experience, an apparent and consistent urge to articulate the effects on consciousness these multiple modes of oppression have had remains persistent. As such, multi consciousness is not a new concept, however I am using the term to describe the shared connexions between these new forms of consciousness being articulated by marginalized writers.

Multi consciousness accounts for and contains double, triple, and *mestiza* consciousness, and furthermore articulates the complexities of marginalized subjecthood in the contemporary moment. I examine multi consciousness, a contemporary structure of feeling, as an affective

structure. Sara Ahmed defines an affect as being both cognition and bodily sensation (9). Ahmed emphasizes the importance of impressions in affect (11)—the subject already has an impression of themselves, and as such, the sensational and cognitive reactions are in relation to those impressions—ones they did not create. The displaced subject does not automatically meet themselves with such powerful, uncomfortable and painful sensations, rather, they come to “know” themselves as distasteful and unwanted. When they see themselves, they see the image of a person to be hated, an image shaped by policy, media, culture, and society. “Emotions are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such objects” (12) Ahmed writes. Additionally, Ahmed emphasizes the transferability and mobility of an affect: they can “circulate between bodies...they ‘stick’ as well as move” (8). As such, this dissertation analyzes multi consciousness as a learned and shared affective structure—shared cross-culturally and cross-generationally.

Multi consciousness is a complex object in so much as it describes an affect and a consciousness of one’s self; it is a shared structure of feeling that stretches across disparate displaced groups of writers. It is a form of continual mourning—an identity tied to the homeland that was lost, and an “Americanness” that can never be obtained. The following sensations can be observed: 1) mourning, 2) the sense of being haunted, 3) multiple competing ways of inhabiting the body/being in the world, 4) the presence of whiteness as consciousness, 5) seeking/creating other selves, 6) dissociation, as key components to multi consciousness. Multi consciousness is an embryonic and emergent condition articulated through various diasporic and displaced American fictions.

As noted, double consciousness has been continually reframed and remapped by multiple different groups in order to articulate the complex psychic effects that occur under the matrix of

domination. I trace the evolution of double consciousness into triple, and then mixed or multi consciousness, as new ways to describe this contemporary condition and form of consciousness as it emerges and takes shape. I use multi consciousness as a shared affective structure not to conflate the varying experiences of oppression and its myriad of effects, but rather to give shape and name to the embryonic object that shares the same source (the matrix of domination) and has produced related effects in those affected. Multi consciousness conveys, not conflates, a shared experience—of alienation from the homeland, “motherland,” and the self—amongst hybridized Americans. This shared structure of feeling considers the effects contemporary period has had on marginalized subjects and the formation of consciousness. This study will focus on African-American, Indigenous-American, and Asian-American texts, but is a springboard for further conductive work on multi consciousness to be done.

Multi Consciousness as Intersectional Framework: Reframing Double Consciousness—*Mestiza*, Triple, Multi

Du Bois pioneered discussions of the effects of national racism on consciousness, and his idea of double consciousness has been used in other discussions of marginalized consciousness. Du Bois himself had a longstanding interest in Asian subjectivity, African-Asian relations, and the multiplicity of diasporic groups in the modern world (Mullen viii). Du Bois visited Russia, Japan and China and wrote widely on India’s struggle for independence (Mullen xiv). He concluded that the problem of the colour line was a global phenomenon:

The problem of the Negroes thus remains a part of the world-wide clash of colour. So, too, the problem of the Indians can never be simply a problem of autonomy in the British commonwealth of nations. They must always stand as representatives of the coloured

racess—of the yellow, and black peoples as well as the brown—of the majority of mankind, and together with the negroes they must face the insistent problem of the assumption of the white peoples of Europe that they have a right to dominate the world and especially so to organize it politically and industrially as to make most men their slaves and servants (“Indians and American Negros” 73).

Du Bois draws an interesting parallel between the problem of the colour line in America, where black Americans have been displaced by the Middle Passage, and then are left in suspense (or re-enslaved by the prison-state) by the failed Reconstruction that followed Emancipation, and the problem as it exists in colonized countries. For Du Bois, it is the “coloured laborer” who is the common denominator, and who needs to be released from the “domination of the investor” via economic literacy (140-141).

Frantz Fanon’s 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks* further recontextualizes double consciousness in the context of Afro-Europeans, particularly in France: “The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man...That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question” (17). Fanon uses language as an apt site of discussion for the splintering of the self—he points to the “death” of the African subject’s mother tongue, the denial of Creole (the merging of the mother tongue and the language of the colonizers) by schools, and the dominant language of French that moves them closer to “humanity” but not French identity. “By refusing to multiply our elements, we take the risk of not setting a limit to our field; for it is essential to convey to the black man that an attitude of rupture has never saved anyone” (28). Interestingly, Fanon posits multiplicity as a form of identity in which one circumscribes the limits of his own field, as opposed to having the narrow

field, one which causes rupture, inscribed for him by the colonizer. Glen Coulthard performs another layer of recontextualization of Du Bois via Fanon in the Indigenous-Canadian context:

Fanon's analysis suggests that in contexts where colonial rule is not reproduced through force alone, the maintenance of settler-state hegemony requires the production of what Fanon calls "colonized subjects" namely the production of specific modes of colonized thought, desire, and behaviour that commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions required for their continued domination (16).

For Coulthard, the language of "recognition" in Canadian politics can further feelings of double consciousness. Settler-colonial relationships are characterized by domination and dispossession, the primary motive being access to territory. The "gifting" recognition, and without the transformative struggle in which the colonized recognize themselves as free, leaves the population remaining not only subjects of imperial rule but also come to see the forms of recognition by the colonial masters as liberation, and as such, identify with white liberty and white justice, which does not permit the Indigenous subject to escape double consciousness and experience true self consciousness.

Theresa Martinez also sees Du Bois's discussion of double consciousness as resonating with Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza* consciousness, or mixed consciousness, as in both, colonial violence and displacement result in a bodily and psychic fragmentation that produces related sensations, perceptions, and affects. Anzaldúa defines *mestiza* consciousness as:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we believe the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple,

often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision (78).

The feminization of *mestiza* consciousness adds another layer of multiplicity to the fragmentation of the self. As Anzaldúa notes, culture circumscribes a version of reality—of perception—and in turn, a form of consciousness. When two “incompatible frames of reference” come into contact, there is blood, mixing, and an open wound, as Anzaldúa notes, but also the yawning divide between each consciousness, each way of being in the world. As Martinez observes, Du Bois’s double consciousness deals primarily with race, and Anzaldúa brings in issues of gender and sexuality in her observation of identity and consciousness formation under the American matrix of domination (159). Martinez describes double consciousness and *mestiza* consciousness as “significant forms of oppositional culture and consciousness” (159) which address “interlocking systems of oppression spanning two centuries...arguably binding the experiences of African Americans and Latina/os in America” (159). In both Du Bois and Anzaldúa’s discussions of consciousness formation under the matrix of domination, common themes of racial performance, identity loss, and multiple “warring” selves emerge.

Anzaldúa adds a discussion of the ways in which consciousness takes shape under the pressures of being a woman—a woman of colour, and a queer woman—already divided between two cultures:

Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey. Alienated from her mother culture, “alien” in the dominant culture, the woman of colour does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the space between different worlds she inhabits (20).

Anzaldúa identifies multiple layers of alienation here—alienation from the mother culture, the dominant culture, and the woman’s own self. This alienation stems from multiple, interlocking layers of policing, shaming, and violence against women of colour, and queer women of colour in both cultures. Anzaldúa describes *la mestiza* as petrified—frozen by her own terror, paralyzed between two opposing forms of consciousness that meet only in their alienation of her. To feel alienated from one’s own self, one’s own body, is a form of disassociation that contributes to *mestiza* consciousness.

Martinez makes use of Mitchell Feagin’s theory of oppositional culture in which “subjugated groups will draw on their own cultural resources to resist domination” and “generate a ‘culture of resistance’” that embodies “a coherent set of values, beliefs, and practices which mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the majority culture” (160). Martinez examines double consciousness and *mestiza* consciousness as forms of oppositional consciousnesses. These forms of consciousness surface as a result of domination, as methods of survival. As Du Bois writes, the lives and the identities of black Americans were circumscribed from the moment of their capture and beyond into post-emancipatory life—from the subjecthood of slave to criminal. Martinez draws upon James Scott who discusses “frontstage” and “backstage” behaviours developed by slaves (161). The use of stage language is fitting as black subjects utilized performance as a practice of survival—both playing the role they were confined to, as well as retaining some elements of their original culture and identities behind the scenes in their own communities. It is in part these separate lives that form the basis of double consciousness.

Anzaldúa emphasizes the effect of the “borderlands”—the U.S.-Mexico border—in creating fragmentary consciousnesses. She describes the history of the land itself as in constant

dispossession and violence: “This land has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage (90). As such, these violent cycles produce generations of traumatized and displaced subjects and provide the grounds for a form of consciousness that encompasses multiple ways of being in and seeing the world. As Anzaldúa describes, the borderlands are where:

The Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them* (3).

The liminal space of the borderlands gives birth to a hybrid people—a marginalized, alienated group, operating with multiple warring ideals and identities in one body. *Mestiza* refers to a woman of mixed race, and to apply this as a descriptor to a new form of consciousness illustrates the psychological mixing of cultures. While the subjects of this hybrid consciousness may not be of white and Mexican mixed ethnicity, life in the borderlands, and America more broadly, alters the consciousness of the borderland, racialized subject. The two cultures clash and collide—the melting pot myth does not hold. Instead, incompatible “frames of reference” operate in a single body and polarize one’s own claims to identity and selfhood.

Anzaldúa’s examination of gender and sexuality as added layers to the fruition of *la mestiza* paves the way from double consciousness into further understandings of divided consciousnesses. Sylvanna Falcón identifies “*mestiza* double consciousness” in Afro-Peruvian women who, through their daily contact with society, are forced time and time again to “see themselves through the eyes of the Other,” the white eyes of degradation and contempt for their

blackness, their womanhood. She cites one of her interviews with an Afro-Peruvian woman who recounts walking down the street in the middle of town where someone yells to her "Negra! Tienes vagina de jebe," which means her "Black pussy" is "like rubber" since she has been sexual with a high number of men" (668). *Mestiza* double consciousness adds the layer of gender to double consciousness, as black women experience gendered racism, and broadens *mestiza* consciousness to "account for different borderlands" apart from the US-Mexico border (677).

Triple consciousness has emerged to describe the consciousness of those with varying identities within the intersection of race, gender and sexuality. Nahum Welang, like Falcón, uses triple consciousness to argue that "black women view themselves through three lenses and not two: America, blackness and womanhood (298). Morgan Parker similarly describes the multiple layers of black womanhood: "Being a black woman is a triple consciousness because it's a whole other layer of being a woman... There's something in that about double consciousness—being well-versed in multiple mindsets. But then to be a woman, all women know a particular type of consciousness that is, for example, always locating danger or thinking about how to use your sexuality. But then as a black woman, there's a whole extra level" (Andrews 155). Sheila J. Wise uses the concept to describe black American gay men: "They develop a triple consciousness, one of being a black man within the context of a larger white society, another of being a black man within the context of the larger black community, and finally being a black man whose sexual orientation differs from the majority" (11). Miriam Jiménez Román and Juan Flores use triple consciousness to define: the United States Afro-Latin@... ever feels his three-ness—a Latin@, a Negro, an American" (160). For Román and Flores, the treatment of Latina/o American subjects as being the "same" as African-Americans, the refusal and dismissal of differentiation prompts a doubling of race and as such, a different form of triple consciousness. As such, various groups

have made use of triple consciousness to identify and bring to surface a way of viewing the world that is particular to subjects who find themselves at the crossroads of race and/or gender and sexuality.

A common baseline amongst these differing formulations of consciousness is the direct correlation between multiple forms of consciousness and individuals who are subjugated by multiple vulnerabilities, as such, multi consciousness is also inherently an intersectional structure. Patricia Hill Collins defines intersectionality by its multiplicity: “The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways” (*Intersectionality* 11). Collins discusses intersectionality as a structure that can circumvent the “single-focus lenses” of many social movements and address the complexity of experiences that exceed single-lens frameworks (12). Deborah K. King discusses black female experience in terms of multiple jeopardies:

The modifier "multiple" refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism. The sexual exploitation of black women in slavery is a historical example. While black women workers suffered the same demanding physical labor and brutal punishments as black men, as females, we were also subject to forms of subjugation only applicable to women (47).

King emphasizes the interlocking nature of these multiple jeopardies—that the formula of double, triple, or multiple jeopardies is not a sums equation, but a concept more complex in its formula, one that takes into consideration the relationships between differing oppressions, the

ways in which these oppressive forces can converge and diverge. Multiplicity implies simultaneity—these oppressions occur together, as separate and interlocked—and reproduction, these forces amplify one another, and as such, multiply in their effects. For King, multiple jeopardies indicates not racism + sexism + classism, but racism \times sexism \times classism. As King defines, “it is in confrontation with multiple jeopardy that black women define and sustain a multiple consciousness” (72). As such, multi consciousness is an intersectional structure that takes into consideration the multiple jeopardies faced by subjects of multi consciousness, examining their impact on consciousness formation. For example, Anzaldúa describes the practice of “masking” or “making faces”—“to become less vulnerable to all these oppressors, we had to ‘change’ faces...Some of us are forced to acquire the ability, like a chameleon, to change colour...to adopt a face that would pass” (xv). Multiple performances, nesting inside one another is where the effects of multiple oppressions are multiplied, and the overdevelopment of a “passing” identity competes and impedes one’s claims to autonomy and agency.

Miming (as)simulation and Mourning: Multi Consciousness in America

As the United States has such a longstanding and complex history as a country founded on immigration and colonialism and continues to have the highest number of immigrants per year, containing the highest population of immigrants living in a single country, it serves as a major site to examine in its production of multi consciousness. The diversity of races and cultures remains one of the defining characteristics of the nation, shaping its identity. Du Bois coined double consciousness in relation to African-American experience because the United States is a liminal space in which African-American subjects were forcibly brought, or born, but faced a history of enslavement, segregation and racial othering. Further discussions of

fragmented consciousness emerged from other marginalized communities as there are many other histories of navigating between individual identities and societal, cultural and political marginalization and segregation. Paul Spickard notes that with the third and fourth waves of immigration entering the United States, the populations entering further and further “diverge from the assumed Anglo-American central population” (28). Furthermore, those native to America—Indigenous populations and other American-born non-white citizens—were, and are still, considered marginal to the “real” American populace. Struggling to cross the cultural gap and unable to bridge the racial divide, the non-white subject is cast “alien”—not just Other, but Other-Worldly, non-human. Paul Spickard unpacks the use of the legal term “alien” in U.S. immigration laws:

An alien is a foreigner, an outsider, one who does not belong. Aliens come not just from other countries but from other planets. Aliens are invaders from outer space. They are irradicably Other. If I refer to a migrant as an “alien” I am creating in the reader’s mind a prejudice; I am dehumanizing that person and defining his or her presence in the U.S. as illegitimate (47).

Spickard notes that the model American is based on first wave immigrants: primarily Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, and other Southern and Eastern Europeans (28-30). As such, new waves of immigrants are “less able to make the prescribed cultural transformation” (30). Struggling to cross the cultural gap and unable to bridge the racial divide, the immigrant is cast “alien”—not just Other, but Other-Worldly, non-human. The gap between “human” to “nonhuman” is far too large to cross—the desire to be seen as “human” in the eyes of America, to be seen as “American” in the immigrant subject’s own eyes, becomes an increasingly out of reach reality.

The subject of multi consciousness experiences numerous forms of distasteful performance through the miming of “Americanness”—of whiteness. Unobtainable whiteness is thus embedded in the American Immigrant Dream. David L. Eng and Shinee Han explore their concept of racial melancholia as another form of “splitting” of the Asian-American psyche (348). From Freud’s theorization of melancholia, Eng and Han conceive of racial melancholia as occurring when the immigrant subject experiences the loss of the “norms,” of which they could never obtain, such as whiteness, and this loss psychically establishes a melancholic framework (344):

The experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning...In Freud’s theory of mourning, one works through and finds closure to these losses by investing in new objects—in the American Dream, for example. Our attention to the problematics of mimicry, ambivalence, and the stereotype, as well as the history of juridical exclusions of Asian Americans, reveals a social structure that prevents the immigrant family from fully assimilating. From another perspective, this structure might be said to deny him or her the capacity to invest in new objects (352).

Consequently, the immigrant subject remains locked in an inertia—haunted by their losses, unable to fully invest in a new mode of being. What Eng and Han identify as losses here—homeland, family, language, community—also inform the subject’s consciousness: their sense of world and sense of self. The “successful” assimilation involves the transition from one mode of consciousness to another—American, English, white, consciousness. And yet, as Eng and Han note, this transition is an impossible feat—miming whiteness does not produce white subjects, but rather subjects of multi consciousness. The presence of the “Other” consciousness, however far it recedes, however ghostly it shadows, persists.

Tina Chen adopts “impersonation” as a more apt descriptor for the practices hybrid-Americans engage in within the context of the present-day United States. Impersonation can be thought of as an act “that requires one to impersonate fundamentally oneself” (Chen xvii). For Chen, the impersonating of an already-articulated self is thus the praxis through which Asian-Americans can perform themselves into “being” and agency can be claimed (xix). The non-white subject is left with another distasteful option: miming assimilation by miming their racial stereotype. With an acute awareness for the magnitude of the dominant structures that dictate their “American/non-American” selves, this praxis uses invisibility and inscrutability as methods of possibly attaining or claiming agency in a situation overwhelmingly seeking to negate such acts. Impersonation utilizes modes of non-sovereign performance and repetition in the form of mimicry within the context of subjugation. Impersonation presents multiple avenues of personhood, familiar and slightly ajar: a pre-diasporic self, an ideal of attainable whiteness, a stereotype of racialized Other as viewed through the lens of white America.

As the gap between immigrants and the “ideal” American citizen remains impossible, I’d like to further unpack the practice of assimilation in terms of miming (as)simulation—miming as simulating Americanization, and miming assimilation as the promised process of assimilation is inherently impossible. As Spickard describes, “the melting pot really means Anglo-conformity” (33). Homi Bhabha argues that the “effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is emphatically not to be English” (128)—or to mime whiteness is emphatically being not-white. Bhabha describes that in contexts of colonialism, colonists have a “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (126). This contradictory desire produces a colonized subject, a mimic man, who, in that slight difference, becomes not “quite” human, and emerges from a desire for control, for the gap

between self and Other to be exploited in assertions of dominance. Applied to the situation of the non-white Americans, this gap creates the illusion of inclusion while maintaining “American,” or whiteness, as a status perpetually just out of reach. For Bhabha, mimicry “fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence” and functions by “continually produc[ing] its slippage, its excess, its difference” (126).

The situation of dominance in colonial contexts can also be applied to American immigration. As Spickard explains, “The first fact of the history of American immigration is genocide: the displacement and destruction of the Native peoples of North America. That is part of the story of *immigration*” (46). Spickard continues by outlining the history of American immigration following the genocide of Indigenous populaces as one of enforced labour through slavery, labour exploitation, and extreme violence towards the very immigrants America brought over:

Native peoples were killed or pushed out of New England. Five large tribes were ousted from the Southeast in forced marches in the 1830s. In 1885 and 1886, the entire Chinese populations of Seattle and Tacoma, Washington and Rock Springs, Wyoming, were shipped out of those towns, and many murdered...During WWII, 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them US citizens, were jailed on account of their race. And let us not forget the master case of all this: Black racial slavery (46).

Spickard weaves together the various violent histories that intersect in the creation of “America.” The history of Asian-American immigrants whose labour largely contributed to the American economy and yet were still violently persecuted is also intertwined with the history of the Indigenous populaces that were forcefully and violently removed from their homes, and is also intertwined with the history of black slavery where people were abducted, transported, and

dehumanized. Glen Coulthard emphasizes the harmful codependency that a history of domination and a present day “reconciliation” present to the displaced subject:

Fanon argued that in *actual* contexts of domination (colonialism) not only are the terms of recognition usually determined by and in the interests of the master (the colonizing state and society) but also over time slave populations (the colonized) tend to develop what he called psycho-affective attachments to these master-sanctioned forms and this attachment is essential in maintaining the economic and political structure of master/slave, colonizer/colonized relations (26).

Building off of Franz Fanon to establish the shortcomings of Canadian “politics of recognition” in terms of Indigenous peoples, Coulthard goes on to note that Fanon’s analysis suggests that in contexts where colonial rule is not reproduced through force alone, the maintenance of settler-state hegemony requires the production of what Fanon calls “colonized subjects,” namely the production of specific modes of colonized thought, desire, and behaviour that commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions required for their continued domination (16). In short, colonial domination changes and alters consciousness—the subject learns to harbour white consciousness within themselves, driving a desire for whiteness, and in that desire, the distinct distaste for one’s “true” self, and one’s “true” consciousness. American attempts at reconciliation are seen as benevolence, and through that benevolence, the same power structure of colonizer over colonized is sustained. This is how the subject splits, forced into engaging multiple levels of performance via miming and simulation, unable to recognize and emancipate the self.

Allyson Hobbs notes a turn in American culture beginning in the 1990s towards racial hybridity. It was only in 1997 that the U.S. Census Bureau changed their policy to allow for

individuals to mark one or more racial categories and indicate a multiracial identity (275). Hobbs notes Halle Berry, a mixed-race woman, winning an Academy Award in 2003 and Barack Obama's presidency from 2009-2017 as markers of this transition in the racial landscape of America (274). While Berry celebrated being the second African American actress to accept an Academy Award, she went on to play a "number of racially unmarked roles"; similarly, Obama identified as African American on the 2010 census but chose not to identify as the "black president" (274). As such, a "racial balancing act" emerges—"to claim a black racial identity, but to transcend it at the same time," Hobbs notes, and a form of double consciousness that emerges from this act (274). Hobbs notes that "mixed-race men and women were in vogue" (276) yet this trend is not without its complications, nor does it move us towards a post-racial society. While the movement towards multiracial identities is a significant cultural shift and challenges the notions of race as fixed and binary, embracing a more fluid racial identity, Hobbs notes that the championing of multiracial identity may overshadow or erase the concerns of black Americans or other racialized Americans: "attempts to get rid of race result in a deeper entrenchment of racism and racial inequality" (278). The emphasis on multiracial identities can also create a hierarchy of racial identities, in which multiracial identities, particularly those with white ancestry or are white passing, are privileged over monoracial identities.

Those with multiracial identities also must grapple with multiple racial and cultural identities simultaneously, and with various racial and cultural groups interacting in the United States, monoracial individuals must also grapple with the various aspects of their multicultural identities. In chapter two, Eric Nguyen's novel *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021) is discussed in its discussion of multicultural identity: Tuấn is a Vietnamese refugee who struggles to preserve his Vietnamese identity, but comes into contact with the stiff ways in which

Vietnamese, and Asian people at large, are perceived by the dominant culture of America, and furthermore, the Vietnamese-American gang culture that forms in response to this idea of Vietnamese- and Asian-American identity. Furthermore, multiplicity can pose significant challenges in a society in which race is conceived of in binary and rigid terms. Those who are multiracial and/or multicultural may feel the need to develop or negotiate between multiple identities in order to preserve a certain identity, erase it, or react against it, and can experience different treatment based on how they identify and present. As the population of multiracial and multicultural individuals increase, multi consciousness emerges as a more apt structure to define this experience of fragmentation, splitting, and simultaneity.

Identity performance does not stop short at racial performance. The performances of gender, sex, and sexuality add further layers of distortion to one's consciousness. As Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor and Lisa G. Materson note, in North America it is through the "two-sex model of humans as either male or female and heterosexuality" and the conventions associated with each that "political power worked through intimate relationships and childbirth, bringing the force of the government, courts, and churches into women's daily experience of their bodies" (8). This biopower was exerted over queer bodies and women of colour as well, with "sexual violence, laws prohibiting interracial and same-sex relationships, and controls on women's reproduction" (8). Significant progress was made through the various waves of feminism and LGBTQ+ movements that fought to overturn oppressive laws and address issues of violence, discrimination, and lack of basic rights. However, in June 2022, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, revoking the reproductive rights of many women and raising concern over the stability of the various other laws and policies that had been put in place for the protection of women, LGBTQ+ populaces, and racialized populaces.

As such, Anzaldúa calls the practice of masking “making faces”— “to become less vulnerable to all these oppressors, we had to ‘change’ faces...Some of us are forced to acquire the ability, like a chameleon, to change colour...to adopt a face that would pass” (“Making Face” xv). Passing here holds both its racial connotations and of passing within one’s own communities, as the oppressions of gender, sex, and sexuality extends across racial groups. A passing identity can be an identity that fits more easily into predetermined expectations and stereotypes if passing as white is not an option. We become aware of our masks because there is friction, because there is resistance—the masks rub the face raw. To add the masks of gendered, sexed, and heteronormative performance causes further dissociation, further removal between the self that is presented and one’s own intersubjective personhood. Multiple performances, nesting inside one another—to racially perform, to perform as a racialized woman, to perform as a queer racialized woman—is where the effects of multiple oppressions are multiplied, and the overdevelopment of a “passing” identity competes and impedes on what Anzaldúa coins the “inner-face” (xvi). The inner-face is the “multi-layered” true-face behind the faces that have been made by “white and coloured male typographers” (xvi), and that the practice of “making faces” holds the potential for subjects to remake their own faces, to rewrite their own bodies.

The nature of an inner-face, as Judith Butler discusses, is complex: it is through “ritualized repetition” of norms that “stabilize the effects of gender” and the “materiality of sex” (ix). “It is not enough to argue that there is no prediscursive ‘sex’ that acts as the stable point of reference on which, or in relation to which, the cultural construction of gender proceeds” (x) Butler notes, but to consider instead the ways in which sex cannot exist outside of its construction:

In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled (13).

To understand the sexing of the subject as a lifelong practice emphasizes the nature of sex as a performance and a construction. The repetition of gender norms in order to materialize sex underscores sex as a non-biological and discursive process.

The continual performance of sex deepens the effects of multi consciousness. Sexed performance circumscribes the subject’s experience in-utero:

Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an “it” to a “she” or a “he,” and in that naming, the girl is “girled,” brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that “girling” of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm (18).

The girling of the child includes the internalization of the male gaze, the female gaze, the objectification and sexualization of one’s own body beginning before sexual maturity, the subjection to violence. The weight of this performance continues on throughout life.

Furthermore, as Butler borrows from Norma Alarcón, women of colour are:

“Multiply interpellated,” called by many names, constituted in and by that multiple calling, then this implies that the symbolic domain, the domain of socially instituted norms, is composed of racializing norms, and that they exist not merely alongside gender norms but are articulated through one another. Hence, it is no longer possible to make sexual difference prior to racial difference or, for that matter, to make them into fully separable axes of social regulation and power (135).

The axis of domination works through these interlocking axes of racial and sexual difference, and for the woman of colour, these oppressions and these masks multiply in their effects. As Alarcón notes, becoming-woman is not just a process in opposition to men, but in spaces in which whiteness is the norm, women of colour become-women in opposition to white women as well (360). As such, Trinh T. Minh-ha calls this form of consciousness a form of “hybrid reality” (374)—it is to inhabit multiple realms of Otherness, multiple realms of performance that take her from the space of the “other” but not into the space of sameness (376), she exists between, looking from the outside onto multiple realms she cannot inhabit.

As such, the further removed from the axis of domination a subject is, the further removed from their “inner-face” or intersubjective personhood they are. While, as Butler points out, it is difficult to conceive of a prediscursive inner-face, the distasteful and disassociate affects multiple layers of performance and masking produce points to an apparent friction between the “passing” faces and some form of inner-face. The subject of multi consciousness is acutely aware of the difference between an I and not-I, even if both notions are unstable. Trinh T. Minh-ha moves towards an understanding of identity as referring to “no more to a consistent pattern of sameness than to an inconsequential process of otherness” (371).

Multi consciousness is not unique to America; it can be observed in various countries with histories of colonialism and majority/minority race culture. In countries that have experienced colonialism, the legacy of colonial rule shapes the identity and consciousness of both the colonized and the colonizers, creating a racial hierarchy that persists through multiple generations, as seen in Fanon's discussion of France and Falcón's discussion of Peru. In countries with significant immigration, immigrants and their descendants often grapple with the tension between maintaining cultural roots, attempting to assimilate into the home and dominant culture, and the effects of dislocation on consciousness. Multi consciousness emerges in diverse contexts where individuals must negotiate between different cultural, racial, and ethnic identities, lost and dislocated identities, and various competing understandings of reality and the self. Multi consciousness speaks to the complexities of identity and consciousness formation in societies marked by histories of colonialism and power dynamics between minority and majority groups.

Multi Consciousness as Contemporary Technological Structure

Multi consciousness is also a contemporary technological structure of feeling as evidenced by examining the shifting discussions of consciousness in fictions of displacement from 1970-2022. Double consciousness undergoes significant changes and the movement towards multi consciousness becomes more intricate and nuanced in the age of profound relationships between humans and technology, and the profound effect of current technology on consciousness. The rise of digital identities adds another layer of self-presentation, identity construction, and performativity, simultaneously providing a space in which the individual can curate how they present themselves, granting them some agency in self-fashioning, yet these

digital identities are often essentialized and confined for palatability and marketability. As such, further divides between the self and the digitized self, and the idealized digital self emerge.

Bernard Stiegler discusses the intimate relationship of human and technology in the twentieth and twenty-first century in its process of dehumanizing the human. As Stiegler observes, “technological power risks sweeping the human away...work, family, and traditional forms of communities would be swept away” (*Technics I* 103). The contemporary period is characterized by massive and rapid technological innovation and change, and the technological transformations “regularly bring in their wake upheavals of the social system” and as such, massive and constant uprooting (32). Massive upheavals, uprooting, and constant change to traditional forms of community rupture experiences of subjectivity and as such, may set the grounds for multi consciousness to become a more universal condition of contemporaneity. Stiegler also discusses marketing and the “culture industries” as “psychopower” building off of Foucault’s notion of biopower (*Nanking* 169). For Stiegler, “the advertising industry has massively changed language, and in doing so, “language changes to the extent that the brains of the speakers themselves change” so that they are receptive to the “messages” the technologies “imprint” (173).

In chapter 4, I discuss Ted Chiang’s novella *Story of Your Life* (1998) in which Chiang does not discuss race, nor is it discussed in Denis Villeneuve’s 2019 film adaptation *Arrival*. However, I argue that there is still a connection to a diasporic framework of multi consciousness through the emphasis on language and perceptions of reality via displacement and language. Furthermore, the text and film posit multi consciousness as a potentially universal structure, in a situation in which we all become dislocated and displaced, universally alienated and uprooted, in the contemporary moment and in the event of a potential alien invasion. Louise, the polyglot

protagonist of the novella and film, is a white American woman gifted the ability to experience all times at once and engage with different versions of herself along her life path's timeline via the alien language, and as such experiences multi consciousness. The narratives pose the question of the potential universality of multi consciousness while underscoring the persistent themes of dislocation, power imbalances, and isolation.

Stielger also notes the problematic of the "technical being" where the human "exceeds the biological" through the evolutions of "prosthesis" and where the living becomes "characterized in its forms of life by the nonliving" (50). Human interiority becomes exteriorized, and this poses the problem of what now constitutes the "human" body as its limits are unclear, and the boundaries between the human body and technology become increasingly blurred (152-3). He points particularly to the exteriorization of memory, where aspects of consciousness become technologized, and aspects of the interior self exist outside of the body (152). As aspects of human experience and existence continually move beyond the confines of the physical body and into the digital, virtual, cyber and artificial space, unprecedented levels of interaction and connection with the world beyond our physical selves occurs. This movement has profound implications for consciousness as consciousness is no longer confined to the interiority of the human body and no longer entirely interior to the subject as consciousness becomes uploaded to the world wide web. In chapter 3, I discuss virtual reality and cyberspace technologies as contributing to the exteriorization of interiority, and as such, complicating the structure of multi consciousness. In Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018), a young Native-American boy named Daniel participates in an act of terrorism against his own community, but chooses to do so via virtual reality and a drone. In another story in *There There*, Edwin, a Native-American grad student becomes addicted to the virtual avatar game *Second Life* in which he

grows up on a reservation and lives a more “authentic” Native life. The two complicate double consciousness—both Edwin and Daniel exhibit a deep detachment from reality through their obsession with virtual reality and cyberspace, and their Indian community and heritage at large as urban Indians. Edwin attempts to mitigate the double consciousness he experiences by living an “authentic” Native life in the metaverse, while Daniel decides to act on the discomfort of his double consciousness through violence against the community he feels so isolated from. As such, both move towards multi consciousness in their integration with technology as the technology becomes both an extension and externalization of their consciousnesses, coexisting with them and existing indecently of their physical selves. In the process of externalization, these virtual consciousnesses heighten the awareness of their disconnection from the world around them, their communities, and their own bodies. The realities they create in the virtual realm have real consequences and leave the two subjects struggling to reconcile between their multiple identities and the contrast between their real lives and their virtual personas.

Moving towards Multi Consciousness: African-, Asian-, and Indigenous-American Contemporary Fictions

In chapter 1, I examine novels of black and mixed-race girlhood, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* (1998), and Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* (2020), as sites of double and multi consciousness. The novels use narratives of sisters or sister-like figures to create points of comparison between young black girls who live as black girls and become black women, and their sister-counterparts who pass as white or become consumed with the desire for whiteness. The girl who denies her blackness exhibits a movement into multi consciousness—her internalization of the white gaze becomes a white consciousness as she

attempts to sever herself from her black girlhood and enter white girlhood. The additional layers of self-consciousness brought upon by gender and class make the subject multiply-conscious of the identities they must construct, perform, and maintain and the ones they must disavow. The result is a figure who is phantasmic, haunting her own body, who speaks in voices that are not hers and inhabits a life she cannot recognize. The texts span the 1970s to 2020 in their publication date but cover the period of 1940-1990 in their narratives. As such, the movement from double consciousness to the emergence of multi consciousness as a structure of feeling in its infancy is outlined.

In chapter 2, I outline the movement from double to multi consciousness in Asian-American texts—Eric Nguyen’s *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021), Charles Yu’s *Interior Chinatown* (2020), and Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* (2015)—and the ways they employ multi consciousness to discuss transgenerational haunting, distasteful performance, and the splintering effects of dislocation. The three novels are narratives of immigration and assimilation and the effects of that movement and process on the immigrant subject’s consciousness. Charles Yu and Viet Thanh Nguyen use satire to explore the stereotyping and marginalization of Asian Americans. Yu structures his novel as a screenplay where the protagonist Willis Wu is unable to escape his “Generic Asian Male” role, blurring the line between fiction and reality. Yu illustrates the double consciousness of Willis who simultaneously understands the distastefulness of the roles he performs yet desires to continue to perform and conform to them in the hope of assimilation and acceptance. Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* satirizes the Asian-American stereotype of the double agent through a spy narrative in which the unnamed narrator arrives in America as a refugee, participating in a production of a Vietnam War film titled “The Hamlet,” satirizing films like *Apocalypse Now* (2001) and *Platoon* (1986) and

drawing attention to the many afterlives of the Vietnam War and its impact on Western consciousness, and subsequently, on Vietnamese-Americans. In both texts, satire is used as a tool to disrupt realist narratives of immigration to challenge prevailing narratives about race, culture, and history by introducing the complexities of double and multi consciousness through the problematic of assimilation via metaphors of performance, masking, and double agency.

The novels move towards multi consciousness in discussing the children of immigrants. Willis's daughter Phoebe stars on a show of her own making, which features a set that is an amalgamation of her differing ethnic and cultural identities, embodying the ideal multicultural American. In Eric Nguyen's *Things We Lost to the Water*, Ben, the son of Vietnamese refugee, struggles under the weight of his Vietnamese and American identities, and eventually moves to France to forge his own path and life. In doing so and in creating that distance, he is able to see the connections between all of his homes and his selves—the image and resonances of water, the converging histories that connect Vietnam, Versailles New Orleans, and France. Nguyen's novel is multi-layered and multi-voiced as the family saga follows Ben's mother Hương and his older brother Tuấn, both of whom were born in Vietnam, unlike Ben. The three family members illustrate degrees of separation and degrees of multi consciousness in their proximities to Vietnameseness, Americanness, Asian-Americanness.

In chapter 3, we move onto an exploration of Indigenous-American literature and multi consciousness, unpacking the effects of colonial history, forced relocation, loss of land and cultural hybridity in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018). The discussion moves from thinking through Indigenous double consciousness, in which Indigenous individuals negotiate between their own ways of being in the world (via language, culture, spiritual beliefs) and the

dominant culture imposed by colonial powers, resulting in language loss, mind/body disconnection, loss of tradition, and the erasure of traditional knowledge and practices, to examining the ways multi consciousness is represented in Indigenous-American texts via representations of interconnected consciousnesses (spiritual, mythical, communal, individual, Native, white, merged). The three novels use detached narrators, often via third-person narration, to illustrate a state of non-consciousness, differing from an unconscious state where the subject is unaware but occupies a place in between unconscious and conscious. The narrator is awake and aware but has no sense of identity and no connection to their body or the world around them. In *Winter in the Blood* and *Ceremony*, the two protagonists must journey through this state of nonconsciousness and find ways to reconnect with their land, their animals, their spirituality, in order to find their way back to themselves and their community. In *There There*, Orange discusses the complexity of the urban Indian who is not offered the same resolution via reconnection. Instead, Orange's characters turn to cyberspace and virtual reality in order to simulate a form of connection, and in doing so, complicate the structure of multi consciousness via the externalization of consciousness and the multiplicity of the internet itself.

Chapter 4 discusses contemporary films of the multiverse in relation to multi consciousness. The multiverse acts as the ideal vehicle and metaphor for the impact of displacement on an individual's consciousness. The act of uprooting one's life is the catalyst—the starting point from which all possible branches of otherwise possibilities emerge. Multiverse theory is also a theory of haunting, and immigrant stories are often ghost stories—a life lived haunted by those left behind, including the self, the one still emmeshed in the symbiosis of the home country, and all the lost versions of that self that could have been. Ghost stories are also multiverse stories—counterpoints where multiple universes intersect, subjects who carry all of

their ghosts in with them. In discussing Ted Chiang's novella *The Story of Your Life* (1998), its film adaptation *Arrival* (2016) directed by Denis Villeneuve, and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, we are presented with two mothers who enter a multiverse space by virtue of their daughters. Louise, the protagonist of the novella and film, is a white American woman gifted the ability to experience all times at once and engage with different versions of herself along her life path's timeline via the alien language, and as such experiences multi consciousness. Evelyn, the protagonist of *EEAO*, is a Chinese immigrant gifted the ability to perceive and travel through the multiverse in order to save the universes from her "mind-fractured" daughter. The parallels between the two narratives are evident: two mothers searching for two lost daughters. In reading them in tandem, the potential of multi consciousness to become a universal structure, under shared circumstances of dislocation, is explored.

Chapter 1: To See Through White Eyes—Multi Consciousness in African-American Literature

and we each wear many changes/inside our skin
—Audre Lorde, “Between Ourselves”

Passing is a performative practice of survival. It is the adaptation of a “chameleon skin” Anzaldúa describes, to be able to put on a “passing” face (xv), to put on a face that allows one some safety, some claims at agency and autonomy. The skin is the largest organ and surface of the body, and the face, Anzaldúa explains, is the “surface of the body that is the most noticeably inscribed by social structures marked with instructions... We are ‘written’ all over” (xv). Our faces are discursively demarcated and allow us to be interpolated by multiple names, our faces inscribe us in the symbolic domain of society. The colour of one’s skin, the gendering of one’s body, predetermines the subject in social order.

However, situations of racial passing disrupt symbolic order by undermining claims of racial purity, essentialism, and supremacy. Ironically, it is the very insistence of biological and social superiority of whites over blacks that produced the practice of passing. As Allyson Hobbs notes, “the constructed nature of race becomes evident when individuals changed their racial identity by changing location, clothing, speech, and life story, thus seemingly making themselves white” (8). Hobbs outlines the history of racial passing in America and the shifting reasons behind the practice as it is carried out in various generations:

In the antebellum period, enslaved men and women lived with a looming threat of loss, knowing that they could be bought, sold, and forever separated from their families if their master lost a card game or decided to present a slave as a wedding gift. To pass as white during this period was to escape—not necessarily from blackness, but from slavery—

with the intention of recovering precious relationships and living under the more secure conditions of freedom. After emancipation, to pass as white was considered by many African Americans... to be “sell[ing] one’s birthright for a mess of pottage.” In the short-lived but hopeful moment of Reconstruction and later, during the long years of Jim Crow, passing meant striking out on one’s own and leaving behind a family and a people (4-5).

Hobbs identifies four phases in black history in which passing was prevalent: the antebellum period, emancipation, reconstruction, and the Jim Crow era. The practice of passing evolved from a means of survival and escape, to a disavowal of one’s own blackness. While the crossing of the colour line undoubtedly had its many social, economical, and pragmatic benefits, those who passed over suffered too from immense racial melancholia, loss, and mourning.

Race is far more than skin colour or social construct—it is the history and lived experience of being born into a community of people within a symbolic order. As such, Hobbs argues that race, beyond skin colour, is itself also a shared structure of feeling—it describes “relationships between people” (269). For Hobbs, passing is not “becoming what it is that you pass for” but rather “losing what you pass away from” (18). The language of death—passing over, passing away—surrounds the practice of passing as it is a type of death—the disavowal of family, community, history, experience, memory, and as such, black identity. Those who “pass over” acquire a ghostly presence. Those who pass over must disavow their entire lives prior to the point of passing or they risk exposure, and as such, in passing they are reborn. The outside community recognizes the passed over as white, and on some level, the passing too are forced to identify with whiteness, despite the internal conflicts such an identity poses.

Sartre asserts that recognition constitutes a form of enslavement or being “fixed” by the “look” of another. The Other is always a threat to one’s own experience of self, having the power

to objectify an Other, to disrupt their selfhood with a different version of themselves. For Sartre, the only way out of this situation is for the objectified to make the Other into the object of one's own look, turning back the gaze and reversing the process. Thus, recognition is a power struggle and conflict between two subjects who seek to make each other objects and reclaim their inner freedom. Most often in situations of such extreme power imbalance however, the option of returning the gaze is denied. Sartre gives the example of anti-Semitism, stating that the anti-Semite creates the Jew. Anti-Semitism gives the Jew two options: authenticity in which the Jew affirms their Jewish identity by making themselves a Jew of their own making, and inauthenticity in which the Jew assimilates, converts, secularizes the self, and thus admits that they are a Jew by the anti-Semite's making.

When applying this to the practice of passing, it is the structures and communities of white supremacy and power that create the non-white subject, ultimately leaving them with seemingly two options: insist on a racialized identity of their own making, or convert and assimilate, and in this assimilation, the recognition that while they can attain some of the privileges that come with whiteness, they cannot inhabit whiteness in the same way. The option of creating a racialized identity of the subject's own making is a difficult feat, as the influence of white social power over the non-white subject's identity is so intertwined already in one's perception of their racial identity. The options are not as clear cut.

As Edward Said notes, to mime whiteness is to emphatically exhibit your non-whiteness. For Hobbs, passing is a way in which white-passing black subjects can attain some of the benefits of whiteness, but as race is such an inherently complex structure that exists beyond the body, beyond skin, the reality of race cannot be practiced or mimed. The narrow way in which race is perceived in contexts of racial passing allow for the passing subject to cross over into

“whiteness” on the surface, but the interior and conscious-level aspects of race complicate the process. Passing as practice results in permanent mourning—a haunting of a body that one cannot fully inhabit, a loss of the community, history, memory and identity.

Furthermore, racial subjectivity for the racialized subject is far more nuanced than America at large acknowledges. As Tyina Steptoe discusses, the distinct groups of “black” and “white” enforced by the Jim Crow laws did not account for the ways in which people of colour perceived themselves and their communities. Blackness was treated as an overarching, essentialized, and flattened identity that failed to take into consideration the multitude of distinctions within communities of colour. Steptoe uses the example of Houston, where black Texans and Creoles of colour were identified under law and by white society as black, but upon contact with one another, their “different racial identities, practices, languages, and even musical styles bore the imprint of an Afro-Anglo heritage versus an Afro-French/Afro-Spanish heritage” (2). Waves of migration to the cities transitioned urban spaces into “multiethnic/multiracial metropolises” and as such, migrants to these city centres “expressed their own notions of race” (Steptoe 5). Evolving parallel to an American insistence on a white and black divide was a new understanding of racial subjectivity that made space for multiplicity and ambiguity.

While a more open-ended racial subjectivity was more acceptable in their own communities, people of colour were forced to abide by racial segregation laws, and as such, had to choose an identity, or have it chosen for them by virtue of their skin. As Hobbs notes, in the era of the Jim Crow laws, a racially mixed or ambiguous identity was inconceivable—one *had* to be on either the black or white side of the colour line (273). The colour line delineated the very space black and white people occupied in America. Steptoe describes the way in which:

The legal division of space reinforced white social power. More than a means of maintaining racial separation, segregation enforced white supremacy by relegating nonwhites to the substandard spaces...The partitioning of public spaces provided a physical foundation for the social order of white over black (10).

To cross over the colour line was to cross over to the other side of Du Bois's veil—to enter a world without enclosures. To be white was to move freely in the world, to have safety and agency. And yet, what is also produced is a subject of multi consciousness—a subject who experiences a psychic splintering, a visceral disassociation from any form of unified self, who suffers greatly from the conflict produced by their multiple conflicting ways of being in the world.

The passing narrative is an embodiment of African-American trauma, and the psychic splintering it produces is central to contemporary narratives of multi consciousness. Narratives of passing are integral to American fiction—Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Fannie Hurst's *Imitation of Life* (1933), Eric Jerome Dickey's *Milk in My Coffee* (1999) are a few of many. As Hobbs explains, it was only in 1997 that the U.S. Census Bureau “changed their policy for the first time in almost eighty years to allow individuals to “mark one or more” categories” (275). The racial constraints that conducted daily life did not allow for a mixed-race identity to be a valid form of self-identification—laws such as the one-drop rule forced mixed-race people to either pass as white or identify as black. While racial passing is perhaps a practice of the past, the terrain of racism, the binaries of black and white, and violence against black people remain prevalent, and as such, racial shame and the desire to conceal one's race, or hide in plain sight, to make the self invisible, emerge as shared difficulties within narratives of passing.

I am particularly interested in the effects of multi consciousness via the desire for whiteness and the desire for blackness as it is represented in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020). The three novels unpack the experience black girlhood in America—hypersexualization and hyposexualization, dissociation, racial and gendered melancholia and performance. The texts are narratives of sisterhood interrupted, bonds broken by one sister's desire for whiteness, erasing her blackness and her sister in that quest. What is interesting about the three novels is the comparison of two sisters: one who insists on a black identity of her own making, one who lives in whiteness, in secrecy. The sister who denies her blackness exhibits multi consciousness: she does not just see herself through the eyes of the Other (the eyes of white contempt and pity, as in double consciousness) but sees the world through white eyes. Her performance grants her access to another reality, another personhood, a new consciousness, which brings upon its own set of performances and masking. Spanning the time period of 1970 to 2020, the above texts speak to persistent issues of racial discrimination, and as such, the desire to escape through achieving whiteness.

I. “A World of Clean Comfort”—Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970)

*A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named.
Smiling white face. Blonde hair in gentle disarray,
blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort.*
—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Toni Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is set in Morrison’s hometown of Lorain, Ohio in the 1940s. Ohio was one of the few states that was a part of the Great Migration, where a large portion of the African-American populace from the rural South migrated to urban Northern states (Gregory 12). Lorain was one of the destinations many black families fled, seeking escape from the lingering history of slavery and Jim Crow laws of the South. Morrison underscores however that Ohio was not free from racial segregation and discrimination, and that the scale of racism had changed. Media, culture and internalized racism within the black community of Lorain mass-produce racist ideology in subliminal and inescapable ways. Tessa Roynon describes the novel as engaging with the “many-layered, deeply ingrained racist culture of the town” (3). The culture of racism takes on a multiplicity in itself in the multiple ways it is able to manifest itself and insert itself into the consciousness of the young black girls who narrate the novel. Catherine Romagnolo describes this time period as one in which the civil rights movement and Black Power movements were losing ground and influence, and “conservative forces and popular culture were competing to reinscribe a discourse of white supremacy” (41). She cites the dominant “representations of a white ideal of the American family” in popular culture, exemplified by television shows like “*Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Leave it to Beaver*” in addition to “textbooks, classroom materials, and the institutional discourse of the educational system” (41). As such, the backdrop to *The Bluest Eye* is one of a secondary displacement—from the South to the North, and of a shift in race consciousness in America.

Configuring blue eyes as the path to “clean comfort,” Pecola, one of two narrators in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* is keenly aware that whiteness means safety and love. For Pecola, safety and love are two immense desires, as she exists in an entirely loveless world—her father Cholly sexually abuses her, her mother Pauline is an absent figure, working most of her life away for a wealthy white family to whom she is affectionately known as their “Polly” (128). As a young girl described as being very dark and very poor, she is scorned by both black and white children, she “repulses” shop owners. Unsurprisingly, Pecola develops a deep-seated obsession with little white girls—as has her home of America, especially so in 1940s Ohio. At each turn, Pecola is met with the blue-eyed gaze of Mary Jane, deemed desirable enough to live comfortably and well. “Clean comfort” for Pecola has numerous resonances: a life of wealth, purity, and ease. As such, Pecola eventually seeks the aid of a sham preacher to give her the blue eyes she has so long prayed for. The transformation marks Pecola’s complete psychic divide.

To have blue eyes is to see through blue eyes, to see the world through whiteness and to be seen as white, as worthy of love. It is not enough to appear white, to pass as white, Pecola wants to *be* white. This belief gives Pecola hope that her innermost desires can be met through the acquisition of blue eyes—blue eyes are the doors that open out into comfort, “cleanliness,” and care. What’s interesting about Pecola’s case is that her outside appearance has not changed, she does not pass as white, nor engages in a practice of passing as white. From the other narrator of Morrison’s novel, Claudia, Pecola’s blue eyes are read as complete delusion. Only Pecola sees through her blue eyes—her gaze is not cast back on herself, but instead, cast outward onto a world beyond the veil. For Pecola, the blue eyes make her anew *internally*. She is granted a new consciousness, a new self, a new life. Yet, she cannot erase her blackness. Blue-eyed Pecola spends the rest of her life bantering with another version of herself—a phantom black girl only

she can see, who recognizes Pecola's blue eyes, but also casts doubt. Pecola is haunted by the fact of her blackness. Pecola believes her blue eyes have changed her physical world—everyone is so envious of her eyes that they avoid her. However, her desire for blue eyes and the “acquisition” of them ruptures her inner psychic world drastically: she progresses from a stage of dissociation and self-abjection to complete psychic divide—seeing through black and blue eyes—separate consciousnesses operating autonomously, possessing one body. Pecola is no longer doubly conscious of herself, as in Du Bois's understanding of double consciousness, where she sees herself through the eyes of Other, she has become both self and Other.

Pecola is haunted by her blackness and possessed by the blue eyes of the blonde girl she saw at every corner, held in the loving gaze of all those around her. Guattari presents an understanding of identity formation under capitalist modes of production that extends modes of machinic production to the production of individuals:

Mass culture produces individuals: standardized individuals, linked to one another in accordance with hierarchical systems, value systems, systems of submission—not visible, explicit systems of submission, as in animal ethology, or as in archaic or precapitalist societies. These systems of submission are much more hidden. I wouldn't say that they are “internalized” or “interiorized,” an expression, very fashionable at one time, implying that subjectivity is something to be filled. On the contrary, it is *produced*. Not just individuated subjectivity—subjectivity of individuals—but social subjectivity that can be found at every level of production and consumption. And, what's more, an *unconscious* production of subjectivity (22).

Morrison's novel encapsulates the transition from the Jim Crow era into the era of mass culture, where various media and communication channels become the medium that disseminates racist

ideals and presents them as standardized. From Guattari's understanding, capitalist structures influence everyday struggles of subjectivity and identity through the production of systems of submission. As Guattari notes, these systems have no "natural" order, but are produced and consumed in order to maintain machinic social operation: "One of the conditions for the maintenance of capitalistic societies is that they should be modeled on a certain axiomatic of subjective segregation. If blacks did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them somehow" (107). Power imbalances are intentionally manufactured, and as such, Guattari resists the idea that subjectivity is "internalized," but rather *consumed*. The consumption of submission complicates marginalized subjectivity as submission becomes "produced both by the oppressors and by the oppressed" (60). Guattari makes an important distinction, however, that this production of submission is largely unconscious, as the manufacturing of subjectivity crosses over even into the realm of the unconscious: our dreams, daydreams, fantasies, and notions of love (23) have all become products we've consumed.

Morrison outlines the manufacturing and consumption of Pecola's blue-eyed dream. Claudia recalls Pecola's obsession with drinking milk from a Shirley Temple glass (19)—the white milk filling in the outline of Temple's body, giving her perfectly milky white skin. Pecola lived under the panoptic gaze of Shirley Temples and Mary Janes—meeting them at every turn. The association of these icons of white girlhood with food is noteworthy:

Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blonde hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort...To eat the candy is to somehow eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane (50).

The product of the candy operates on multiple levels of consumption here. Mary Jane is the product, the manufactured subjectivity of idealized girlhood—pure, white, blue-eyed, sweet, desired, loved. Mary Jane is made to be consumed, and in her consumption, the production of Pecola as a subject of submission emerges. Pecola’s desires are paradoxically produced through the consumption of Mary Jane—the desire to consume Mary Jane, to “eat the eyes” to “be Mary Jane,” is produced by the widespread force-feeding of little white girls as objects of desire in American mass culture. Guattari calls this process the “assembly line of subjectivity” (39) as the sequential and consequential links between these modes of production and consumption continually produce subjectivities to be consumed, and subjectivities of submission produced by that consumption.

Guattari also highlights the complex relationship between subjectivity, multiplicity, mass culture and technological culture:

The individual is serialized, registered, and modeled. Freud was the first to show how precarious the notion of the totality of an ego is. Subjectivity is not susceptible to be totalized or centralized in the individual. The individuation of the body is one thing, the multiplicity of subjective assemblages is another. Subjectivity is mostly manufactured and modeled in the register of the social...What one might say, using the language of computers, is that an individual always exists, but only as a terminal; this *individual terminal occupies the position of a consumer of subjectivity*. It consumes systems of representation, sensibility, and so on—which have nothing to do with natural, universal categories (43-5).

Guattari underscores the fragile nature of the concept of a unified ego and the amplification of that fragility under capitalist culture. Subjectivity becomes a multiplicity of assemblages—

assemblages that are highly processed and manufactured. Subjectivity is not an encapsulated entity but rather a complex interplay of various external inorganic elements. As such, Guattari posits multiplicity as a universal condition under the contemporary period of capitalist culture, and furthermore, technological culture. He describes the individual as now a “terminal”—employing technological language to emphasize the shifting role of the individual into interfaces which consume and process information. Advancements in communication technologies enable the rapid dissemination of cultural content, and in doing so, creates a shared cultural space where ideologies are consumed on a mass-scale.

In *The Bluest Eye*, mass commercial culture becomes the carrier of racist ideologies, particularly through television and children’s media, and moves the marginalized individual from experiences of multiplicity into multi consciousness. The individual consumes their marginalization and enters processes of becoming-minority. These processes of becomings are a series of masks, selves, and consciousnesses the individual becomes host to. The process of multi consciousness is twofold: the subject becomes multiply-conscious of themselves, and as such, develop other consciousnesses, and engage in the additional performances, practices, and masking their new “selves” require. The consumption of “pure” white girlhood produces universally detrimental values—the sexualization of female children, virginity and “purity” culture—but further disparities are created through these values within the context of race. Black girlhood is rendered invisible, abject, and “dirty” in comparison. The production of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane, the consumption of white girlhood, literalized by Morrison through consumption via eating, produces the subjectivity of Pecola—the poor, black girl who is unloved, unwanted, unseen. Upon buying the Mary Jane candies, Pecola comes to realize her existence does not even register with white people—she is not even recognized as a person:

He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two year old white immigrant storekeeper...his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary...*see* a little black girl? The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness...

Somewhere in the bottom lid is distaste. She had seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness...Pecola unfolds her first, showing the three pennies. He scoots three Mary Janes towards her...She holds the money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand (49).

The Virgin Mary is another iteration of Mary Jane, an icon of infantilized and idealized womanhood. Mary is made to be worshipped, consumed, and fantasized about. Pecola—poor, black, violated by her father—is juxtaposed against the Virgin—eternally pure, white, doe-eyed. The manufacturing of Mary as an object of desire in turn produces Pecola as an abjection, an object of distaste. Mary is purity, and as such, Pecola is contagion, as the shopkeeper refuses to even take money from her open hand. Pecola's desire for clean comfort, the stark contrast of what she is perceived as by others and how she perceives herself in turn. She is multiply conscious of herself, seeing in that moment of contact, herself through the various lenses in the eyes of others.

Pecola is acutely aware of the distaste “for her, her blackness.” She is acutely aware of the “separateness” between her and white people. She lives it, consumes it, harbours and nurtures it inside of her. Claudia recounts the gifting of white baby dolls to little black girls by other black community members:

The big, the special, the loving gift was always a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll. I knew that doll represented what they thought was my fondest wish...I had no interest in babies or motherhood...I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to

discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me...all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured (20).

The love of whiteness is marketed for consumption to black children. To force a black girl into a maternal role for a white child, even pretend, has her mimicking and digesting the role of the “mammy” and furthermore, normalizes for her the structure of submission to which she is subservient to white people. To mother whiteness is to carry it with you, to have it be a part of you, to love it, nurture it, care for it, protect it, to treat it as an extension of yourself.

The production of the desire and love for whiteness has been entirely absorbed by Pecola. Pecola’s sections of the novel are written in third-person. She cannot inhabit her own body, her own experience—there is no sense of an “I.” Pecola has no natural defences against the submission she’s fed, making her the perfect consumer. Claudia acts as Pecola’s foil, presenting an alternate version of Pecola’s descent. In Claudia’s description of the baby dolls, there is a concrete sense of “I,” a self who is aware of her own desires, desires that have formed in rebellion to the gifting of the dolls—“I had no interest in babies or motherhood...I had only one desire: to dismember it” (20). Claudia does not turn to inward violence and dismemberment—as happens with Pecola—but rather an outward dismantling. Claudia has a space of love within her home—“Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup eased up into that cracked window...So when I think of autumn I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die” (12)—a space in which love for her, a little black girl, is made possible and real, an experience that alters her consciousness in a way that counters some of the desire for whiteness and white supremacy she consumes.

In configuring the fantasy of whiteness, the contrasting reality of Pecola and Claudia is deemed “distasteful.” This distaste is consumed and as such, recreates the separateness in one’s own consciousness. To view the self as abject, to not even want to encounter the self, is detach, to separate from the body. Claudia witnesses the better treatment a light-skinned classmate, Maureen Peal, within her own community:

If she was cute and if anything could be believed, she was—then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but could we destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers with they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret? What did we lack?...Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then....Jealousy we understood and thought natural—a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us. And all the time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us (74).

Claudia too is acutely aware of the interrelationship between the production of the fantasy of whiteness and consequently, the production of blackness as abject. From Claudia’s perspective, the preservation of white superiority, even in her own community, keeps it alive in her own consciousness. She comes to know herself as “lesser” and comes up against her own powerlessness—she can strike out against the dolls, but she cannot change the deeply ingrained system of submission in the consciousnesses of those in her community. The tremendous cost of this identification with inferiority is that it inhibits Claudia’s relationships to everything in her life—she hates Maureen, but knows she is not the enemy, she hates herself, but does not want to

hate herself, her anger is directed at a force too large and too dispersed to act upon, and as such, she meets the outside world with fear—the “*Thing*” that made Maureen beautiful, the “*Thing*” she feared the most, whiteness, permeates all aspects of her life.

Guattari defines “marginal people” as “victims of segregation” who “are increasingly controlled, watched over, and assisted in societies... That’s what Foucault is referring to in the expression *surveiller et punir* (watch over and punish).” (173). The fetish objects of whiteness haunt Claudia. The production of desirable whiteness creates systems of submission through its unattainability. The black girl meets the white gaze at every corner, identifies with the distastefulness in that gaze, assumes inferiority, and becomes enmeshed with the desire for unattainable whiteness. As Guattari explains, capitalist forces have effectively colonized subjectivity through infiltration into the domains of the unconscious and of desire: “This happens on all levels: from the clothes you use to your ambitions and your practical subjective possibilities” (173)—each seemingly unconscious decision is robbed of its autonomy.

The movement from double consciousness to multi consciousness lies in the multiplication of interlocking oppressions and their multiplied effects. Double consciousness concerns race in which the subject is acutely aware of the world beyond the “veil,” the white world, that they cannot reach as black subjects. They can see both this world and their own and can see themselves through both their own eyes and the disdain of the white gaze. They are doubly self conscious of themselves as a subject and as a black subject. In multi consciousness, the subject feels the divide amplified. Claudia and Pecola are not only aware of their blackness, but of her black “girlness”—of her expected subservience to white women and their children, to lighter-skinned black women, of her undesirability, her impurity, her contagion. They are furthermore conscious of themselves as black, as girls, as black girls. Multi consciousness is the

result of these psychic processes of what Deleuze calls “minoritization” (*Kafka* 104). Pecola and Claudia enter processes of becoming-black, becoming-girl, becoming-black-girl as they come up against productions of whiteness, white girlhood, white comfort made for their consumption and submission. Subjectivity is constructed by capital, and as Deleuze notes, the consequence is a minority “problematics of multiplicity and plurality” (102). Pecola and Claudia undergo the processes of minoritization not as individual and separate forces, but simultaneous and multiplied effects: becoming-poor-black-girl—classicism × racism × sexism. Multi consciousness describes an ongoing process aligned with the multiple oppressions produced by capitalist society. The ideals of whiteness, white womanhood, white wealth, are continually engrained in American culture, pushing the narrative that, for girls like Pecola and Claudia, they will always remain in that “separateness” from the compelling fantasy they’ve been sold.

A running question throughout Pecola’s life is: “how do you get somebody to love you?” (32) A human desire to be loved, in conjunction with a manufactured desire to be desired, and to achieve desirability through whiteness. It is not just the white world at large Pecola lives in fear of, but the multitude of oppressions that seep into her community and thus, her consciousness. bell hooks describes black girlhood as one of mourning love: “All the years of my life I thought I was searching for love I found, retrospectively, to be years where I was simply trying to recover what had been lost, to return to the first home, to get back the rapture of first love” (x). David L. Eng and Shinee Han make use of Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia to describe racial melancholia: in mourning, one is aware of what has been lost; in melancholia, one cannot place exactly what they have lost (58). In racial melancholia, especially those subjects who are American-born but face deep discrimination, the homeland that has been “lost” cannot quite be recovered, as it is a part of racist mythology, to “go back where you came from.” Pecola

furthermore experiences racial melancholia as she cannot recover hooks' place of first love—Pecola has remained “unloved” the entirety of her life.

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source...It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way...Pecola. She hid behind hers.

Concealed, veiled, eclipsed—peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask (39).

Pecola's “ugliness” is described as a mask. In thinking through Anzaldúa's idea of masking—as protecting one from the violence of oppression—Pecola's mask presents a contradiction. She finds protection in it, “ugliness” allowing her a degree of invisibility, and yet, the flip side of the mask is that she cannot take it off nor see herself without it. Pecola has “accepted it without question,” found only evidence in support of her ugliness everywhere she looked, and yet, what is so “ugly” about her remains arbitrary. The “mysterious all-knowing master” of capitalist production produced her—an “ugly” subject—to maintain structures of submission, structures of submission to desire. There is the recognition that the mask is a falsehood, but simultaneously a deep identification with it. It is both her and not her, and Pecola's ambivalence leaves her in a state of instability.

Daniel Siemens characterizes a change in American consciousness at large between the years of 1890-1940—exhibiting widespread and extreme fears of plurality and attempts to force homogeneity. Siemens notes that the cultural shifts America was facing—“rapidly increasing divorce rates, the new leisure time culture of cinema, jazz, and dance halls, as well as changing behavioral norms”—prompted anxiety and “xenophobic reactions” from white, middle class populaces (46). American culture was naturally progressing from Victorian tradition and was becoming multi-layered with the multiple different cultural influences brought in by various communities. Yet, white Americans offloaded all resentment for any cultural shifts onto people of colour, whether or not these changes were related to them or not. The anger of the white middle class was not only directed outward toward incoming immigrants, but also via a deep inward racism toward people of colour already living, and even born in, America.

Perceiving these changes as a cultural decline, the white middle class turned to the concept of eugenics—promising “race betterment” and solving a variety of “social problems” such as “genetically based criminality” and the “spread of inferiors” (50-1)—coined by European scientists, and then gaining a considerable following in early twentieth century America (Siemens 60). The spread of this racist ideology, Siemens notes, speaks to the “collective fears of the Anglo-American upper and middle classes in the face of an increasingly pluralist, urban society,” and its “pervasiveness” can be illustrated by the fact that in 1928, “376 universities and colleges offered eugenics lectures” (50). The ideal “economic, political, or intellectual leaders” were “exclusively Nordic males” who were also “superior” over “Nordic women and seemingly effeminate immigrant males” (53).

The story of Dick and Jane permeates Morrison’s novel, reinforcing white, middle-class norms. Morrison distorts the form of the short nursery rhyme—fragments of it are repeated

throughout the novel, acting as epilogues to many of the chapters. The story is written once in its entirety, then repeated with a slow dissolution of grammatical conventions—the capital letters are removed, or words are removed entirely, the text begins to crowd together into one large, mass:

Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy see jane she has a red dress she wants to play who will play with jane see the cat it goes meow-meow come and play come play with jane the kitten will not play see mother mother is very nice mother will you play with jane mother laughs laugh mother laugh see father he is big and strong father will you play with jane father is smiling smile father smile see the dog bowwow goes the dog do you want to play do you want to play with jane see the dog run run dog run look look here comes a friend the friend will play with jane they will play a good game play jane play
 Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty
 here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green and white house they are very happy see jane she has a red dress she wants to play who will play with jane see the cat it goes meow meow come and play come play with jane the kitten will not play see mother mother is very nice mother will you play with jane mother laughs laugh mother laugh see father he is big and strong father will you play with jane father is smiling smile father smile see the dog bowwow goes the dog do you want to play do you want to play with jane see the dog run run dog run look look here comes a friend the friend will play with jane they will play a good game play jane play (4).

The incessant repetition of Jane's story acts as another voice in Pecola and Claudia's

consciousness—the voice of white normativity and eugenics. Dick and Jane and their family are the American ideal: the “big and strong” father, the “very nice” mother, the equilibrium of heteronormative pairings; Dick and Jane, cat and dog; and Jane in her desirable red dress. They are “very happy,” and everyone is laughing and smiling around Jane. The narrative taunts Pecola, her reality a stark contrast to Jane's life: Cholly rapes Pecola and impregnates her, her mother serves the family of Dick and Jane, nobody wants to even come near Pecola. The story breaks down—words are repeated and fall off, spaces are eliminated becoming one unified, and suffocatingly long mantra. There is no space for interpretation, no space for another narration,

for words between words. The narrative is solidified, certain. The story is second nature, it is an unavoidable break in consciousness; a solid wall, a foundation of American consciousness.

As such, the American idols in Morrison's text—Shirley Temple, Mary Jane/Jane, and the Virgin Mary—displayed, sold, and consumed at every corner, are both products and producers of eugenic myths of white supremacy and female objectification. They occupy an omniscient presence—unspeaking but haunting, watching, and judging. In their widespread homogeneity, upholding pure, white girlhood as the height of desirability, deserving of protection and love, heterogeneity, multiplicity, pluralism, and hybridity are strategically excluded and facilitated as abject. The pervasiveness of idealized white girlhood works as a mechanism of minoritization surveillance, punishment, and as a result, multi consciousness. The identity of the black girl becomes a performance, phantom present-absence, a mask, and an abject object.

The psychic consequences of this national model of multi consciousness production are evident. Pecola's dissent into complete psychic separation underscores the relationship between the dissemination of her black-poor-girlness as simultaneously invisible and grotesquely hypervisible, and the psychic damage this inflicts—a deep disidentification with her “self.” Pecola cannot recognize herself as a legitimate person, and certainly not an American girl. There is no space in which she is the “norm”—she is cast out from both white and black communities. As a result, Pecola's multi consciousness is represented as a complete psychic splintering and separation of consciousnesses. Wearing the mask of her abjectness demands a multiplication of self—the mask is both a reproduction and exteriorization of her own internalized self-abjection. Pecola sees herself through the scornful white gaze but furthermore exhibits an awareness of the daily acts she must perform (on multiple axes—race, class, gender) and the mask she must keep

up as a practice of survival. In her identification and disidentification with the mask, in her disidentification with her self and inability to curate an individual sense of self, Pecola exhibits an acceptance of the universal “norms” of America alongside an overwhelming pain in understanding her own role in relation to this norm.

Pecola’s girlhood is interrupted—she is unable to form a sense of subjectivity she can safely inhabit. Her unresolved development provides a harrowing reflection on the psychic effects of marginalized subjectivity formation:

Here comes someone. Look at his. See if they’re bluer.

You’re being silly. I’m not going to look at everybody’s eyes.

You have to.

No I don’t.

Please. If there is somebody with bluer eyes than mine, then maybe there is somebody with the bluest eyes. The bluest eyes in the whole world.

That’s just too bad, isn’t it?

Please help me look.

No.

But suppose my eyes aren’t blue enough?

Blue enough for what?

Blue enough for . . . I don’t know. Blue enough for something. Blue enough... for you!

(203).

Through the splitting of Pecola’s consciousness, Pecola is haunted by her unwavering desire for the “bluest” eyes, and the persistent doubt that her eyes will never be blue enough. The conditions of Pecola’s life have not changed much—she discusses with the disembodied voice

that people still avoid her gaze, they look at her “drop-eyed” (195), but her reading of the situation has changed—Pecola is convinced people are “prejudiced...just because I got blue eyes, bluer than theirs” (197). Inversely, Pecola does get what she wishes for—the ability to see the world through white eyes. She sees herself as superior, she believes she possess an innate greatness, regardless of if no one else can see it.

Pecola begs the second voice for recognition—the recognition that her eyes are the bluest, and as such, the recognition of her beauty and subsequent power. The second voice does not easily give Pecola the recognition she desires. The voice Pecola banters with oscillates between menacing and reassuring—going so far as to tease Pecola about her sexual abuse, comforting her by assuring her that her eyes are the bluest, then abandoning her. Pecola recreates Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, in which Pecola, the “master,” cannot get the recognition she desires from the objectified voice she has created. The voice has no subjectivity, and Pecola’s desire to be recognized as beautiful, as in power, is not fulfilled. The conversation is an eternally repetitive closed circuit, haunting Pecola and reifying the lack of recognition, and lack of selfhood, she has experienced her entire life.

As Grace M. Cho notes, once the subject is overwhelmed by extreme trauma, the trauma exceeds the body and demands to be heard. The “the hallucinatory voices that speak through her body demonstrate the ways in which her trauma is a creative force that assembles new forms of perception” (24). Pecola’s yearning to be seen, to inhabit a beautiful body, a body of power and presence, fragments her consciousness and speaks through various voices. She yearns to escape her blackness, her poverty, her girlhood. In her hallucinatory acquisition of blue eyes, Pecola mimics the white gaze once used against her, and yet, she still cannot escape its power. She sees through white eyes but she does not escape its panopticism. Her “transformation” is unfulfilling

and incomplete—she is a fragmented phantom, having not achieved the whiteness she desired and, in that desire, removed herself entirely from her reality. She lives in eternal fear that her eyes are not blue enough—for her to be recognized as human, for her acquisition of power, for her to see the world through the position of desirable, white girlhood.

II. Whiteness as Contagion—Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia* (1998)

Danzy Senna’s *Caucasia*, published in 1998, is set in 1975 Boston, Massachusetts against the backdrop of the Boston busing desegregation crisis and anti-miscegenation laws. As Jeanne Theoharis recounts, 20,000 plus African-Americans demanded the desegregation of Boston and the Boston school system. A busing system was implanted in order to diversify the schools, leading to immense protesting and riots by white Boston residents. Furthermore, while Boston started an “open enrollment policy” in 1961 (133), the schools were still made purposely inaccessible to black children—“the School Committee forbade the use of school funds to bus children to the 7,000 open seats throughout the city” (133). When in 1974 Federal Judge W. Arthur Garrity ordered the desegregation of schools, white violence against black children broke out—black parents having to accompany the children’s school buses to ensure their safe arrival (137):

The black students desegregating South Boston High were met by a mob of whites throwing rocks, bottles, eggs, and rotten tomatoes and yelling “Niggers Go Home.” One student, Phyllis Ellison, who attended school that day, explained, “And there were people on the corners holding bananas like we were apes, monkeys”...“We don’t want you in our schools” (141).

The objects thrown—rocks and bottles in particular—were used to hit and harm black children, like bullets. Black children were treated like a contagion, white parents did not want their children near black children, did not want them “infecting” their schools.

Furthermore, *Caucasia* tells the story of a biracial girl during a time in which interracial marriage only just became legal in the U.S. Anti-miscegenation laws were not overturned until the 1967 Supreme Court ruling *Loving v. Virginia*, a landmark civil rights decision regarding the

case of Mildred Loving, a mixed-race black and Native woman and her marriage to a white man named Richard Loving (Wallenstein xvii)., Peniel E. Joseph also notes that this time period marked a major turn for the Black Power movement as: “America first heard the words ‘Black Power’ in 1966” from the mouth of Stokely Carmichael who “introduced the slogan...to the black freedom struggle” (1-2). As Joseph observes, Black Power activists “trumpeted a militant new race consciousness that placed black identity as the soul of a new radicalism” which included advocating for “community control of schools, Black Studies programs at colleges and universities, welfare rights, prison reform, and jobs and racial justice for the poor...increasing black political power” (3). This “militant new race consciousness” fought to bring a heightened awareness and acknowledgement of black life and experience, to bring blackness into consciousness and into visibility—refusing to be an invisible people, as in Ellison’s seminal 1952 novel *Invisible Man*. By emphasizing blackness, they aimed to counteract the prevailing white supremacist ideologies that perpetuated the erasure of blackness.

The turn to a “militant” race consciousness marked the movement away from the peaceful protests associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Joseph catalogues the assassinations of Martin Luther King, JFK, and the election of Richard Nixon as “signposts for the end of a more hopeful era” (4). Joseph turns to Jeanne Theoharis who marks the Boston school desegregation crisis as a site in which the dichotomy between “integrationist and Black Power strategies” was made clear (17). As such, Senna’s novel takes place at the crux of immense significant social change as well as significant racial protests and violence. Multiplicity existed within the Civil Rights movement itself, and children like Senna’s narrator Birdie, biracial but white passing, found themselves in the distressing situation of having to choose a side due to the immense racial tensions and hostility.

Caucasia approaches multi consciousness by reversing Morrison's narrative about blackness as contagion. Senna's narrator Birdie is a biracial girl (with a white mother and black father) who passes as white, is forced to pass as white by her mother, and begins to fear losing her "blackness" and the truth of herself—her mixed-race identity. Her desire is not for blue eyes or white skin, but a concrete and visible racial identity that aligns with her perception of herself—a black girl, like her sister Cole. What Birdie desires is more fluid and her idea of identity becomes more nuanced and complex as she passes over as white. As Guattari posits the individual under a society of mass-consumption a terminal that consumes mass-produced subjectivity, Danzy Senna configures racialized subjectivity a virus:

The missing scared me. It made me feel a little contaminated. I wondered if whiteness were contagious. If it were, then surely I had caught it. I imagined this "condition" affected the way I walked, talked, dressed, danced and at its most advanced stage, the way I looked at the world and at other people (308).

The consumption of subjectivity takes on a new resonance—it is not passively consumed but caught. Birdie describes whiteness as a contagion—having passed over into the white world, surrounding herself with white people, has left her vulnerable to a deep internalization of whiteness. The contagion's effects stretch far beyond the physical—Birdie feels her consciousness has been rewired. Deleuze and Guattari also give the virus as an example of a rhizome:

Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the cellular gene of a complex species; moreover, it can take flight, move into the cells of an entirely different species, but not without bringing with it "genetic information" from the first host...We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather our viruses cause us to form a

rhizome with other animals... We evolve and die more from our polymorphous and rhizomatic flus than from hereditary diseases, or diseases that have their own line of descent” (10-11).

Viruses have the ability to rewire, reroute, reproduce and rewrite the self, as well as shoot off into other beings, implanting and integrating themselves as a part of another. As such, there is no central being—only variations, assemblages, and multiplicities. In Senna’s description, whiteness as a virus has the capability to control the individual’s interactions with the world and how they perceive it. The virus fuses with the host and has the power to act autonomously within the host’s body. The body and its consciousness are piloted by the ingested virus. As noted however, the virus can either force evolution through multiplicity or lead to death.

As Eng and Han note, configuring “whiteness as contagion connects assimilation with illness and disease” (343). Whiteness as a contagion necessitates that a part of the host dies. In passing, one must sacrifice their racial and cultural identities. However, even in “contracting” whiteness, the individual does not become white. As in Bhabha’s explanation of racial mimicry—that to mimic whiteness is to emphatically not to be white, it is to underscore your non-whiteness, and even if one is successful in passing as white, one does not become white, but rather loses their original racial and cultural identity. The disease is not of transformation, but loss and psychic cleaving. The subject’s losses are doubled—the loss of whiteness as it exceeds one’s reach, and the loss of the original identity to which the individual can never return or regain.

The material and psychic structures of the individual are cleaved in order for the non-white subject to pass as white. The subject is forced to mimic whiteness for protection, for opportunity, to live as fully American. In that miming is the repeated consumption of whiteness,

and in that consumption, the consumption of self-hatred and disdain for one's blackness. Multi consciousness itself is a rhizomatic condition, spurred by the consumption of mass-produced subjectivity. The subject is infiltrated by ideals of whiteness and other "normative" ideals, haunted by the inability to achieve these ideals, haunted by what is lost in the process of attempting to achieve them. In Birdie's case, she finds she is unable to find a sense of belonging and an identity that reconciles her mixed-race heritage regardless of how she identifies publicly and how she is read. While multi consciousness is a shared structure of feeling, the variables that contribute to the structure vary. Seeing through white eyes and entering the world beyond veil is not what eases Birdie's fragmented consciousness, and instead further fuels it. In the inverse of *The Bluest Eye*, Birdie longs to look black and be accepted by her black community. Yet, as she lives within such extreme racial tensions, she is marginalized from her community and is forced to choose whiteness.

Prior to Birdie's encounter with the outside world, she has no concept of racial differentiation. Birdie's parents have kept Birdie and her sister Cole sheltered from the outside world—they are home-schooled, and only have each other as company. As such, Birdie is vehemently attached to Cole and sees her as a mirror of herself:

Before I ever saw myself, I saw my sister. When I was still too small for mirrors, I saw her as the reflection that proved my own existence. Back then, I was content to see only Cole, three years older than me, and imagine that her face—cinnamon-skinned, curly-haired, serious—was my own... That face was me and I was that face and that was how the story went (19).

Cole confirms in Birdie her own existence. Birdie sees Cole as her twin, as an externalization of her interiority. Birdie feels undifferentiated from Cole. Birdie has a positive association with

doubling here—Cole is everything she sees as herself and everything she loves. They move in the world in unison. She has no concept that Cole is visibly black and she is white passing, that the way their skin is read outside of their home will drastically alter the paths the two girls walk on, and will have to walk on separately.

Despite the efforts of Birdie and Cole's parents, the fact of their racial identities and their racial subjectivity still appears to seep into their consciousnesses. Birdie and Cole invent their own language, Elemenos (named after their favourite letters of the alphabet, LMNO), and a lore that surrounds the language's conception:

Cole was explaining to me that it wasn't just a language, but a place and a people as well... The Elemenos, she said, could turn not just from black to white, but from brown to yellow to purple to green, and back again. She said they were a shifting people, constantly changing their form, colour, pattern, in a quest for invisibility. According to her, their changing routine was a serious matter—less a game of make-believe than a fight for the survival of the species... What was the point of surviving if you had to disappear? I said it aloud (21).

Cole is evidently cognizant of the idea of invisibility, of passing, as a form of survival. The racial violence happening outside of their home has bled into their imaginary space. Colours are politicized, to be one colour is safer than another. If the exteriority of the Elemenos, and later Birdie, becomes transgressive and chameleon-like, what occurs internally? The way their bodies are read shifts, and their external reality is altered as a result. In order to commit to this external change, the subject of passing must commit to an internal shift as well—breaking off from their prior self. Birdie's final question is both naïve and foreshadowing—to her, a life lived in hiding is not a life, but it is the kind of life she is forced to live in order to stay alive. To remain

invisible is to deny the self any form of recognition, and as such, denies the possibility of self-fulfillment.

From the beginning of Birdie's life she is afflicted by multiple identities pushed onto her by her parents, each with differing personal politics they try to uphold:

They couldn't even agree on a name for me, which is how I ended up Birdie...My father wanted to call me Patrice, as in Lumumba, the Congolese liberator; my mother wanted to name me Jesse, after her great-grandmother, a white suffragette. Cole just called me Birdie—she had wanted a parakeet for her birthday and instead got me. For a while, I answered to all three names with a schizophrenic zeal (32).

Her parents, Deck and Sandy, both envision a powerful political identity with the names they chose, particularly in regards to women's liberation movements. And yet, Deck picks a black woman's name, and Sandy, her own white great-grandmother's name. In each name is a legacy that each parent wants to bequeath to the child, and but they are two opposing ones. Birdie juggles all names until taking on Cole's more permanently—Cole's name, which holds no expectations of Birdie, other than treating her like a pet.

The "schizophrenic zeal" Birdie experiences being pulled between her parents is a direct result of the complexity of her biracial identity and sets the grounds for her multi consciousness. She is put in a situation where there will be no pleasing either of her parents, where there is no sure community for her to be a part of. Birdie and Cole are sent to Nkrumah, a private Black Power school in Boston, and this begins Birdie's separation from Cole and her own sense of selfhood. Birdie's appearance, especially considering the context of racial strife between blacks and whites in her community, made her a very unwelcomed guest. Birdie becomes the object to which many of the black children project their anger onto. Broken off from Cole, and now

confronted with the reality of her appearance—that while she identifies as black, her black community identifies her as an outsider and a victimizer—Birdie ingests the ostracization and separates internally, too:

I often found myself alone, chewing on my hair and nails with an insatiable hunger, as if trying to eat myself alive, picking at my scabs with a fervor, as if trying to find another body buried inside (58).

Birdie's white skin feels like a shell hiding her "real" black self. Birdie attempts to physically gnaw away at her white skin. In an inversion of the tragic mulatto myth, Birdie longs to look black, to fit in with her sister, the rest of her peers, and to feel more aligned with how she views herself. The question of race is complicated here—Birdie does not "feel" white but is read as such. She identifies strongly with Cole's image, viewing her as a mirror, only to realize she is Cole's inverse.

Hobb's definition of race is more useful here—to conceive of race as "relationships between people. Identity is a series of networks and a set of connections" (269). Race is a shared structure of feeling, like multi consciousness. Birdie's own understanding of her identity is dismantled by her outside world's definition of race—as being read strictly on the body. As such, being read differently in her external world changes her interiority drastically. Birdie befriends a black girl at Nkrumah named Maria, forming a sisterly bond with her. She leans on Maria to replace Cole and attempts to emulate Maria as best she can. Through Maria, Birdie is able to "learn the art of changing" (70)—to oscillate between white and black. Maria curls and styles Birdie's hair, and Birdie emulates Maria's way of dress. She even begins to imagine herself as Maria's cousin:

I imagined my name was not Birdie or Jesse or even Patrice, but Yolanda, and that Maria was one of my many cousins. I imagined myself Cape Verdean (77).

Birdie recounts this moment as developing a “skill that would later become second nature to me...There I learned how to do it for real—how to become someone else, how to erase the person I was before” (70). By putting on multiple different names and different “skins,” Birdie develops multiple consciousnesses. Like the creatures of Elemenno, Birdie feels the need to alter how people read her racially in order to blend in with her surrounding community. To imagine herself Cape Verdean, a country with a high population of mixed-race individuals (primarily African and Portuguese), is to imagine a more racially ambiguous version of herself. Birdie takes on the identity of Yolanda—her “passing” as black here is not just performative, it is “becoming” someone else. Yolanda is not a mask she removes in her own company; it is a new personhood she actively lives.

This can be seen furthermore when Birdie is then forced by her mother to pass as white, to take on the identity of “Jesse.” Birdie’s parents split and agree to take one child each. Birdie’s father takes Cole and Birdie stays with her mother. Birdie is forced to take on the name her mother wanted for her, to live that history. Initially, Birdie feels disassociated from her surroundings in New Hampshire and her new identity as white Jesse. In playing “Yolanda,” Birdie acts upon her yearning to be more like Cole, more like her peers. There is a distinct separation between how Birdie is perceived, how she perceives herself, and how she wants to be perceived, and as such, a distinction between Birdie and Yolanda, inhabiting the same body. When Birdie is forced to pass as white, Birdie feels more alienated from Jesse. Being white is not just an announcement of identity—as Birdie experiences, whiteness manifests a form of perceiving, thinking, being. As Birdie explains, whiteness “affected the way I walked, talked,

dressed, danced and at its most advanced stage, the way I looked at the world and at other people” (308). Whiteness is not just a performance that Birdie puts on as she “acts” as Jesse—the longer she identifies as white, the more she is recognized as white and, as such, recognizes herself as white. Jesse dominates over Birdie as Birdie begins to see the world through white eyes.

The experience of multi consciousness is based on a structure of simulation. As individuals consume whiteness and become increasingly disassociated from their non-white bodies, they engage in practices of simulating whiteness that appear promising but are ultimately futile. Birdie leaves her family, identity, and community and attempts to fully invest in her new one. Doing so means she must constantly erase Birdie and “write” Jesse into existence. As such, Birdie is denied the possibility of a complete subjectivity—she constantly feels fragmented and spectral:

Something else changed in New Hampshire, something I never told anyone for fear of being called crazy and sent away, like a girl I had seen on an after-school special. It was simply a sensation I had at times, when I experienced a sense of watching myself from above. It happened only occasionally. I would, quite literally, feel myself rising above a scene, looking down on myself, hearing myself speak. I would gaze down at the thin girl sitting by the fence, the one with her brown hair falling into her eyes, drawing patterns into the dirt, and watch this girl with the detachment of a stranger (184).

To engage in such an extended practice of simulation has left Birdie unable to recognize herself—she no longer feels attached to her own body. Multiple separate consciousnesses are described as tethered to a single body. Birdie became Yolanda, Yolanda became Jesse. The worlds of the three girls are vastly different, as the three girls are themselves. To fully commit to

the practice of passing in each, Birdie had to disengage from “Birdie” and transform her own interiority to match her exteriority. What’s interesting about Birdie’s description is that she is looking at herself through her own eyes—just a separate pair. Birdie and Jesse have become incongruent, with Jesse acting autonomously and Birdie spectrally observing. Birdie looks at Jesse through Birdie’s eyes—and Jesse now is the one piloting Birdie’s body. The longer Birdie spends as Jesse, the more Birdie is pushed from her body, spectrally haunting what was once hers. Whiteness has become a part of her consciousness, the white gaze is now Jesse’s gaze, and Birdie can only observe.

Grace M. Cho argues that “schizophrenia is a normal mode of memory for a diasporic unconscious that is in constant displacement and that reverberates with the voices of haunted histories” (185). Birdie inherits multiple opposing histories and has multiple opposing expectations of who she will be. Cho makes reference to John Johnston’s use of “schizophrenic multiplicity of voices” to describe the new modes of perception that occur when one’s trauma “exceeds one’s frames of reference for understanding and is assimilated into the subject” where “her system becomes overloaded” (186). Multi consciousness is the direct consequence of trauma—the system is overloaded, the body is infiltrated by multiple consciousnesses from multiple sources. Eng and Han also posit that racial melancholia develops a “split subject”—“one who exhibits a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time as he displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals” (349). As such, racial melancholia is an aspect of multi consciousness—the multiplied mourning of a racialized subject has internal effects that splinter an individual’s sense of selfhood and consciousness.

The narrow way in which race has been structured in American society positions mixed-race or ambiguously raced individuals in a space of ambivalence. This ambivalence disrupts the individual's ability to inhabit the world and their bodies in a way they feel authentic. Birdie continuously comments on the "make-believe" quality her surroundings take on. New Hampshire looks "like some imitation of life I had witnessed before only in movies...flat props to be knocked down after the day's shooting was over" (141). Even years after living there, Birdie has trouble even registering her own room as belonging to her: "My room looked strange in the darkness—the Bruce Springsteen poster over my desk, the horse calendar by the windows, the makeup and perfume...the objects suddenly unfamiliar, like props" (229). Birdie's room is decorated with hallmarks of white American girlhood—Bruce Springsteen and horses. Even in her own private space of the bedroom, Birdie does not "give up" the performance of white girlhood—she must commit to it, to live it. Passing is not an external performance, but an internal transformation that results in separate selves. This is Jesse's room, and when Birdie briefly re-enters her own body, she is disoriented. Jesse is constantly under the threat of the white gaze, internalized and perpetuated by her own consciousness now. Foucault calls the ingestion of the authoritative, disciplinary gaze a part of contemporary panoptic society. The self acts always in accordance to being watched, to being persecuted. However, in the context of colonialism, Fanon calls this process the production of colonial subjects—when the colonized become their own colonizer. When Jesse has these episodes of disassociation, it is as if Birdie briefly re-enters her own body. As such, the objects in Birdie's life don't represent her personhood or have any personal significance because they belong to Jesse.

The discussion of Birdie's multi consciousness has focused on Birdie's own self-subjugation and the larger but more impersonal forces that have fragmented Birdie's

consciousness. However, Birdie's interactions with her surrounding community are another impact and vital force in producing Birdie's condition. Birdie cycles from Cole to Maria to Mona—a well-known white girl she meets at her new school—as her objects of deep attachment and mimicry:

I became her shadow over the next few months...Around Mona, I was usually performing, trying to impress her, but never letting her in...And when I heard those inevitable words come out of Mona's mouth, Mona's mother's mouth, Dennis's mouth—nigga, spic, fuckin' darkie—I only looked away into the distance, my features tensing slightly, sometimes a little laugh escaping. Strange as it may sound, there was a safety in this pantomime. The less I behaved like myself, the more I could believe that this was still a game. That my real self—Birdie Lee—was safely hidden beneath my beige flesh, and that when the right moment came, I would reveal her, preserved, frozen solid in the moment in which I had left her (223).

Beginning with Cole, Birdie's life is marked by close female bonds she uses as reference points for her own identity. After Maria ushered Birdie through black girlhood, Birdie takes to Mona as her guide through white girlhood. Yet with Mona there is a discrepancy—Birdie detaches from both Jesse and Mona in these moments of racism. Jesse takes over—she laughs. Birdie maintains the hope that her real self remains intact inside of her—like a Russian doll nested inside this white shell. Birdie still views her “beige” skin as a falsehood, as skin that does not represent who she is. What her white skin comes to signify in the racially charged situation she finds herself in is entirely different from how Birdie wants to be read. Detachment is a form of safety for Birdie—it is a form of endurance and survival—and as such, common to the experience of multi consciousness. By observing at a distance, Birdie is able to both endure the spoken violence

against and hatred of her real self, but she is also able to endure the humour and ease Jesse finds in the situation—this separate being in her that is a part of white racism. Detachment is self-preservation for Birdie, it allows for her to maintain the belief that Jesse is not real, that she is a performance, that she could not participate in the privileges of whiteness.

The experience of racial dissociation is amplified by experiences of performing femininity. Birdie is multiply-conscious of herself as a white, black, biracial, girl. When coming into contact with ideas of virginity, a gendered conversation, Birdie also understands it as a raced conversation. Judith Butler discusses the “disjunctive ordering of the human as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ as taking place not only through a heterosexualizing symbolic with its taboo on homosexuality, but through a complex set of racial injunctions” (122). The act of sex and the performance of sex is a site upon which the spheres of gender, sexuality, race, and class converge. As Butler defines:

“Sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled (13).

The norms Birdie must ritualize in order to move towards “femininity” are complicated by the fact of her passing. The sex she must forcibly materialize is within the sphere of the race she must also materialize. As Butler elaborates:

Sex is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the “one” becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility (13).

Birdie's existence as a white passing, biracial girl exceeds the "intelligible" binaries she lives within. Her subjectivity exceeds discourse, and as such, Birdie becomes a subject of multi consciousness as she attempts to materialize a sense of subjectivity into being.

Birdie begins to live the trope of pastoral "horse girl." There are several scenes where she rides through the lush pathways of the property she lives on, echoing romantic representations of white American girlhood. The owners are a white family with a son named Nicholas, whom Birdie forms a friendship and a sexual relationship with. Nicholas is college-aged while Birdie is only fourteen. As with most of their surrounding community, he is also openly racist. Birdie has found herself in a very vulnerable position. Her relationship with Nicholas is not the pastoral fantasy between two white teenagers it almost seemed to be. Birdie is interpolated and enters Jesse's consciousness when Nicholas's racist remarks intercept their time together, interrupting Jesse's girlhood. He nicknames Birdie "Pocha" as she darkens in the sun, also warning her not to get "too dark." He is also an adult, pressuring a minor into sexual acts. Nicholas doubly objectifies Birdie as both a racial object and a sexual object. She is his object of racial ridicule, sexual entertainment, and fetish. He is both aroused and amused by her vulnerability.

Birdie approaches her relationship with Nicholas with the same ambivalence she finds in her relationship with Mona—she both desires his approval but halts the possibility of further intimacy. Birdie continues to remain conscious, and interrupts Jesse's girlhood. Birdie stops Nicholas's sexual advances at intercourse:

Sex was the only time, outside of the womb, when a person became one with another, when two people really melted together, into one body. Allowing a white boy inside of me would make my transformation complete, something I wasn't ready for (258).

Having sex with Nicholas would “finalize” the process of passing for her, would make her Jesse forever, and would perhaps betray Birdie. She engages in the fantasy white girlhood complete with a white knight but cannot fully bring herself to consummate life as a white woman, to live the totality of whiteness for the rest of her life. The intersection of racial and sexual difference amplifies the oppressions Birdie faces and multiplies her consciousness—she must perform racially and sexually against “Birdie,” as Jesse. Jesse performs white racism and sexual submission, a paradoxical powerful powerlessness, in ways that Birdie finds traumatizing, distasteful, and alienating.

Butler notes the threshold of sex as also being a racial crossing in Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929): “Clare goes too far, passes as white not merely on occasion, but in her life, and in her marriage. Clare embodies a certain kind of sexual daring that Irene defends herself against” (124). Birdie too finds this threshold one she is unwilling to cross—intercepting Jesse’s ushering into the experience of sex. The nickname “Pocha”—like Bellevue’s derogatory nickname of “Nig” for Clare—brings Birdie back to consciousness. Butler describes how race is “figured as a contagion transmissible through proximity” in *Passing*, as Clare is only outed as black when she associates with blacks, and Bellevue’s association with her challenges “the boundaries of his own whiteness, and surely that of his children” (126). In *The Bluest Eye*, blackness as contagion haunted Pecola, but in Senna’s *Caucasia* the idea is reversed. Birdie begins to fear the whiteness as contagion, and crossing over the racial-sexual boundary of sex with a white man would mean she could no longer ever cross back over. Birdie’s ideas of sex are clouded by purity discourse in more complex ways—her concerns over preserving a sense of racial purity converge with ideas of sexual purity.

The fear Birdie holds over being unable to pass back over the colour line via the act of sex complicates understandings of race. Butler examines the exposure of Clare in terms of marked and unmarked bodies:

Blackness is not primarily a visual mark in Larsen's story, not only because Irene and Clare are both light-skinned, but because what can be seen, what qualifies as a visible marking, is a matter of being able to read a marked body in relation to unmarked bodies, where unmarked bodies constitute the currency of normative whiteness (125).

Yet Birdie fears the internal marking of whiteness that this sexual experience would incite. How this sexual experience would transform her internally, what kind of damage it might inflict, is too terrifying a possibility. Birdie fears how her consciousness would further divide. Birdie struggles against the loss of her dignity—to fully become Jesse is to also become complicit in the racism she witnesses around her, to engage in relationships with racist people, to be both her own victim and victimizer. As Hobbs notes: "Race and gender are never isolated, disparate, or distinct categories, rather they are always linked, interrelated, and intersectional" (236). Birdie is ambivalent—she experiences both outrage at the incessant racist remarks and actions thrown into her daily life, as well as disassociation, as the connection to Birdie and her identity as a black girl becomes increasingly strained. The privilege she gains through whiteness is shadowed by the self-subjugation she must swallow. While the conditions of her life as a white American girl improve, she now also becomes the prey of white men who doubly objectify her sexual and racial difference. These multiple losses and multiple jeopardies are the condition of multi consciousness.

The experience of passing is structured around loss, not gain. The safety and privileges Birdie acquires through passing are always under the threat of loss. "Birdie" herself is always

under the threat of loss. Birdie attempts to negotiate between Birdie and Jesse by preserving Birdie as much as possible, but her condition of multi consciousness becomes unbearable. As Hobbs describes:

Passing could mean the wrenching loss of one's family, but it could also mean the personal pain of losing one's dignity. It could mean laughing on cue at a minstrel show or constraining one's feelings and emotions and being unable to register disgust or outrage at a racist joke. For some, this was undoubtedly a bitter bargain. But for others, the connection with oneself and one's past had been lost long ago (230).

In passing, what is lost can never be recovered, and the looming threat of leaving Birdie behind forever, in Birdie being sacrificed in order for Jesse to live, pushes Birdie to attempt to cross back over the colour line. Birdie returns to Boston to find her father and sister. She is disturbed however, when Boston feels foreign and Jesse/New Hampshire begin to feel like home, one she misses. The people she once knew and identified with no longer resonate with her:

The name Jesse had been a lie, but as I walked home that day, I wasn't quite sure the girl Jesse had been such a lie. I had felt out of place with Ali—less at home with him than I did in New Hampshire. Maybe I had actually become Jesse, and it was this girl, this Birdie Lee who haunted these streets, searching for ghosts, who was the lie (308).

Eng and Han use Freud's theory of the melancholic who "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him" to describe the racial melancholia immigrants in America experience. The structure of melancholia functions here too in experiences of passing. Birdie is unable to identify what is lost to her, as she cannot identify what feels more like home to her either. Melancholia is embedded too in the experience of multi consciousness. Birdie furthermore describes the

sensation of haunting—spectrally haunting her own body. Still tethered to her body but unable to fully inhabit it, Birdie feels haunted, fragmented, and multiplied.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their description of Kafka, examine his references to his body as indicating that he “understands his body as the means while in bed to cross thresholds and acts of becoming, each organ ‘being under special observation.’” (*Minor* 30). Jesse’s body is the means by which she can cross the threshold into white womanhood, by the logic of the construct of virginity. But Birdie haunts and watches spectrally and cannot allow Jesse’s body to do so. Her skin, her reproductive organs, are examined, judged, objectified, deemed desirable or abject. Yet, Birdie herself begins to conceive of whiteness as contagion—it is a virus, a rhizomatic structure. She feels she has caught it; it has taken over and overloaded her system. Whiteness, manifested as Jesse, permeates her consciousness as its own.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the “schizo body” as “waging its own active internal struggle against the organs” (150). Birdie is at war with the largest organ of the body—her skin. Her skin’s function has been rewritten, but not by her—it is no longer just a protective layer, but a suffocating bind. It does not move and grow with her, it confines. The skin speaks for her—it claims her identity as Jesse, as white, even though Birdie feels differently from what her skin articulates. Deleuze and Guattari observe the use of doubles and trios in minor literature and note that the “triangulation of the subject, familial in origin, consists in fixing one’s position in relation to the two other represented terms (father-mother-child) (*Minor* 54). Even moving beyond the family, the subject still always finds themselves in a position of triangulation: the subject-the police-the Inspector (54). This triangulation is an aspect of becoming-minority—continually viewing the self in submission to others, surveying the self through the eyes of others, and immobility. As Deleuze and Guattari note, in triangulation, “one moves and the other

remains immobile, or...both move with the same movements” (54). Jesse moves forward and Birdie remains inert, but as Jesse begins to cross thresholds of her life, Birdie holds them both inert. They remain frozen and imprisoned together. Birdie-Yolanda-Jesse stems from the original triangulation she found in her family between her, her mother, and her father, two poles with opposing hopes, dreams, and expectations for her.

When Birdie reunites with her father, he too views her as a racial object of his theoretical study. Dismissing her lived experience, he says to her: “There’s no such thing as passing. We’re all just pretending. Race is a complete illusion, make-believe... You just switched yours at some point. That’s just the absurdity of the whole race game” (365). Birdie’s inability to reconcile skin colour and internal understanding of self emphasizes the incongruity between skin colour and racial identity, and the ineffability of racial identity more broadly. Blackness as a form becomes related to content that no longer refers back to blackness as an optic. Blackness comes to refer to the opposition of whiteness. If whiteness is normalcy, blackness is delinquency. Skin colour simultaneously is and isn’t a signifier of race. Birdie is able to acquire privilege and some safety when passing as white, but is incessantly distraught by the sensations of unreality, unhomeliness, and unrest and the threat of exposure.

As Cole says to Birdie when they reunite: “‘He’s right, you know. About it all being constructed. But’—she turned to me, looking at me intently—‘that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist’” (380). Pointing to the incongruities in the structure of race does not make racism any less real, evidently, and in politically charged dialogue such as this exchange, *Caucasia* as a novel also functions as a critique of racial discourse. Birdie’s mother goes too far with her racial activism and her violence forces Birdie to have to pass as white. Birdie’s father is an absent academic who theorizes about racial problematics but fails to acknowledge Birdie’s own

suffering. Birdie's multi consciousness does not resolve with her crossing back over to Boston. She is in constant unrest—despite having found Cole, Birdie finds herself chasing after girls who look like her (385). It is the initial identification with Cole she chases, the image imprinted as a “true” self, as it has been irrecoverably lost to her now.

30 years post-*Caucasia*, Allyson Hobbs looks to Danzy Senna for her experience as a biracial woman during the transition from the 1970s into entering the new millennium:

Senna describes her surprise when she wakes one morning to discover she was “in style . . . that mulattos had taken over. They were everywhere— playing golf, running the airwaves, opening restaurants, modeling clothes, starring in musicals with names like Show Me the Miscegenation! The radio played a steady stream of Lenny Kravitz, Sade, and Mariah Carey. . . . Pure breeds (at least black ones) are out; hybridity is in” (276).

Senna's upbringing in 1970s Boston as a mixed-race woman where “mixed wasn't an option” was not unlike Birdie's in her novel *Caucasia*, yet her racial identity would later become a commercial commodity. Hobbs draws careful attention to this movement towards hybridity and what it means for civil rights movements in America:

The friendly embrace of hybridity in the twenty-first century neither signals the achievement of a “postracial” age nor supports the colorblind thesis that race no longer matters. On the contrary, the increasing acceptance of hybridity underscores just how germane race continues to be to contemporary American society. Some scholars have argued that the chorus of support for a mixed-race movement corresponds with worrisome setbacks to civil rights legislation. A mixed-race movement could vitiate the solidarity needed to press for racial justice. The championing of a multiracial category on the U.S. census by conservatives has done little to quell this alarm. Some have argued

that the addition of a multiracial category coupled with the elimination of affirmative action programs in an overall effort to eradicate racial categories will increase racial harmony (277).

Hobbs posits many complex questions around racial identity as mixed feelings arise from the celebration of hybridity. A mixed-race movement, as Hobbs notes, could continue to support racial hierarchy, with biracial individuals now occupying a space below white people but above black people. The overt commodification of racially ambiguous individuals contributes too to an erasure of black violence and discrimination—colour blind and “post-race” discourses are dissonant with their times; they do not reflect American reality.

III. What Does Hybridity Look Like?—Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* (2020)

Gordon E. Slethaug credits the “relative rareness” of twinship for the superstitions and general wariness that culturally came to follow the image of twins and doubling (100). In contemporary diasporic American literature, there is a gravitation towards repurposing the metaphor of the double. Doubleness still comes to represent unrest and often tragedy, yet the rewriting of this cultural archetype into contexts of race relations in the U.S. gives the concept new resonances. In Brit Bennett’s *The Vanishing Half* (2020), Desiree and Stella Vignes are two white-passing black twins raised in the town of Mallard, Louisiana. Two forms of doubleness are present from the opening of the novel: the sisters are identical twins, and so light-skinned they can oscillate between white and black identities. As with the prior novels discussed, the relationship between two sisters is examined as one lives as a black woman and the other passes as white. In Bennett’s novel, the chapters flip between multiple narrators, including the two sisters, and as such, Stella’s multi consciousness is made clear through her narration of passing, in contrast to Desiree’s more stable sense of self.

The novel follows the lives of the Vignes sisters between the years of 1940-1990. As Hobbs explains, this period in American history is transitory and contradictory in the contexts of racial politics and passing. While racial discrimination and racist and xenophobic ideologies were still widely ingrained in American consciousness in the 1940s, the “promise of new economic possibilities coupled with a growing protest movement for civil rights led many to reconsider the choices they made about their racial identities” (Hobbs 226). African Americans were rejecting passing and moving towards black liberation and celebration. By the 1960s:

Black identities were affirmed and passing was rejected. Black was beautiful. Large Afros were in; chemically straightened hair was out. The chant of “black power,” the

surge of black pride and black unity, and the revival of black nationalist movements rendered passing dissonant with the times (Hobbs 263).

By the 1970s passing was seen as archaic. Black identity, experience, and life was brought to American consciousness and the time period of the 1940s to the 1990s saw many of these changes: in 1969 the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research founded at Harvard University, and more students begin to protest in demand of black studies programs at their schools, and were successful in achieving them. Schools in the South become desegregated through *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*; in 1976 Black History Month is founded by Carter Woodson; in 1982 Michael Jackson's *Thriller* becomes the best-selling album of all time; in 1983 Alice Walker wins the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple*. Yet this period is also not without violence against black people—in 1991 the murder of Rodney King took national hold, resulting in the 1992 Los Angeles riots, James Byrd Jr. is murdered in 1998 by self-proclaimed white supremacists.

Hobbs notes an interesting turn in the 1990s regarding hybrid identities, as American society began to legitimize and commercialize mixed-race identities. By the late 90s and early 2000s, these hybrid individuals became widely celebrated:

Suddenly, mixed- race men and women were in vogue. A 2003 article in the Style section of the New York Times named a new crop of Americans “Generation E. A.” (an abbreviation for “ethnically ambiguous”) and noted the marketing power of this group (276).

As Hobbs observes, ethnically ambiguous identities went from nonexistent to commodified. President Barack Obama's tenure from 2009-2017 marked this new era in American culture. As racially mixed populations grew in number, as did their viability as a market, and as such more

of a push came to recognize these identities legally and commercially. It is no coincidence that the recognition of mixed-race people as a market coincides with the legal and societal recognition of mixed-race people.

The Vanishing Half ushers us through this transitory period of race and identity politics—the novel takes place from the 1940s to the 1990s. Having been published in 2020, the novel is a historical text that recounts the complex history of black Americans retrospectively. Desiree and Stella are born in the fictional town of Mallard, known for its obsession with light skin and extreme colourism—the town is a microcosm of racial politics in America at large and colourism in Louisiana. Founded by a freed slave of mixed-race, Mallard becomes a town exclusively for light-skinned people, with the population becoming increasingly white-passing as the townsfolk attempt to marry “light” and produce lighter and lighter offspring. Yet still, early in their lives, Desiree and Stella witness the kidnapping and lynching of their father at the hands of white men—despite being white-passing himself. Their father survives the first attack but is later shot in hospital. Stella is plagued by nightmares of white men dragging her out of bed like they did her father. The extreme targeted violence the twins witness forces them to confront the reality of their situation—white-passing while living as black is not enough to guarantee their safety, they must find a way to become white.

Through Morrison, Senna, and Bennett, passing over or transforming into whiteness can be said to outline a trajectory from self-hatred to self-annihilation. Self-hate is acted upon and moves from the internal domain of the consciousness and transforms the body, and as such, its relations to other people and the world. This external transformation disrupts the internal processes of the individual; if the body is transformed, consciousness will be as well. To transform is thus also to destroy, but the process of destruction does not lead to the death of the

“black” self and the prevalence of the “white” self, but rather an individual whose ego is fundamentally ruptured, leading to multiple competing voices, melancholia, and haunting. Passing becomes more than a performance to render the body unmarked by blackness in the public sphere, it is the active cultivation of a new personhood, a new consciousness, one racially unmarked even internally.

Stella makes the decision to pass as white, and her transition from “blackness” to “whiteness” illustrates the negotiation between selfhood and safety passing individuals partook in. Stella suffers an immense loss of identity, home, and community, and while she attempts to re-establish what she has lost, her losses are amplified. The identity, home and community she rebuilds remain incomplete and unfulfilling—as all she has rebuilt is built upon structures of erasure and performance. From a young age, she questions what it means to be white:

“But white folks can’t tell,” she said. “Look at you—you just as redheaded as Father Cavanaugh. Why does he get to be white and you don’t?” “Because he *is* white,” he said, “And I don’t wanna be” (74).

In Stella’s dialogue with another townsman, whiteness is presented paradoxically as both an absolution and a choice—Father Cavanaugh simply “is” white, but the townsman does not “want” to be white. This presents a complexity for Stella, with whiteness being an ineffable state of being, one her father could not achieve despite his fair skin, but also something you can choose to be. The relationship between marked and unmarked bodies presents Stella with an understanding of safety in which by reframing her own skin, she can enter the space of “real” Americanness that grants her the permission to stay alive. Butler provides a Hegelian reading of Larsen’s *Passing*: “Paradoxically, his own racist passion *requires* that association; he cannot be white without blacks and without the constant disavowal of his relation to them. It is only

through that disavowal that his whiteness is constituted” (126). The white subject seeks reification and reaffirmation, and mostly, recognition from the black subject as a master, as superior. Yet, as the idea of blackness and whiteness here is as intangible and fleeting as such, Stella learns she can access whiteness through silence, as Clare does in *Passing*: “Clare passes not only because she is light-skinned, but because she refuses to introduce her blackness into conversation, and so withholds the conversational marker which would counter the hegemonic presumption that she is white. Irene herself appears to ‘pass’ insofar as she enters conversations which presume whiteness as the norm without contesting the assumption” (126). The essentializing understanding of race presumes that upon entering even conversation, one’s racial markedness would become apparent. As this is evidently not the case, the practice of passing relies on the act of withholding, of repression, of secrecy. The countereffects of this lifelong disavowal of one’s self and history however can include the haunting of multiple consciousness in one body, the mourning and melancholia of that which was disavowed, the dissociative sensation of disorientation and displacement when the repressed self comes back into consciousness.

Initially, Stella sought comfort in the familiarity of Desiree—someone who is both her and not her, someone she can escape into while still feeling like “herself”:

Sometimes being a twin felt like living with another version of yourself. That person existed for everyone, probably, an alternative self that lived only in the mind. But hers was real. Stella rolled over in bed each morning and looked into her eyes (247).

The doubling metaphor is at play transparently here, as Stella confirms her own existence through Desiree. Stella sees herself mirrored, but the image is live, dimensional, and functions as a companion. For Stella, Desiree has always represented a fixed version of herself, a self more

assured and grounded. Desiree continues to live life as a mixed-race woman, she never crosses over with Stella. In Ovid's myth, Narcissus's mother is warned that her child will only live a long life if he never comes to *recognize* himself. After rejecting the romantic advances made towards him, Narcissus becomes entranced by his own reflection in a pool of water until he dies, leaving behind narcissus flowers. In Pausania's account however, Narcissus gazes into the spring because his features recall those of his deceased twin sister's. Bennett reworks the Narcissus myth on multiple levels: Stella becomes both transfixed by the white gaze she has internalized and leads a life in which recognition could be fatal, while Desiree is left to gaze into her own face as a reminder of her departed sister.

Stella and Desiree serve an interesting comparison of consciousness formation because of Stella's decision to pass, despite being twin subjects. In Stella's case, the primary experience of witnessing her father's attack brings her into crisis and reconfigures her understanding of herself into one of perpetual outsider. Desiree is too greatly impacted by the event but moves instead toward reinstating familiarity and bringing her black culture and identity to the forefront. At sixteen Desiree and Stella abandon Mallard and head to New Orleans, but with differing intents:

In New Orleans, Stella split in two. She didn't notice it at first because she'd been two people her whole life: she was herself and she was Desiree...She'd always thought of herself as part of this pair, but in New Orleans she splintered into a new woman altogether...Being white wasn't the most exciting part. Being anyone else was the thrill (193).

Stella begins already doubled, but further multiplies as she engages in a second life outside of her life with Desiree as Miss Vignes—a white woman. Yet as she dons her new identity of “Miss Vignes,” she begins to feel like “maybe Miss Vignes was already a part of her, as if she had been

split in half” (199). What’s interesting about Stella’s description of her passing is that she sees Miss Vignes as a “new woman” she “splintered” into. Miss Vignes is her own person, a new consciousness developing in Stella’s body. Stella’s identity is a complicated equation—she is doubled through her relationship to Desiree and split in half between Stella and Miss Vignes. Miss Vignes has always been a part of her: “She hadn’t adopted a disguise or even a new name. She’d walked in a coloured girl and left a white one. She had become white only because everyone thought she was” (198). There is no essence of whiteness Stella had to seek out—all she did was claim to be so, recognizing herself as white in turn, being recognized as white by white people.

To maintain whiteness however, Stella must become Miss Vignes internally. As the depth of her passing intensifies, Stella is forced to estrange herself from all that is familiar and transform her notions of identity into ones of distaste and repulsion. Her identity equation now must include the subtraction of Desiree and all their past life holds, and yet the phantom of this loss never leaves her consciousness. Stella’s consciousness is now divided between the present-absence of Desiree and all she represents, “Stella” and Miss Vignes. After Stella’s childhood trauma, it becomes too difficult for her to repair the association she has of her blackness with fear and death. As such, her black identity becomes dissociated from her, transformed into an object of hatred. She passionately rallies to keep other black people out of the wealthy Los Angeles neighborhood she moves into with her white husband. He even comments on Stella’s “embarrassing” racism.

Stella’s unresolved losses can be avoided only through dissociation—a splitting of Stella, and in turn Desiree, from Miss Vignes. This dissociation translates over to her identity as Miss

Vignes too, however, as Stella describes her new life in a similar way Birdie had—as some sort of play, complete with props and actors:

The newborn in her arms was perfect: milky skin, wavy blonde hair, and eyes so blue they looked violet. Still, sometimes Kennedy felt like a daughter who belonged to someone else, a child Stella was borrowing while she loaned a life that never should have been hers (158).

The attempts at repairing her losses fail, as Stella experiences a sustained disidentification with her new life. Her daughter Kennedy is born entirely white passing, but the bond between Stella and her child is disrupted by the dissociation Stella feels from her own body and life. Miss Vignes becomes her own person, and actively participates in the disavowal and hatred of blackness, of Stella. Yet Stella never leaves her body—instead she is trapped, watches Miss Vignes’ life unfolding before her. In the experience of racial melancholia, as Eng and Han identify, the melancholic is unable to restore love into new objects. As the loss of one’s history and identity are irreconcilable, Stella is unable to allow the level of vulnerability needed to form a bond with her daughter, and as such, Kennedy and Stella grow estranged.

Stella’s unrest becomes transgenerational. Kennedy suffers from nightmares the way Stella did. She drops out of school to become an actress—where she can be multiple different people whenever she likes. The role she identifies with the most is when she plays a “lonely girl living in a world surrounded only by ghosts. Nothing reminded her of her own life more” (262). Kennedy’s artificial relationship with Stella creates this dissonance in her life. Everything is fabricated, unreal, and nothing is examined beyond the surface of skin. She later becomes a washed-up actress and resorts to real estate where she continues to play “pretend”—selling buyers on a dream life in a dream home—for a living. Desiree’s daughter Jude is the more

grounded of the two. After leaving Mallard, finding the colourism intolerable—having been given the nickname Tar Baby, an homage to Toni Morrison’s novel of the same name—Jude successfully completes her education at UCLA, has a relationship and community, and later is accepted into medical school.

Stella’s multiplicity functions on the axis of race, class and gender. She still suffers from violent night terrors of being kidnapped by white men, and when intimate with her husband, Stella’s consciousness transposes the face of one of the men who killed her father onto her husband’s body. While Stella comes to associate her blackness with shame and “wrongness,” passing over as white has not uncoupled the association of whiteness with violence in her consciousness but has instead redoubled it. Moments of sexual intimacy while passing as a white woman, as with Senna’s Birdie and Larsen’s Irene, provide a moment in which the spheres of sex and race converge, and as the threshold is crossed by Miss Vignes, Stella’s memories of white violence transpose over Miss Vigne’s reality. At sixteen, Stella was forced to drop out of school and help her mother clean the houses of wealthy white people, where she is sexually assaulted by one of the older male clients. As a sixteen-year-old black, impoverished girl, Stella’s vulnerability was amplified by multiple interlocking forces. The man does not want to be seen with her and forces her into isolated spaces, knows she wouldn’t be believed if she said anything, knows there would be no repercussions anyway. He sexualizes her powerlessness. While Miss Vignes tries to repress that version of herself, she resurfaces in Stella’s new life, where the power imbalances are still heavily in place—Stella’s husband Blake is her former boss, and an older white man. The sex she has with her husband as his white wife is layered with her experiences of violence and assault at the hands of white men as a black girl. She experiences

the fragmentation of the multiple oppressions she faces. While she now is an openly married, wealthy, white woman, she is still unable reinstate safety in her world.

Stella lives with the constant threat of exposure—fuelling her distancing from black people. She fears they will recognize her as one of their own, when she has so deeply repressed her blackness. Desiree's daughter comes into contact with Stella while working for Blake. She is shocked by Stella's likeness to her mother—convinced that Stella is a doppelgänger. Bennett repurposes the trope of the doppelgänger in the context of passing and racial subjectivity. Mythologically, the presence of a doppelgänger indicates imminent death, but Stella has already “died” by becoming Miss Vignes. By being recognized as someone else's double, she is also being recognized as a fraud. Being recognized means the possible death of Miss Vignes, and would leave Stella trapped in a no-man's land between two worlds, both of which she no longer has full access to: “She could tell the truth, she thought, but there was no single truth anymore. She'd lived a life split between two women—each real, each a lie” (278). Passing has complicated the identities of both Stella and Miss Vignes, as the two women are intertwined and distinctly separate. As with Birdie and Jesse, Stella feels familiarity in both the black and white versions of herself. Yet, her transition from the black girl Stella into the white woman Miss Vignes interrupts her development so fundamentally she feels unable to inhabit either identity fully, resulting in a spectral, split sensation.

The loss of Stella also coats Desiree's life. Stella and Desiree are bound by their mourning but mourning for different losses. Interestingly though, Desiree appears not to share Stella's longing for whiteness. Desiree marries a dark-skinned black man and has a dark-skinned child. Desiree lives a life in which she is able to relay the truth of her experience, and thus is able to form fulfilling relationships. She is not forced to lose her identity, history, family or

community. If we return to definition Hobbs's of race as "relationships between people" and identity as "a series of networks and a set of connections" (273), racial identity itself is a shared rhizomatic structure of multiplicity—shared histories, identities, traumas, community, and if we return to the conception of whiteness as a product and a virus—marketed, consumed, infecting, multiplying and controlling—Stella's condition of multi consciousness can be said to result from the combination of the loss of her racial identity and the resurfacing of the repressed identity through the sensation of being haunted by the previous self, in addition to the multiple levels of performance, distaste, and dissociation she must engage in. Pecola, Birdie, and Stella are haunted by their lost selves (and through those selves, the connections they lost), rewired and rewritten by whiteness, and are left in an ambivalent body. As Eng and Han note in the context of racial melancholia, "loss is symptomatic of ego formation, for both dominant as well as marginalized subjects" but the "ways in which that lost object can or cannot be reinstated into the psychic life" is largely politicized (72). The fragmentation loss creates is a universal process in subjectification, but the possibility of reconciling loss, especially loss of self, is greatly reduced in situations of multiple oppressions. Pecola, Birdie and Stella's compromise to their original losses is the further erasure and loss of themselves. As the axes of race, class and gender amplify their vulnerabilities and the stakes of their losses, marginalized subjects must engage in multiple simultaneous identities to simulate the reconciliation and safety they are denied.

The Vanishing Half portrays the arc of racial and identity politics from 1940-1990, highlighting both the immense changes and societal stagnations. The novel underscores the intersection of individual lives and experiences with broader historical forces, as exhibited by the two generations of women. The 1940s, when Stella and Desiree grew up, was characterized by strict racial segregation and the one-drop rule. Passing allowed Stella to circumvent the limited

opportunities she had as a black woman. By the time Jude and Kennedy come of age in the 1980s and 1990s, the Civil Rights Movement and the fight against racial segregation has led to legal changes and increased race consciousness. Jude, Desiree's dark-skinned daughter, is able to find success in the way Kennedy, Stella's white-passing daughter is not, and in a way Stella nor Desiree were able to. By the end of the novel, Jude is in medical school and closes the novel gleefully floating in a river (266)—free, and in harmony with her surroundings, her life. She does not get there without struggle, though—Jude does not have the luxury of the carelessness Kennedy has towards life:

Didn't Jude wonder what it would be like to care so little about your education, to know that even if the worst happened, you would be all right?...The girl was maddening sometimes, but maybe this was who Jude would have been if her mother hadn't married a dark man. In this other life, the twins passed over together. Her mother married a white man and now she slipped out of mink coats at fancy parties, not waited tables in a country diner (329).

Jude works herself to exhaustion to afford her schooling and to maintain her grades. Education is her ticket to at least some of the privileges of the life beyond the veil.

Kennedy holds onto the photograph Jude gave her of Stella with her grandmother Adele, the “proof” of her blackness. Kennedy, unable to reconcile the new information about her history, insists she is “not a Negro” (281). She lives life from place to place, at times impersonating Jude: “She was taking a break from medical school. She had a boyfriend back home named Reese. She was white, she was black, she became a new person as soon as she crossed a border. She was always inventing her life” (284). Kennedy feels as though she has now “crossed” the border of race, and finds herself wavering and jumping back and forth. She desires

the stability that Jude has, but cannot remain grounded in her reality, in her identity, and as such, remains unbound in terms of consciousness like her mother Stella. Her impersonation, an attempt at performing a sense of concrete identity, leads her nowhere. She is unable to identify what her “authentic” self is, nor can she come to terms with the multifaceted nature of the truth of her identity.

IV Conclusion: Black Girlhood—Of Double and Multi Consciousness

Read together, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half* (2020) cover the period from 1930-1990 in American history via the perspectives of young, black girls. Morrison's novel brings to surface the subliminal transition in the ways racist ideologies are disseminated via mass culture and media upon entering a new technological age and exiting the Jim Crow era. Senna's *Caucasia* explores the racially divided society of the 1970s and 1980s upon the threshold of immense societal change in terms of segregation laws. Bennett's novel ushers us through the 1940s to the 1990s, bringing us into the transitory period of racial desegregation and closer to the present day.

Through the narratives of sisters, twins, passing, splitting and impersonation, the novels make apt use of metaphors of the double in their illustrations of double consciousness. Additionally, in all three novels, there is a movement towards an emerging multi consciousness, one that is examined as not just as a universal condition of all oppressed or minoritized subjects, but rather a condition that stems from various individual and historical forces. In each novel, a set of sisters form the basis of comparison where one suffers under the weight of multi consciousness. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola sees blue eyes as an escape from the atrocities of her life. She is neglected by her mother, she is raped by her father, she is at once invisible to her community and hypervisible as the antithesis to the Shirley Temples and Mary Janes at every corner. Claudia, whose family Pecola later lives with, is raised with love, and has both a family and a sense of community. Claudia is keenly aware of the internalized racism in her own community, the colourism, and the obsession with white girlhood, and is not unaffected by these forces. She exhibits a double consciousness in her desire to have what light-skinned girls like Maureen Peal have, yet she also recognizes the ways in which a subconscious desire for

whiteness is implanted in young black girls, and actively fights against this desire. Pecola gives in entirely to her desire to a point of delusion and complete psychic splintering. Her experience begins to exceed the framework of double consciousness—the trauma and alienation she’s endured left Pecola exhibiting a nonconsciousness. She is narrated only in third-person, as if observing the actions of a body she does not know or control. The voice of her consciousness becomes entirely rewritten by the proliferation of the Mary Jane myth and turns into an all-consuming desire. She becomes multiply-conscious of herself as abject object—poor, dark-skinned, “ugly” girl and breaks under the constant awareness of such.

Caucasia, like *The Vanishing Half*, is a passing novel where Birdie and Cole serve as the two sisters of comparison. Unlike Pecola, Birdie is able to pass as white and is temporarily granted the privileges of white girlhood. Unfortunately, the immense psychic cost of passing renders her new life as the white girl “Jesse” entirely unfamiliar. Birdie comes in and out of consciousness, at times suddenly jolted back into the body of Jesse and into a life she does not recognize. Interestingly, it is not just whiteness Birdie desires, but blackness as well. She wants to look like her sister Cole, she wants to be integrated into her black community. She attempts to pass as “more” black by taking on the persona of Yolanda. What Birdie longs for is a racial identity that is more easily digestible and palatable to the racially divided community she finds herself in. She desires a unitary, concrete racial identity, and in doing so, denies the truth of her multiplicity. Like Pecola, Birdie is left haunted and unfixed to her body. Even after reuniting with Cole, who appears more collected and sure of herself, having aligned with her identity and her perception of herself the duration of her life, Birdie continues to search for “Cole,” or perhaps the vision of herself as Cole she held as a child.

The Vanishing Half compares the twins Desiree and Stella, with Stella having passed over. As with *Caucasia*, it is Stella who undergoes deep psychic fragmentation and distress. Like Birdie, she describes the sensation of being unable to recognize her life and the uncanniness that comes with such dislocation—to feel dislocated in one’s own body, one’s own life. Desiree does not conceal her identity and eventually moves back to her hometown of Mallard. Desiree’s life is not without struggles against racial barriers, but the decision not to pass over with her sister allows her to live a life which feels more congruent with her consciousness. As a result, her and her daughter Jude are grounded in their identities and realities in comparison to Stella and Kennedy, both of whom have ostensibly more privileged lives compared to Desiree and Jude, but suffer from feelings of dissociation, displacement and dislocation—spectrally haunting their own bodies, playing “pretend” because they cannot tell what feels real anymore. The novel itself is a multivocal and multifaceted exploration of racial politics over two generations of women and explores double and multi consciousness as transgenerational structures of feeling that emerge through denial of heritage and of identity, through racial divide, violence and trauma, and through the intersections of race, gender and class.

Chapter 2: Intersecting and Interlocking Performance in Asian-American Literature

For Tina Chen a “central aspect” of Asian American experience “involves the doubly conscious awareness of playing parts that seem distasteful and unnatural, but are perceived by others to be somehow representative of one’s identity” (4). Chen here provides a variation on double consciousness where the cognitive split is not just between unobtainable whiteness and Otherness, but also between “selfhood” and perceived identity, between “natural” identities, and unnatural identities. Within the subset of “Otherness,” a version of “Asianness” exists as a preformed digestible identity created and upheld by American society. The aim is to create a space within the idealized America for this form of Otherness, but not one that occupies a role of agency over self-representation. Asian minorities still exist on a marginal plane, but stereotypes create the roles they can fulfill and designate a confined space for Asian people to occupy.

The model minority myth is often ascribed to Asian-American subjects and stereotypes them as excelling academically and otherwise exhibiting “model” behaviour that allows them to integrate more “easily” into American society. As Ellen D. Wu explains, beginning in the mid-1960s a shift in American thinking regarding Asian subjects occurred as Americans created and began pushing the narrative of the minority myth: “The pig-tailed coolie has been replaced in the imagination of many Americans by the earnest, bespectacled young scholar” Wu quotes from a December 1970 issue of the *Times* (1). The Asian American was cast as the “assimilating Other”—“persons acknowledged as capable of acting like white Americans while remaining racially distinct from them” (4). Wu notes that Asian Americans also contributed to self-stereotyping—“Self-representations of Japanese and Chinese American masculinity, femininity, and sexuality, purposefully conforming to the norms of the white middle class, were crucial to the reconstruction of aliens ineligible to citizenship into admirable—albeit coloured—

Americans” (5). In fear of further marginalizing the self, Asian subjects suppressed any deviations from white middle class norms and performed approximate-whiteness in the form of the model minority role.

Wu notes that the mid-1960s brought a surge of liberal reforms—such as the African American freedom movements—and this call for a “complete overhaul of the nation’s—and the world’s—existing structures of capitalist democracy” unnerved the States, and as such, turned to upholding “Japanese and Chinese Americans as evidence of minority mobility to defend the validity of assimilation as well as integration” (6). As Wu argues, the debates over race here are “not simply about race relations” but are “more fundamentally concerned with race *making*—the incessant work of creating racial categories, living with and within them, altering them, and even obliterating them when they no longer have social or political utility” (7). This contemporary identity formulation emerges out of a desire to produce a racialized subjectivity that conjoins the subjugation of Asian-Americans with the discrediting of African-American and other minority experience. As Eric Tang notes, following the Rodney King verdict:

Asian American “successes,” specifically those achieved without (or even despite) state intervention, have served white racial dominance as an important countervailing argument against those who would hold the state accountable for the reproduction of racial inequality (119).

The social formation of the model minority produces subjects who are denied the right to articulate their experiences. They become narrated instead by generalizing polarities—the self-sufficient Asian versus the government-dependant black.

Versailles, located in New Orleans East, is the most densely populated area of Vietnamese immigrants in America. The neighborhood was 90% black when Vietnamese

immigrants arrived (Tang 118), and as such, the area became an intersection between Asian and black Americans, sharing similar life conditions despite the persistence in the media of a binary defining the two groups. Tang notes how Hurricane Katrina became media fuel for the narrative that “Asian Americans were once again succeeding while neighboring blacks were faltering,” as the Vietnamese community was praised for its “quick” and “efficient” rebuilding of New Orleans East post-Katrina in contrast to the still devastated black communities. Yet, this wasn’t the full reality:

Father Vien offered a more sobering explanation. “We were lucky,” he said. “Our church was not badly damaged and this allowed us to get back in to coordinate the return and rebuilding effort. Without denying the importance of survival skills, the priest plainly recognized that his community did not sustain the degree of damage experienced in other neighborhoods, particularly in the predominantly black sections of New Orleans East - areas situated farther to the west, closer to the levees of the Intercoastal Waterway. He asserts that had the floodlines in Versailles reached only a few feet higher, the fate of his community could have been very different (Tang 125).

These are two starkly different versions of the New Orleans East community post-Katrina. Asian-Americans and black Americans are posed against each other in an attempt to create a national fiction of triangulation in which Asian Americans are valorized “over blacks, locating blacks at a third coordinate of inferiority to whites... The devaluation of black life is therefore always substantiated in relation to Asian Americans. And the power of white racial dominance is determined by its ongoing ability to reproduce itself by maintaining positions of antagonism between racial others” (Tang 122). The insertion of antagonism between Asians and blacks

attempts to displace the possibility of unity and thwart ideas of social reform in regards to racial equality.

On the surface, the stereotype of the model minority is perceived to be a positive one, yet it is harmfully double-sided. The stereotype perpetuates Asianness as submissiveness, as labourers for American capital. As Lisa Lowe notes, Asian immigrants have “played absolutely crucial roles in the building and the sustaining of America” and yet the “Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the foreigner-within” (5). Lowe cites the various immigrant acts in the United States that placed Asians “within its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as ‘foreign’ and ‘outside’ the national policy” (8). The flip side to the model minority myth is the eventual cycle back of Asian “model” behaviour as fuel for Sinophobic narratives of job theft and opportunity theft by Asian immigrants from “real” Americans. The narrative of Asian immigration is read in varying incompatible ways, with Asian immigrants also being read as an inscrutable mass who contribute nothing positive to American society and strain/take advantage of the social benefit systems in place. Furthermore, at the time of the writing of this dissertation, the NYPD reported that Asian hate crimes jumped 361% in NYC in 2021 following the COVID-19 pandemic (“Asian-American Attacks”). The COVID-19 virus was repeatedly referred to as the “China virus” or the “Kung-Flu” by President Trump, coding Asian subjects as “diseased” and “dirty” and at fault for the worldwide pandemic. In 2021 a shooting spree at three spas and massage parlors in Atlanta took the lives of eight people, six of whom were Asian women. The perpetrator claimed he was motivated by “sexual addiction,” evidently fueled by the fetishization and stereotyping of Asian women as sex objects and sex workers. A pattern of using Asian individuals as scapegoats for national and cultural problems is apparent.

A consequence of these mythical, distasteful, and impossible identities, and the violence they subject the individual to, is the destructive, dissociative affect in which the minority subject becomes overwhelmed by the persistence of multiple consciousnesses and feels no resonance with any form of identity. The Asian-American individual is furthermore fuelled by the fear of the consequences—familial and social shame, racial violence, poverty—of deviating from the seemingly only Asian-American identity. Chen differentiates between performance and impersonation by identifying impersonation as a “double construction of identity: a performance always involving the acting out of roles, the contestation of the performance that we both wish to participate in and would like to somehow disavow” (4). Impersonation is a type of performance involving already-articulated identity, but also one that is fundamentally *not* the performer—impersonation is the specific act of mimicking and taking on someone else’s identity. The complication Chen adds to impersonation in contexts of minority subjects is that the minority subject is often impersonating an idea of themselves—what society already perceives them to be. Thus, becoming an American citizen also meant becoming a subject whose individual identity is displaced in favour of an already-articulated conception of one’s identity and culture. These new conditions and the psychic displacement that occurs generates the condition of multi consciousness as one navigates a terrain of intrusive and degrading psychic infiltration. Through Chapter 1, the amplified effects of multiple interlocking oppressions—particularly in black and biracial underclass girls and women—lead to the disavowal and “killing” of the black self, to extreme dissociation, to multiple competing internal voices, to unending performance and permanent uncanniness. This chapter will now investigate multi consciousness in the Asian-American context.

I. Degrees of Separation and Degrees of Multi Consciousness— Eric Nguyen’s *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021)

Contemporary Asian-American literature has refused easily reconciled immigrant narratives. The internalization of Asian culture as alien and abject and Anglo-American culture as desirable creates ambivalent characters who are unable to reach a final “synthesis” that does not deny the trauma of their displacement from both their motherlands/cultures and the trauma of the prescriptive recognition as citizens in their American homeland, or which reconciles the multiple divides the Asian-American individual is subjected to through the demands of assimilation: becoming-stereotype, performance, and sacrifice.

Eric Nguyen’s *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021) takes place in Versailles, New Orleans between the years of 1978, when a pregnant Vietnamese mother arrives in the United States with her son, and 2005, when her youngest son leaves the United States. As Huping Ling and Allan W. Austin point out, prior to the mid-1960s there were almost no Vietnamese people living in America, and at the beginning of 1975, there were still fewer than 15,000 Vietnamese-Americans (573). The Vietnamese American community occupy a unique space in the history of Asian-American immigration as their homeland was already shaped by U.S. influence prior to their immigration, and furthermore, they come to enter the United States where there has not been a Vietnamese-American community already established. American troops had been in Vietnam for nearly a decade before pulling out—inciting a crisis where Vietnamese who had worked for the South Vietnamese or the American forces were desperate to leave as South Vietnam was overwhelmed by Communist forces (573). From 1975-1981, the U.S. took on roughly 400,000 (588) Vietnamese refugees, many of whom “made their escape aboard rickety, hastily constructed vessels—earning them the sobriquet ‘boat people’” (574).

Martin Joseph Ponce deploys the term diaspora as a framework that seeks:

To account for the movements of Asians around the world and their transnational connections with their ancestral homelands and co-ethnics in other locations. By exploring their global orientations, activities, and relationships, diasporic frameworks decenter the United States as the privileged frame of analysis and revise the one-directional, teleological immigration narrative of “Asian America”: from Asia to America, from racial persecution and class exploitation to cultural assimilation (or hybridity) and “model minority” success, from xenophobic alienation to social acceptance (66).

Diaspora as a framework in thinking about Asian-American experience challenges the one-dimensional and linear narrative of Asian immigration to the United States and proposes instead a transnational framework of multiplicity with various lines of flight. This framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of Asian communities to their homelands and to other Asian-diaspora communities across the world. By decentering the United States as the sole point of reference in Asian immigration experience, the immigrant narrative is revised and moves towards “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” (Lowe qtd in Ponce 66).

Yen Le Espiritu discusses Vietnamese people in the United States being treated as a “problem that needed to be solved” through “prescribed assimilation” (104). From this prescription emerges the model of the “good refugee,” a narrative which presents “the United States as self-evidently *the* land of opportunity” (104). Mass media and policymakers “began to depict the newly arrived Vietnamese as the desperate-turned-successful (104) even when many were unable to access education, were unable to find employment, and living in poverty. As diaspora is inherently an experience of multiplicity, and that multiplicity is denied and funneled

into the singular narrative of “good refugee,” the structure of multi consciousness can become a detrimental psychic splintering instead of an unbound simultaneity.

Things We Lost to The Water is polyphonic in its exploration of three different consciousnesses—three Vietnamese-Americans of the same family, yet differing in their approximation to Americanness. Hương, the mother, immigrates to New Orleans in her late 20s, with Tuấn, her preschool aged son. She is pregnant with her second son Bình. As Hương enters America as an adult, she remains peripheral to it. Without a command of English, without an American education, without American friends and community, Hương remains isolated, alien, and viewed as an inscrutable labourer at her place of work as a nail technician. Tuấn represents a liminal position—having memories of his previous life in Vietnam and beginning a new life in America, his narrative is pointed with the anger and confused terror of mourning his lost life in Vietnam and the difficulty of life as a poor Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S. Tuấn becomes deeply antagonistic toward American culture and grips tightly onto the remaining memories and ties he can find to his Vietnamese heritage. Bình, born in America, changes his name to Ben. Ben is deeply divided between his Vietnamese culture and his American culture. He feels held back by his history and family, but still unable to assimilate fully into an “American” identity.

The various acts of impersonation that result in multi consciousness are informed by numerous factors outside of the minority subject’s control. From Sartre, there is an understanding of the outside gaze as a form of dominance that “enslaves” the object of the gaze. From Foucault, the gaze becomes disciplinary and panoptic—inescapable and ingested. Tina Chen builds off of this existing discourse to discuss the “nature of stereotype as a form of psychic projection” (4). Stereotypes inform acts of impersonation and sustain the disciplinary gaze in the form of “psychic projection” of idealized selfhood that the minority subject cannot

escape nor obtain. Hương internalizes the model minority myth in a multitude of ways—she holds herself to the expectation of Asian-American success in the domains of the familial, financial, and social. She believes that the “American dream” is to “earn a living, to provide for yourself” (173). As such, Hương impersonates what she feels is a “good” American, playing into the obedient model minority:

She repeated the words she knew in her head, a chaotic mantra of foreign sounds that contorted her mouth comically, strangely, like a puppet’s—Yes, no, thank you, please, yes, no, sorry, hello, goodbye, no, sorry (22).

Many of the words Hương learns and repeats are ones of passivity, agreement, and guilt. By emphasizing the feeling of “puppetry,” Hương accentuates the degradation of this impersonation, but also the protection this “mantra” provides. Yet Hương’s performance creates a cycle that promotes multi consciousness—puppetry/miming—an instance of “failed” miming—guilt, shame, and dissonance—internalizing increasingly difficult to achieve American ideals.

The sections in which the novel enters Hương’s consciousness work tirelessly through this cycle. Hương goes to a restaurant to ask for a job and is met with hostility when she could not communicate her question. Immediately, Hương feels the disciplinary gaze of the American woman, imagining herself through the American’s eyes: “a strange Vietnamese woman, a woman who did not belong here” (21). Hương’s immediate course of action is to portray submission and guilt, feeling that this single interaction is enough to warrant a violation of law:

“I am sorry,” Hương said, giving up, using the phrase she knew by heart: *I am sorry*. It was a good phrase to know....She didn’t know what had just happened, but she felt, in the pit of her stomach, that she had done something wrong. The last thing she saw on the

girl's face was a grimace. She was being told, she was sure, that she had done something rude and against the country's laws (21).

The white woman's grimace follows Hương out of the restaurant and convinces her of her obvious unbelonging, and criminality as such. As Chen explains, "the omnipresence of the gaze implies constant witness, an audience always already waiting to 'see the show'" (5). Hương's experiences in America have led her to believe that she is under the constant threat of surveillance, surveying her un-Americanness, and as such, Hương becomes her own constant witness. To consistently perform is to also consistently act as audience to one's own performance. This contributes to Hương's exhibit of multi consciousness—she is the performer, the audience, and the judge.

Furthermore, the role of the mother—particularly in the context of new immigrant motherhood—becomes an increasingly impossible identity, one that demands exhaustive labour inside and outside of the home, extensive emotional trauma, and physical degeneration via unsafe labour practices and impoverished conditions. Adrienne Rich distinguishes between two interlocked definitions of motherhood: "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that the potential—and all women—shall remain under male control" (2). Motherhood is distinguished here between a potential individual experience of interconnectedness and an oppressive institution in which women are "alienated from our bodies by incarcerating us in them" (Rich 2). In the first definition, there is the empowering nature, and possibility if one chooses, of carrying and connecting with life, in the second, the disavowal of female agency and female reproductive powers in favour of enforcing a motherhood that enshrines the female body as separate from the

female herself—a body that becomes a vessel under male control, where motherhood as an identity becomes an involuntary sentence.

Rich further describes the complexity of motherhood as an identity and an institution: women are “haunted by the stereotype of the mother whose love is ‘unconditional’...If I knew parts of myself existed that would never cohere to those images, weren’t those parts abnormal, monstrous?” (23) The mother is already a figure of multiplicity and divide—the female body is literally doubled, tripled or further multiplied through carrying a fetus(es), and in many situations where the mother is the primary or sole caregiver, her identity dissolves entirely into the institution of motherhood. At the beginning of Nguyen’s novel, Tuấn calls his mother “mẹ” doubling as the Vietnamese word for “mother” and the English word “me,” conflating the body of the child and the mother, symbolizing Hương’s fusion with her children. When the individual needs and desires of the mother surface, the mother feels immense guilt, shame, and dissociation. As Kristeva argues:

A woman will only have the choice to live her life either *hyperabstractly* (“immediately universal,” Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen (“immediately particular:” Hegel said). But she will not be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity (173).

As women are not offered the complexity of division without deep shame and ostracization, the complex feelings that surface during motherhood lead to the condition of multi consciousness—a mode of survival in which the female individual must perform multiple roles and inhabit multiple identities that must never cross paths or bleed into one another.

The multi consciousness of the mother is further divided when considering how race and class intersect with maternal life. As Patricia Hill Collins argues however:

For Native American, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women, motherhood cannot be analyzed in isolation from its context. Motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender (311).

Collins coins the work mothers of colour do “motherwork,” which includes: ensuring the physical survival of their children (as children of colour are at a much higher risk of death due to poverty and violence); the motherwork they performed prior to becoming mothers—slavery, mothering other children and siblings, child labour practices to contribute to their family’s survival followed by unsafe, often degrading, and intensive labour practices as an adult; and the “tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color” (321).

Living below the poverty line with two young boys and no other form of support, Hường, as a young woman in her twenties, desires freedom and is simultaneously appalled by what this freedom would mean—abandoning her children and her identity as a mother. To “leave” brings her happiness—leaving is an action of moving away or departing from an object. But to “leave” is doubly also to leave something behind—her children—which is what halts Hường and fuels her guilt:

A sense of happiness came over Hường as she realized this was the first time in a long time she had left the city by herself... She imagined leaving. Her boys were off at school and they would come home and wait and she would not be there!...*Ms. Tran*, they’d say,

how could you abandon your sons? Yes, *abandon*, and all at once she felt guilty for thinking it (114).

Huong struggles with her new identity as a single mother as she struggles to define what motherhood means to her. She has a projection of perfect motherhood—sacrificial and protective—as she repeats to her sons, “We sacrificed everything—so you can have a roof over your head in a free country” (104)—but increasingly finds another voice pulling her away from feelings of kinship and motherhood. Huong has no space to exist outside of this identity and its expectations—there is no paved path of motherhood for her to walk on which accounts for these divisions and heterogeneities. As such, her “free” life can remain only a fantasy as she is grounded and anchored by her responsibilities as a mother. Her identity as a mother stifles her identity as Huong however—her needs go unfulfilled and her other selves remain repressed.

Rich also describes anger as an affective double to tenderness in the context of motherhood (23) and yet this natural anger is viewed as a maternal shortcoming, failure, or “evil.” In Huong’s attempt to emulate perfect minority motherhood, she comes into contact with this extreme anger:

It’s as if her body is acting on its own then—her hand reaches out and strikes his skin.

The smacking sound of flesh on flesh echoes in the air, hangs in her mind...She doesn’t know what’s come over her. She sees herself from far away. What has she done? What will she do now?...She touches her own impossible hand (194-5).

Huong strikes Ben—as a young queer man, he has been living a double life as Ben, separate from Binh. He feels his queerness to be too burdensome to his mother—already weighed down by her attempts at a perfect life, and as such, hides his truth. Huong touches her “impossible hand”—repressed rage has taken over and surfaced. Huong does not recognize this self—she has

spent all of her time repressing it. Anger has no space in perfect motherhood. Rage has no place in her model minority motherhood. Her son's actions are not those of the "perfect refugee." Her consciousness detaches from the body, her body is seized by another self, the young woman who remained dormant.

It is in part these impossible expectations that create the grounds for multi consciousness. Multi consciousness is an issue of autonomous interactions between consciousnesses in one body, and an inability to recognize these consciousnesses as a self as they are so largely performative, prescribed, and internalized. Hương describes moments in which there is an unbridgeable gap between conflicting selves:

Hương sat on her steps and looked at the moon. How did she get into this situation—to be right here, right now? She weaved back through time and wondered if there were warning signs. Yet another part of herself was outside of her body, watching her and calling her a stupid woman...She looked at herself with pity and shook her head (71).

Hương's mind is moving backwards in time, trying to trace her steps to find out how she got to this place of misery in her life, yet at the same time, another consciousness is moving away from her body, watching her from a distance. Following the recurring sensation of observing the body as a foreign "other" in these various texts, the trajectory of multi consciousness appears to take similar routes: overwhelmed by the multiple impersonations the minority subject must take on, and overwhelmed by what feels to be a failure to fulfill these roles, the subject becomes a partial observer of this contrived self—one consciousness trespasses the boundary of the body, escaping, and observes the other consciousness piloting the body in ways that feel unnatural, yet have become autonomous.

Furthermore, diaspora itself is such an inherently multiple experience, where the displaced subject feels pulled by various forces across time and space. As such, Hương is not only split between a spectral observer self and the performed self she does not recognize, but she is furthermore fragmented in space and time. The past—with her husband still in Vietnam, and the remnants of their much happier life—is still very much alive in her. The Hương in Vietnam is so palpable she takes on her own narrative—she has her own future. Hương feels haunted by this other version of herself, one that exists alternately in Vietnam, after the war, together with her husband and their two sons. Yet, while this self is active in Hương's consciousness, that version also does not feel authentic, either:

Her favorite memories were of Công and her there, eating and laughing, the world fading away from around them, the only world that mattered the one they made. Those memories felt haunted now. In her mind, they appeared smoke-smudged, and, watching, she felt uncomfortable, as if she were an intruder—those weren't her memories, they were another woman's, from a different time and a different place (64).

Even her memories no longer feel like they belong to her. Hương surveys these cinematic glimpses into another life and grieves them, but they still feel as though they are not hers, as though she is endowed and possessed with another woman's past and memories. Displacement has evidently had a splintering psychic impact on Hương. What she left behind was not only her home, but a "self," and now it comes to possess and haunt her. Yet, she feels detached from this former woman, and is left carrying an old consciousness in a new body that has formed several of its own selves in order to survive in a new world.

Another characteristic of multi consciousness is the mourning that accompanies the haunting. Hương attempts to perform model minority motherhood into existence in order to

produce model minority children, to make the losses and sacrifices “worth it”—to achieve the American Dream of self-sufficiency and wealth. However, the weight of her sacrifice is transferred onto her children as the expectations of American citizenry they fail to meet continually make Hương feel as though her motherwork is nullified. Eng and Han observe the pattern of “intergenerational transference between immigrant parents and child” as “the loss experienced by the parents’ failure to achieve the American Dream—to achieve a greater standard of living” than what they could potentially have had in their home countries becomes a loss “transferred onto and incorporated into” the child for them to “repair” (64). As Ben notes:

All his life, it felt like she was trying to shape him, to mold him like a piece of clay into the man he’s never met. Didn’t she understand he was his own person? (177)

Ben feels especially pressured by the presence of his absent father, whom his mother has built up to be an ideal man—“the college professor! the hero! the martyr” (160)—and as such, Ben carries an immense guilt for his inability to live up to the expectations of his mother. Hương has attempted to recreate her former husband in both of her sons, so much so that their absent father comes to haunt them as a disciplinary and judgemental force—embodying Hương’s own internalization of patriarchal and white American ideals. Hương’s trauma of dislocation and separation becomes inextricably bound to the losses faced in the impossibility of the American Dream. Hương’s husband abandons her and their children at the last second of departure, and as such, she and her children remain haunted by his absent-presence. Hương’s idealized and Americanized version of herself and the reality of the needs she is forced to repress also never comes into full consciousness and remains a “dead” consciousness buried inside her. As such, Hương’s phantoms are passed down from her to her children.

Tuấn, the eldest of the two sons, retains memories of his previous life in Vietnam, but is also young enough that American life plays a dominant role in molding his consciousness. His narrative portrays the incongruity of the model minority myth against the labouring, lower-class immigrant. Even in daycare, Tuấn learns that his Vietnamese peers hate anything they associate with America. “The Americans are the reason for everything bad that has ever happened” (45) one girl says, “They made you get on that boat. And now your mom cooks their meals, your dad cleans their houses, even if he used to be top boss, and they both come home smelly” (45). Tuấn, seeing this play out in his own life, develops a deep antagonism towards American culture.

Tuấn copes by joining the Southern Boyz, a Vietnamese gang (133) known for their Vietnamese pride. His girlfriend, Thảo, also part of the gang, vehemently rejects the model minority expectation and white-washing, especially of Vietnamese girls. The Asian-American female body is repressed by the family and fetishized by the nation as submissive and obedient. She explains:

“The Viet girls here with their white names and straight As think if they do everything right they’ll be fine, they’ll have a happy life,” she once told him. “But they forget they’re người Việt. We’ll never be American enough for the people here. People look at us a certain way and they always will” (144).

Roughly translated, *người Việt* means “Vietnamese people.” Thảo is a Vietnamese-American high schooler who attempts to create an identity that runs counter to the Asian-American girl stereotype. Thảo holds onto her native tongue, and to choose to speak the name of her people in her mother tongue semiotically reinforces the distance between what it means to be *người Việt* and Vietnamese-American. To be *người Việt* is to be part of a unified collective, to be

Vietnamese-American is to be a marginal individual held to impossible standards that close them off from American society. Thảo draws attention to the impersonation that the minority subject is bound to—a false personhood that embodies a collective desire to maintain a dominant social order and narrative. Two myths are at play here: unobtainable whiteness/the American dream and the model minority myth. Thảo observes many other girls in her community molding themselves to conform to, or at least be able to perform, these mythical identities. The intersection of race and gender here amplify the effects of multi consciousness. The Vietnamese-American girl attempts to perform her way into a sense of agency neither she nor her immigrant parents have in America—by changing her name, by doing everything “just right,” she can be approximate to whiteness, American, and thus successful and self-possessed. As Collins notes:

Native American girls are encouraged to see themselves as “Pocahontases” or “squaws”; Asian-American girls as “geisha girls” or “Suzy Wongs”; Hispanic girls as “Madonnas” or “hot-blooded whores”; and African-American girls as “mammies,” “matriarchs” and “prostitutes.” Girls of all groups are told that their lives cannot be complete without a male partner, and that their educational and career aspirations must always be subordinated to their family obligations (322).

Thảo resists the model minority expectations put on her by both white America and her own family and community through her identity as *người Việt*, by refusing to change her name or to stop speaking Vietnamese. She attempts to achieve agency and wealth through crime instead of model minority performance.

Asian-Americans who were perhaps born in another country and/or still retain many aspects of their home culture are part of a generation of cultural remaking. Asian-Americans

reform culture around and with American national narratives of “Asianness.” As Lisa Lowe notes, “Asian American culture also includes the practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American cultures as ‘other’” (65). For Tuấn and Thảo, the fusion of Vietnamese culture with American gang culture permits them a space of authenticity and agency. To articulate an identity that is reactionary and that refutes the dominant culture’s stereotypes may leave the minority individual bound to such stereotypes however. Lowe defines multiplicity in the Asian-American context as:

Designating the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power, are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations, with, as Hall explains, particular contradictions surfacing in relation to the material conditions of a specific moment (67).

Asian-American texts like *Things We Lost to the Water* refuse easy reconciliation through nationalism or assimilation. The text instead presents racial and cultural identity as an experience of complex multiplicity. Tuấn describes many instances of this diasporic double vision—he has difficulty thinking in Vietnamese, but also difficulty speaking in English. He dreams vividly of Vietnam, feeling it “call” his name, calling him to return, but like his mother, simultaneously feels detached from this life, as if it is only a dream. As with Ben and the visions of water, there is a simultaneous experience of memory, dream and reality where perception is layered and multiplied:

When school started back up again, his dreams returned him to Vietnam, their old house in the city, and his father dressed not in the ragged T-shirt and shorts of the day they left, but in his school clothes...The sound of the city—mopeds, bicycle bells, and the occasional car—drifted in from outside. Tuấn would stand on their front balcony eating a

frozen banana and see his father coming home from around the corner, calling his name (77).

Both languages and both lives permeate his consciousness, each feeling incomplete to him as he steps between the two. Whereas Hương feels the life she has taken on and the roles she has fulfilled in America are inauthentic, leaving her detached and in limbo between multiple false selves, Tuấn describes a sensation of going in-between, feeling not quite Vietnamese nor American:

“I am in another country,” he often whispered to himself to feel the heaviness of the words fall out. “Out there, far far away,” he would go on but only in his head, “is a large piece of land called Vietnam with different people, different trees, different houses, and that is where cha is and he cannot just walk out of it. Vietnam is not like a room, it’s like a school and you can’t leave because there are different rules in school and you can’t go until tha y gia o says so, so we are waiting for tha y gia o to say he can go or for cha to sneak out” (47).

Tuấn continually reminds himself of his relocation, having to reify his displacement through the mantra of “I am in another country.” He thinks of Vietnam as a school, a confined space that he and his father cannot easily move to or from. Tuấn’s mental landscape shuttles back and forth between the poles of Vietnam and America—emblematic sounds, images, and sensations (the mopeds, the frozen banana, the sound of his father) located in the past, in Vietnam, are layered with Tuấn’s present in America: “He’d stop thinking entirely in Vietnamese nowadays—his thoughts were half in English, half in Vietnamese. The other day he forgot the word for ‘orange’: he kept trying to think of it but all that came up was ‘orange’” (74). Tuấn’s migration between Vietnam and Versailles exists only in his dreams until he returns as an adult. Yet when he does

return, as with most immigrants who return to their homeland, neither Vietnam nor America is purely home or not-home.

As such, Tuấn exhibits both a sense of haunting and mourning. As Freud identified, the melancholic, stuck in a state of mourning, cannot identify precisely what they have lost and as such, cannot resolve this loss. Eng and Han relocate mourning in the context of Asian-American experience and understand racial melancholia to be the by-product of the insurmountable losses faced by the immigrant who has given up everything only to lose more. Tuấn's memories of Vietnam are tied to his father, whom he has lost:

A memory of playing hide and seek with his father by Tuấn: He was the seeker and he counted all the way to thirty (the biggest number he knew back then). He found his mother easily; she was hiding in her wardrobe. But his father was nowhere to be found...Sadness was not the feeling that came over him. It was something else entirely, something heavier, darker. He felt as if he had lost something and that he would never get it back (75).

The persistent memories illustrate the two separate spheres of time and space Tuấn inhabits. Viewing Vietnam alongside the present however alters Tuấn's perception. His lost father comes to symbolize everything that was lost to Tuấn in Vietnam—family, community, language, comfort, familiarity, culture—losses too great to mitigate or replicate in America. His losses too are attached to Hương's, as she instills in her children the hope they can reconcile or resolve their collective melancholia.

Hortense Spillers described the Middle Passage in terms of Freud's "oceanic consciousness"—in which the space of the water, where displaced persons are "removed from the indigenous land and culture" and are "not-yet American either" (72), is a "nowhere" space

that “unmakes” the subject (72). The traumatic travel by boat in inhumane conditions, the near-death experienced, the displacement from the homeland, are meeting points in the disparate situations of the Middle Passage and the Vietnamese “boat people.” In both, hundreds of thousands of lives were lost due to the overcrowding, starvation, illness and precarious conditions of water travel. The violence and trauma witnessed by African and Vietnamese subjects—the slave trade, the Vietnam war—fundamentally ruptured the psychic conditions of each of those affected, and the passage to America marks a transitory space resulting in an “unmaking” of the individual, to be “remade” by American standards.

As Spillers identifies, the water is a transformative space in which the subject is stripped of their sense of identity. By drawing on Freud’s concept of oceanic consciousness, Spillers evokes the imagery of water as medium of primordial rebirth. The passage across water—the water drowning or nearly drowning many, holding no sense of time or space, constantly moving and threatening to destroy the boat, seeping into the boat and the bodies—flooded the consciousness of the subjects, washed away what they knew as their realities. Spillers reworks the concept of the oceanic to discuss the dehumanization of African slaves—by stripping them of their names, homeland, language, and sex, the African subject was “unmade” and clustered as a unified, non-human mass.

Additionally, passages across water create undifferentiated time and space. Huong describes the passage to America as having this effect:

The way the water moved, how you never got used to it, about the men on the boat and their constant fighting, about the uneasy sense of knowing only water, knowing that it connected the entire world—one shore to another—yet not knowing when you might see land (24).

The convergence of violent displacement from the home and traumatic travel by water creates an affective event of dissociation. The subject is removed from familiarity and left in a “nowhere” space, making the transition from homeland to America one of unyielding terror. As Hưong describes, the water is both a connecting medium between lands, but is also a suffocating and isolating force.

The losses and trauma faced by the immigrant parent can transfer to the child, as the child of the immigrant parent now faces immense pressure to fulfill the unachieved dreams of the parent. As Abraham and Torok describe, “the phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious...it passes...from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s” (173). Ben is plagued by what appears to be transgenerational, or inherited memories and trauma:

Ben closes his eyes. And again he sees water. He sees it everywhere. His brother is screaming and his mother—she’s screaming as well, holding her stomach. He realizes now that it is him in that stomach, him in that belly (280).

Water ties Ben to both Vietnam and Versailles. The novel ends with Hurricane Katrina—but Ben has already fled America to France. Yet, even in another continent, Ben cannot escape the water:

The water comes rushing at him. At first he tries to swim, but the waves push at him, forcing their way past his lips, down his throat. He tastes the sea and the salt...They felt so real that, for a split second, between the dreaming and the waking, he confused them for memory (271).

Transgenerational memory and trauma contribute to Ben’s multi consciousness. In these recurring nightmares, Ben inhabits his mother’s consciousness and her body, and his own consciousness as a fetus. He awakes unable to tell the difference between reality, the

dreamworld, and memory. The lines between his mother's consciousness, her body, and Ben's consciousness and body are blurred.

Conversely, the water also represents a positive space of unmaking for Ben. Water ties Ben to his sexual awakening, an identity that separates him from the enmeshment with his mother and family:

A kiss. A kiss getting out of the pool, walking toward the edge of the pool. Walking and still up to the waist in water. A kiss in the pool with water at the waist. A kiss in the pool at night with water and hands at the waists, wet hands on the waists, as they stand in the pool, standing to kiss (161).

Upon entering the pool, Ben awakens to the truth of himself and begins forming an identity of his own. The grammar here contributes to the unmaking of Ben—"a" kiss is shared as "they" stand in the pool. Deleuze discusses "a life" as "absolute immanence...complete power, complete bliss...no longer dependent on a Being or submitted to an Act" (27). Ben is unmade in the water, by "a" kiss and comes into his own by breaking free from the specificities and subjectivities of his life. While water is heavily tied to displacement—displacement from his motherland, within his own homeland, and from heteronormative society here, this marks an act of self-fashioning for Ben where he exceeds individual subjectification.

Ben's narrative juxtaposes a series of episodes connected by this disruptive water beginning with the Vietnam War and the subsequent refugee crisis that takes him to New Orleans—both former French colonies—to his first queer experience in the water, to Hurricane Katrina, devastating an already-struggling area. The fragments read together illustrate Ben's multiple jeopardies and also suggest the multiple ways in which Ben is haunted—he is haunted by the traumatic passage and dislocation from Vietnam to America, by the fact of his queerness

in the face of model minority expectations, by the secondary displacement of his family and home by the hurricane. Ben's multiple jeopardies—queer/Asian/refugee—are amplified by the multiple incongruent ways he is interpellated—as Vietnamese boat person/model minority/inscrutable immigrant. The colonial and imperial damage and subsequent dislocation faced by the Vietnamese-American refugee comes into contact with the various American national fictions of Asian identity and reforms the traumatized subject into one of multi consciousness. Yet, as Ben perceives, performs, and inhabits all “realities” of himself simultaneously, he is also able to find a way to circumvent the splintering and fragmentation of multi consciousness.

Ultimately, *Things We Lost to The Water* concludes with Ben's navigation of multi consciousness and the burden of immigrant resolution. He feels disconnected from his mother but obligated to live as someone who is worthy of the sacrifices she's made. When the divide between these two versions of himself is too great, Ben decides to leave America. He moves to France and moves in with his partner:

In America, Ben felt like a foreigner, too, but in a different way. He couldn't have explained it. In New Orleans, he couldn't have explained how he and his family got there. There was a boat, a wind led them this way, and, like pilgrims, they settled. Here, in Paris, there was some choice in the matter. It was not a familial myth—a story told and retold...His hero of a father scarified his life under Communist bullets while his mother played reverse Penelope...His immigration to Paris was a story made of flesh and bones written by himself, and no matter how horrible things turned out, he was the one who wrote it. That was the important part—to be the writer of his own story (255).

Ben's way of mitigating multi consciousness is conceiving of his consciousness as a site of openness. To be the author of his own identity is to be open to its constant reconfiguration. Ben no longer holds himself to the standards of "Asian" and "American." Ben's narrative suggests that the degree of multi consciousness is affected by the degree of displacement—as Ben is the one character who was born in America, and is able to leave on his own terms. While an immigrant again, as Ben notes, he has more agency now—and more agency than his mother did when coming to America.

II. Model Minority Performance: Charles Yu's *Interior Chinatown* (2020)

Judith Butler provides an understanding of the “construction” of bodies as a constitutive constraint that produces both the domain of intelligible bodies and unthinkable, abject, and unlivable bodies (x) and performativity as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names (13). To be “real” is to perform legibly within a society’s symbolic order. Emily Roxworthy builds off Butler’s work on performativity in terms of racial performativity:

Butler herself has emphasized the primacy of the visual realm in racialization, suggesting that racial performativity is a conditioned mode of perceiving visual evidence that spectacularizes the other (12).

As Roxworthy argues, the “American myth of performative citizenship” proclaims that American citizenship is “conferred upon any individual, regardless of race or national origin, based simply on the performance of a codified repertoire of speech acts and embodied acts” but obscures the “unequal enforcement of its privileges based on proximity to whiteness” (13). Roxwell cites the performance of the daily FBI American “round up” of Japanese “enemy aliens” in 1941 and the subsequent performativity of American hyper-filiality by Japanese Americans that followed in response (79-80) as an example.

The history of Japanese internment, alongside the history of immigration laws, racially motivated violence and discrimination, contributes to the hyper-performance of American “citizenry.” Rey Chow outlines fascism’s production and consumption of a glossy surface image, a crude style, for purposes of social identification (24) in the media age:

What is “internalized” in the age of film is the very *projectional* mechanism of projection. If individuals are, to use Althusser’s term, “interpellated,” they are

interpellated not simply as watchers of film but also as film itself. They "know" themselves not only as the subject, the audience, but as the object, the spectacle, the movie (30).

With events such as the internment of Japanese-Americans and the Vietnam War widely mediatized, Asian-Americans come to know themselves as undeniably "enemy." The Vietnam War has been recreated in film over forty-six times by American film studios with East Asian bodies represented without language or consciousness, bodies that are demonized, dehumanized, and annihilated. Jean Baudrillard turns to *Apocalypse Now* (1979) as an "extension of the war," — a "global victory. Cinematographic power equal and superior to that of the industrial and military complexes, equal or superior to that of the Pentagon and of governments" (41). The film's international blockbuster status—along with others of its kind: *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987)—repeat the violence of the war infinitely, and cement representations of Asian people as violent, barbaric, helpless, and disposable.

The representation of female Asian individuals further amplifies the distasteful "spectacles" the female Asian subject comes to identify with in film. Audiences of *Full Metal Jacket* have coined the "me love you long time" scene as one of the most "memorable" and "iconic" parts of the film—with the phrase "me love you long time" remaining in American culture as an insult used against Asian women to indict them as sex-workers and gold or green card "diggers." In the scene, a Vietnamese woman swaying to Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Were Made For Walking" approaches two American soldiers. As she sexually caresses herself, she yells "Me so horny! Me love you long time! Me sucky sucky!" only to be followed by a Vietnamese man who steals the American's camera, performs a series of "kung-fu" moves, and disappears. The dominant U.S. media production of Asian culture degrades Asian subjects as

thieving and money-obsessed, and further casts Asian women in the role of perpetually willing sex-object. The proliferation of the phrase “me love you long time” speaks as a testament to the widespread influence of the film—repeating the sexual violence and degradation Vietnamese women faced indefinitely and inflicting the same violence onto other Asian women. As Kent A. Ono and Vincent N. Pham note, as Asian-Americans do not have much “power and presence” in the media industry, they are not afforded opportunities to represent themselves (2). They cite major cultural milestones such as *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) and *Year of the Dragon* (1985) as containing troubling representations of Asian-Americans, in line with the films previously mentioned above, but also the overall very limited Asian-American presence in mainstream media (6).

Charles Yu’s *Interior Chinatown* (2020) represents this particularism of Asian performativity, occurring at an intersection of model minority myths, immigration exclusionary laws and interment, and mass-culture invisibility or inscrutability. The novel utilizes the narrative structure of a screenplay—it is stylistically stripped down to isolate dialogue, introducing characters, settings, and acts through headings, amplifying the performative aspect of Willis’s life and the text itself. The protagonist Willis Wu is described through his role—“Background Oriental Male” (13) and his attempt to climb up to the role of “Kung Fu Guy” (13). Willis’s comical desire to transgress from “Background Oriental Male” to “Kung Fu Man” articulates the complexity of navigating Asian-American identity when authenticity is denied. Willis’s path is determined—remain background Oriental male or oversimplified yet celebrated “kung fu” master. These two roles are the only ways in which Willis is rendered legible and legitimate as these are the only two roles circulating in American consciousness, produced by American media.

Through the power of media production, an idealized national social order and forms of subjectivity become cemented in the consciousness of the viewers. As Bernard Stiegler explains:

During the passing ninety minutes or so of this pastime, the time of our consciousness will be totally passive within the thrall of those “moving” images that are linked together by noises, sounds, words, voices. Ninety minutes of our life will have passed by outside of our “real” life, but within a life or the lives of people, and events, real or fictive, to which we will have conjoined our time, adopting their events as though they were happening to us as they happened to them (10).

The subject’s consciousness is a passive vessel the film enters, as in Chow’s words, the subject, the audience, the object, and the spectacle conflate. Film gives the individual the possibility of entering another consciousness and another life, but this transgression of media to consciousness is complicated in the context of racialized subjectivity and performativity. Willis’s role as Background Oriental Male is one he’s absorbed and consumed, but also the role he inhabits on and off screen:

You’re so deep in the background, you’re almost out of frame... You make your face into a mask—dead in the eyes. Not a person. Not a real one anyway. A type. Generic. It’s a form of protection. Keep yourself inside this costume, this role. You lay it on a little thicker with the accent, break up your grammar a bit more (85-106).

The descriptions of Willis’s work are increasingly difficult to differentiate from his off-screen life. His role as Background Oriental Male doubles as his on and off-screen reality. Performance permeates all aspects of Willis’s life—his home of Chinatown acting as a perpetual Oriental backdrop, his parents both being Asian-American performers of similarly distasteful roles.

Willis is not trapped between the white and Asian world—he can’t inhabit the white world; he is not permitted to leave Chinatown or to stop performing. *Interior Chinatown* portrays Chinatown as a perpetual setting the inhabitants cannot escape from nor can stop performing:

If a film needed an exotic backdrop...Chinatown could be made to represent itself or any other Chinatown in the world. Even today, it stands in for the ambiguous Asian anywhere—Bonnie Tsui (11).

Chinatown and its inhabitants are rendered inscrutable—an exotic anywhere and nowhere. Willis accentuates the theatrics and performance of Chinatown as it mirrors his own. His homeland is a farce—a reimaging of the lost homelands that caters to both the Asian immigrants and the Oriental fetish of white America.

They...cut us off from our families, our history. So we made it our own place.

Chinatown. A place for preservation and self-preservation...Chinatown and indeed being Chinese is and always has been, from the very beginning, a construction, a performance of features, gestures, cultures, and exoticism (264).

Chinatown simulates what was lost by immigration, becoming a collage of grieving and mourning rituals and performances, a microcosmic homeland. Chinatown performs into being authentic Asian experience as well as fetishized, exoticized, essentialized Asianness. It appears to embody American hybridity, and yet proves to be a poverty trap that appeases aesthetic fetishism. This is how Chinatown survives, like its residents, caught between multiple forms of mimicry—mimicking what was lost, mimicking an already-articulated identity. Furthermore, Willis points to the coding of Asian faces as inscrutable:

All of the housemates realize: it was them. All of them. That was the point. They are all the same. All the same to the people who struck Allen in the head until his eyes swelled

shut. All the same as they filled a large sack with batteries and stones, and hit Allen in the stomach with it until blood came up from his throat. Allen was Wu and Park and Kim and Nakamoto, and they were all Allen. Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam. Whatever (165).

Willis emphasizes the intentional “inscrutability” forced upon Asian-Americans and how this myth permits targeted racial violence to have a much larger target. The violence against Asian-Americans then evidently does not stem merely from anti-Japanese ideals and American patriotism, but larger violent impulses toward Asian-Americans as they’re perceived as perpetual foreigners and enemies of the nation.

As such, Willis’s multi consciousness stems from a combination of his “white” consciousness, his “Asian” body, his “Asian” performance, and the life his performance takes on autonomously:

A performer may be taken in by his own act, convinced at the moment that the impression of reality which he fosters is the one and only reality. In such cases we have a sense in which the performer comes to be his own audience; he comes to be the performer, and observer of the same show—Erving Goffman (40).

The performance of Asian-American identity warps the performer’s “impression of reality”—their consciousness. Their performance no longer has boundaries, the performance is reality as much as it is not. The cognitive splintering of multi consciousness stems from, in part, the severing of the performer from the observer—the performer detaches, becomes autonomous, and the observer remains unable to control the show and unable to tell where it begins or ends. Willis describes sensations of cognitive split: “I’ve got the consciousness of a contemporary American. And the face of a Chinese farmer of five thousand years ago.” (185). His face displaces him in

space and time, as his consciousness has been formed around the idea that his face is one that does not belong in America. Willis is confronted by his own “Asianness” and is unable to reconcile his felt “Americanness” with his undoubtedly Asian face. The novel opens with his resume, tagging himself immediately as “(Asian) Actor” (16). The novel defines an instance of multi consciousness here as a sensation and psychic disruption that occurs when a minority subject has whiteness as default programmed into their consciousness.

Willis points to a discrepancy in what an American face registers as and how this discrepancy creates a dissociation between the body and self in Asian Americans: “We’ve been here two hundred years... Why doesn’t this face register as American?” (252-3). Willis experiences a deep sensation of dissociation as he engages with his own reflection: “This face that feels like a mask, that has never felt quite right on you. That reminds you at odd times, and often after two to four drinks, that you’re Asian. You are Asian! Your brain forgets sometimes. But then your face reminds you” (182). The sensation of wearing a mask for Willis is complex—it is his “Asian” face that feels unnatural. This discrepancy is caused by the unconscious acceptance of whiteness as Americanness, to feel and “think” American contests Willis’s image of himself—to look “Asian” means he can’t truly be American, that he should somehow feel and think differently if he is Asian, or that he should look differently if he is American. His “American” consciousness has internalized Asianness as Otherness, and as such, cannot register his own face as familiar. It is only in his encounter with another—as in Sartre’s model of recognition—that he sees himself through the eyes of white America—that he sees himself as Asian, perpetual foreigner. This disjunct is caused by the incongruity between what the consciousness perceives as a self and what Willis sees in the mirror. His skin, his body, is a home that he cannot inhabit.

Willis contributes to the unpacking of the model minority myth as a form of racism. The model minority myth contributes to the myth of “America” that allows “anyone” to achieve their dreams through individual effort, regardless of who the individual is. Yet, climbing through the rungs of inscrutable Asian to “model minority” does not end with the autonomy of the Asian American subject, a way out of multi consciousness: “Doing well *is* the trap. A different kind, but still a trap. Because you’re still in a show that doesn’t have a role for you” (199). Yu’s characters speak directly to the ongoing racial debate in America—while Willis’s acting career functions as an intricate metaphor for Asian-American performance and impersonation, the characters also participate in racial discourse more directly. For example, Yu makes use of multiple mediums in his novel—the courtroom act is prefaced by a list of anti-Asian laws:

EXHIBIT A

LAWS OF THE UNITED STATES

1859 Oregon’s constitution is revised: no “Chinaman” can own property in the state.

1879 California’s constitution is revised: ownership of land is limited to aliens of “the white race or of African descent”...

1924 U.S. (Federal) Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, limits the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origins quota. It completely prohibits immigration from Asia (237-8).

While the model minority myth functions to promote and maintain the illusion of the American Dream, anti-Asian laws run counter to this narrative. The satiric court scene occurs as Willis stands on trial for “escaping” his role, leading to the following discussion:

That’s because on the one hand you, for obvious reasons, have not been and can never be fully assimilated into mainstream i.e., White America...and on the other hand, neither do

you feel fully justified in claiming solidarity with other historically and currently oppressed groups. That while your community's experience in the United States has included racism on the personal and the institutional levels...that the wrongs committed against your ancestors are incommensurate in magnitude with those committed against Black people in America...Your oppression is second-class (258-9).

Yu's text further complicates Eng and Han's concept of racial melancholia. As they note, the "experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning...In Freud's theory of mourning, one works through and finds closure to these losses by investing in new objects—in the American Dream" (352) and yet, this white American dream remains unreachable, and thus, the immigrant subject remains in mourning—for both what they lost through immigration, and what they can never achieve. Yu adds to this affective structure: feeling equally dislocated from other racialized Americans, as while many racialized groups in America face personal and systemic racism, their experiences of racism are highly specific and different. Willis accentuates the feelings of guilt around expressing his own experiences of oppression, and the erasure of his oppression.

The discourse on Asian American identity and experience persists in the satiric courtroom, with a Kafkaesque scene in which Willis stands beneath a white judge:

Someone who can't be viewed through either lens. Whose case cannot be properly considered by this court, where the rules and assumptions are based on a particular dialectic. Someone whose story will never fit into Black and White. The error in your reasoning is built right into the premise—using the Black experience as the model for the Asian immigrant is necessarily going to lead to this...But the experience of Asians in

America isn't just a scaled-back or dialed-down version of the Black experience. Instead of co-opting someone else's experience or consciousness, he must define his own (260). Willis is locked in a world of "BLACK AND WHITE"—the title of the show that he is a "Background Oriental Male" in, and later a "guest star"—"To be yellow in America. A special guest star, forever the guest" (138). His experience as an Asian American is overlooked, compared, or conflated with Black experience. Yu's highly stylized characterization of Willis reveals the complexity of Asian American life as one that exceeds double consciousness—it cannot be viewed through the white or black lens. The performance of distasteful and unnatural roles—"Background Oriental Male," "Dead Asian Man," "Generic Asian Man Number Three/Delivery Guy" (20)—in order to climb to the model role, the role of white acceptance and acknowledgement, "Kung Fu Guy" (21). And yet, seen through Willis's satiric climb to stardom—"Kung Fu Guy," like the model minority myth, is just: "still playing a part that was handed to you, written for Asian Man" (220).

The conclusion of the novel offers an optimistic afterlife of multi consciousness in moving towards a utopic structure of multiplicity. Willis attempts to escape his role by sneaking "out the back" (200) and reunites with his daughter. Phoebe stars in her own show, a set built in her room of her own making. In the show, her name is Mei Mei, or "little sister":

The country is geographically unique and logically impossible, some amalgam of dynastic China, a Taiwanese village in the olden days (before imperial colonizers!), and some focus-group-tested, aesthetically engineered, perfect mystical U.S. suburb...immigration, acculturation, assimilation... Her friends, her audience...She seems both more resourceful and yet more childlike at the same time—how she's

invented a word, stylized, so that its roles and scenery, characters and rules...all of it fit within one room (206-218).

Phoebe has succeeded in finding a “room of her own”—she has succeeded in incorporating all of the different elements of her multi consciousness into one self, one room. She is American-born, to her, there are multiple spaces, timelines, and voices, but Phoebe is in control of her own show. She is in control of her own self-fashioning and her own self-representation. Multiplicity and simultaneity become her strength, and draw in an audience, who become her friends. Willis is in awe, calling her a “real American girl” (230).

III. Acts of Impersonation—Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* (2015)

Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer* (2015) poses similar questions surrounding improvisation and performance in the context of “becoming” Vietnamese and Asian American. The boyhood of the unnamed narrator is plagued by his status as a biracial Vietnamese-French in war-torn Vietnam. In post-French occupied Vietnam, the narrator’s “bastard” identity is politically charged, as the illegitimate son of a French priest and Vietnamese maid. He continually finds himself alien in both his homeland of Vietnam and his eventual residence in America, and thus the narrator’s progress from youth to maturity is marked by psychic rupture. The narrative underscores the immense impact racial recognition and misrecognition has on identity formation.

As Yu’s narrator in *Chinatown* exploits his ingrained performative behaviours as an Asian-American actor, Nguyen’s unnamed narrator does the same as a North Vietnamese mole in the South Vietnamese army, and later, in the Vietnamese-American community of Los Angeles. Already, Nguyen’s narrator occupies American enemy identity—communist, Vietnamese, immigrant. The opening line to *The Sympathizer* deliberately mirrors Ralph Ellison’s opening to *Invisible Man*:

I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces...I am also a man of two minds. I am not some misunderstood mutant from a comic book or a horror movie...I am simply able to see from both sides (Nguyen 14).

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of our Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and

bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me (Ellison 3).

Nguyen and Ellison converge in their depiction of racial difference as alien, fundamentally nonhuman. Ellison plays with the optical nonimage of invisibility, in which his narrator's social, political and economic marginalization extends to a marginalization even of the visual realm. Ellison's narrator literally and figuratively circumvents the visual plane of colour and troubles race as concept. Both narrators are "invisible"—occupying the space of the "unthought" where totalitarian thoughts race cannot define them. The history of politicized aesthetics is ruptured through the practice of rejecting the visual.

Where Nguyen departs from Ellison is his emphasis on the simultaneous multiplication and splitting of consciousness. Nguyen's narrator, born and raised in Vietnam, is ostracized and violated for his Vietnamese-French identity. Yet, when he arrives in America, he becomes just another "Asian": "half a gook is still a gook" (386). As such, the narrator is both multiplied and divided: he is both French and Vietnamese, he is neither, he is Asian, he is not white, he is Other in all situations. For Lisa Lowe, immigrant "acts" become pluralized, naming "the *acts* of labour, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as politicized cultural work" (9) through which Asian Americans create agency within the state apparatuses of exclusion that seek to negate their claims to "American" identity, rights, and privileges. Through this contradictory insider/outsider status, Asian American practices of self-fashioning and preserving agency emerge in the context of a racial subjugation that simultaneously forces the Asian American subject to doubly adopt practices of non-sovereign self-fashioning.

Tina Chen observes the prominence of practices of "impersonation" in Asian American cultures and literatures. Impersonation in the Asian American context can be thought of as an act

“that requires one to impersonate fundamentally oneself” (Chen xvii). For Chen, the impersonating of an already articulated self is thus the praxis through which Asian Americans can perform themselves into “being” and agency can be claimed (xix). The narrator attempts to dispel Asian-American myths by intervening in major aesthetic productions of Vietnamese people. The middle of the text is dedicated to a series of sections that depict the incomplete and incongruent representations of the Vietnam War and the Vietnamese people in a film called *The Hamlet*, satirizing films like *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*. The narrator quickly realizes that this was “a movie about our country where not a single one of our countrymen had an intelligible word to say” (128). By adapting Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and transposing Africans with Vietnamese, *Apocalypse Now* foregrounds the non-identities of the “other.” *The Sympathizer* confronts this conflation, through the narrator’s attempts at improvising Vietnamese identities into existence. The narrator quickly realizes though that “the wealthy white people of the world. They owned the means of production, and therefore the means of representation” (210). He is not successful in his attempt to rewrite Asian-American performance. The Vietnamese actors he is able to recruit are asked to deform and warp their experiences of war into one of extreme inhuman violence: “He wants us to act natural but we got to act unnatural. We are motherfuckin’ VC. Got it?” (195) What is natural “Vietnamese” to the Americans is obviously unnatural to the Vietnamese actors, and distasteful, but they perform and entertain the white Americans with their “barbarianism” because they are in dire need of the money. As Willis of *Chinatown* explains:

I’m guilty too. Guilty of playing this role. Letting it define me. Internalizing the role so completely I’ve lost track of where reality starts and the performance begins. And letting that define how I see other people (273).

The feeling of complicity is complex, but for many Asian individuals, the performance leads to economic sustenance. To play these distasteful roles, whether on-screen or in daily life, is often a survival necessity.

For Chen, the impersonating of an already articulated self is thus the praxis through which Asian Americans can perform themselves into “being” and agency can be claimed (xix). This collective practice, however, differs in its teleology from a revolutionary praxis. As the narrator comes to learn after this attempt at revolutionizing the Vietnam War in film:

I had been deluded into thinking I would effect change in how we were represented...I had not derailed this behemoth...My task was to ensure that the people scuttling in the background of the film would be real Vietnamese people saying real Vietnamese things dressed in real Vietnamese clothing, right before they died (209).

With an acute awareness for the magnitude of the dominant structures that dictate their “American/non-American” selves, racial performativity does not aim for collective usurping, but rather uses invisibility and inscrutability as methods of possibly attaining or claiming agency in a situation overwhelmingly seeking to negate such acts. Instead, the praxis of impersonation utilizes modes of non-sovereign performance and repetition in the form of mimicry within the context of subjugation, leading to an alternate form of perpetual becoming-“Asian” over “being” an Asian-American subject.

For Bhabha, “mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” it is, as he borrows from Lacan, “a camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs” (131). The mimic man has had “the unity of a man’s being through which he extends his sovereignty” shattered (129). Bhabha’s colonial “mimic man” mimes away his original personhood, whereas Chen argues for a distinction between “person” and “im-

personation” for the Asian immigrant. These contending notions of the colonized or immigrant subject both underscore an element of performance in which the performer “transforms” themselves; for Bhabha the colonial subject never achieves perfect mimicry and remains unaware of the eternal slippage between colonized and colonizer, but for Chen the immigrant subject internalizes roles that are “distasteful and unnatural, but are perceived by others to be somehow representative of one’s identity” (4) with the awareness of doing so. Despite differing outcomes, mimicry and impersonation as performances bridge ideology and practice, as it is via these performances that the ingestion of racist, nationalist, and colonialist ideology occurs, leading to the emergence of practices of racial and political self-fashioning.

As Lisa Lowe argues, “the subject that emerges out of Asian American cultural forms is one in excess of and in contradiction with the subjectivities proposed by national modern and postmodern modes of aesthetic representation” (32). The nationalist cultural practices that produce identity in a context of colonialism, war, and immigration enforce assemblages of relationality that cannot articulate more than the “partial presences” that Bhabha observed. Non-sovereignty becomes a mode of relinquishing subjectivity for processes of assemblage that rupture ways of “being” for ways of “becoming.” In other words, the practice of improvising different “selves” acknowledges the impossibility of being a completely articulated subject and opts instead for the collaboration of incongruences that communicate a form of transient subjectivity, produced by the conditions that seek to deny personhood.

Lowe argues that the “question of aesthetic representation is always also a debate about political representation” (4). *The Sympathizer* is fragmented in a series of confessions written by the presently captive narrator, presenting the “sins” of his life in a series of vignettes. Common to these vignettes is Nguyen’s resistance of the aesthetic and political representational infidelity

his narrator faces as “foreigner” in both his own homeland and when he flees to America, forcing him, and others he observes, into improvised performances of personhood. Through the recitation of Catholic catechism, “The sin that we inherit from our first parents is called Original Sin” (207), the narrator performs the extent to which he has internalized his “sinful” origins as they have come to embody him. “A dog and a bitch, that’s natural, he said. But him – and here he turned scornful eyes and finger on me—he’s like what happens when a cat and a dog do that...I stood there as if on a boat drifting away from the shore where they all waited, seeing myself through the eyes of others as a creature neither dog nor cat neither human nor animal” (207). Original Sin is recontextualized within the narrator’s mixed-race identity, highlighting his “doubled” sin. This initial representation of his identity as unable to “fit” into any category of his knowledge thematizes the limits of the nationalist qualifier of “Vietnamese.” The narrator is disassociated from his subjecthood, manifesting in his ability to camouflage or mask himself but also his inability to “stop” performing.

The Sympathizer, as suggested by the title, proposes “sympathy” as a practice of survival via performative affect. The narrator finds himself in a series of Vietnamese communities in which he must improvise relationality and continue processes of reproducing a “self” or assemblage of selves. He must overperform his “Vietnameseness” to compensate for his mixed-race identity and overperform is “Asianness” more broadly to his American audiences:

We ate their food, watched their movies, we observed their lives and psyche via television and in everyday contact, we learned their language, we absorbed their subtle cues, we laughed at their jokes, even when made at our expense, we humbly accepted their condescension, we eavesdropped on their conversations in supermarkets and the dentist’s office, and we protested them by not speaking our own language in their

presence, which unnerved them. We were the greatest anthropologists ever of the American people, which the American people never knew because our field notes were written in our own language in letters and postcards dispatched to our countries of origin, where our relatives read our reports with hilarity, confusion, and awe. Although the Congressman was joking, we probably did know white people better than they knew themselves, and we certainly knew white people better than they ever knew us. This sometimes led us to doubting ourselves, a state of constant self-guessing, of checking our images in the mirror and wondering if that was really who we were, if that was how white people saw us. But for all we thought we knew about them, there were some things we knew we did not know even after many years of forced and voluntary intimacy, including the art of making cranberry sauce, the proper way of throwing a football, and the secret customs of secret societies, like college fraternities, which seemed to recruit only those who would have been eligible for the Hitler Youth (295).

The narrator describes his war as “psychological”—his mission was to integrate himself into American life as much as possible, but the mission is ironically impossible. He performs the “model minority” role for the Americans —“I was doing my best imitation of a Third World child on one of those milk cartons passed around elementary schools” (64) he describes, and is further called out by a Japanese-American for his “inscrutable Oriental smile, sitting there nodding and wrinkling your brow sympathetically” (75). While his spying duties continue in America, the impersonation has become so seamless that the narrator sinks further into subjectlessness.

Becoming aware of his condition, the narrator recalibrates himself from faithful Asian American subject to “revolutionary,” problematizing the premise of the “ideal Orient” as infidel

translation of Asian subjectivity. He challenges *The Hamlet's* "Auteur" by "writ[ing] another screenplay in the margins" (130)—the only space he is allotted. The title itself underscores the irony of *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness*, where Kurtz mirrors Shakespeare's Hamlet in grappling with morality, sanity and the horrors of war, and furthermore, a lack of perspective. The narrator fails to effect much change, however, and the film's production progresses. On a micropolitical scale, the performances of "Americanness" and "Asianness" mirror the marcopolitical context of which they emerge. In the final scene of *The Hamlet*, one of the surviving American heroes is shot by a Vietnamese brothel owner—"The whore! The whore!" he whispers nearing death. Parodying *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator intervenes Kurtz's final declaration, "The horror! The horror!" by undermining Kurtz's horror at life, war, and/or what comes after it. "The whore" instead emblemizes the sexual degradation of Asian women and dismisses the horror of the war.

As a character whose entire being is premised on improvisation, a "bastard" with no name and thus no fixed identity confining or relating him to others, he epitomizes the precarious condition of the immigrant, the colonized, the bastardized. With a "fake cemetery with its fake tomb" for his mother, the narrator improvises the ceremony he did not get to have for her (180). "The eradication of this creation, in its wantonness and its whimsy, hurt me with expected severity. I had to pay my last respects to my mother..." (180). He notes it was a "fitting grave for a woman who was never more than an extra to anyone but me" (154). The image of the fake tombstone on a movie set foregrounds the central condition of both colonized and immigrant subject—perpetual improvisation as mode of preserving agency or assembling "a" self. To intervene in blockbuster Vietnam films like *Apocalypse Now*, the narrator relocates the war back in the realm of the "real" by memorializing the lives lost as actualized humans, not mere extras.

By granting his mother a funeral and renarrating her voice both during the ceremony and throughout the novel, the narrator overturns his mother's colonial silence. The narrator draws attention to the subhuman status Asians occupy in the mind of the invading Americans, the colonizing French, and through improvisation reinstates a full-fledged humanity to those brutally denied it.

Throughout his confession, the narrator continues to identify himself with the southern soldiers in a collective "we" or "us," to which he says: "My weakness for sympathizing with others has much to do with my status as a bastard...Many bastards behave like bastards, and I credit my gentle mother with teaching me the idea that blurring the lines between us and them can be a worthy behaviour" (36). Ultimately, spying and contradictorily, sympathizing, provide the models by which the narrator comes to perform discontinuous selves to create continuity between the subject and the nation that has so long been denied to him. Even within his own Vietnamese community, the narrator feels dissociated. His mixed-race identity is the reason he was chosen for the role—because he is a perpetual outsider, he is also a keen observer. Yet, the narrator's yearning for community bleeds into his performance—he narrator goes as far as to juxtapose the General's wife in the family he spies on with his mother: "Madame's pho had dissolved me and transported me back in time to my mother's household...Madame's pho harkened back to the warmth of my mother's kitchen" (135). It is Madame, then, who in a playful argument asks, "Whose side are you on?" (136), echoing the voice of the narrator's dead mother who haunts the texts as a voice of conscience. The narrator continues:

The Auteur's punch had unnerved me, knocked me out of character. Too much freedom of the press is unhealthy for a democracy, I declared. While I did not believe this, my character, the good captain, did, and as the actor playing this role I had to sympathize

with this man. But most actors spend more time with their masks off than on, whereas in my case it was the reverse. No surprise, then, that sometimes I dreamed of trying to pull a mask off my face, only to realize that the mask was my face” (136).

The passage not only reproduces sympathy as a practice of impersonation, but also directly calls attention to the narrator as permanent performer. The Madame is at once his mother and the enemy’s wife, as the narrator is both revealing the vulnerability of a son to her while maintaining the performance of an impersonator. The metaphor of the mask focuses our attention back to Bhabha’s notion of the mimic man, in which there is no face behind it. Likewise with the narrator, his mask and face have become one in the same—there is no end to his performance, and thus he is endlessly improvising “a” self, one who is inscrutable and identity-less.

When the narrator is eventually captured, he is isolated in a white room where he is deprived of sleep through light, blindfolded, earmuffed, gagged, and bound to a mattress (340). Isolation in white rooms recurs throughout the text as well as Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*. Nguyen’s narrator initially puns on the white room: “Above me the ceiling was white. My sheets, white. My hospital gown, white. I must be fine if everything was all white but I was not. I hated white rooms” (215) playing with alright/all white and the stereotyped “Asian” pronunciation of “right.” Whiteness comes to represent an erasure of consciousness and identity. In Ellison’s text the narrator survives an explosion but wakes up in a psych ward: “My mind was blank, as though I had just begun to live” (233)...“Their meanings were lost in the vast whiteness in which I myself was lost” (238). In Nguyen, the narrative shifts from first-person to third as the narrator begins to refer to himself as “the prisoner.” In a torture scene where the narrator is subjected to an examination room with “hundreds of light bulbs” (340), reminiscent of *Invisible Man* as the “prisoner” is simultaneously invisible and illuminated. The interrogation

begins as a series of simple questions: Who are you? What are you? What is your name? (341).

The narrator's responses reveal the degree to which he has been robbed of an identity by his lifelong subjugation and status as "foreigner" and "bastard." He finds himself unable to form any answer to the questions posed, running instead through a series of multiple masks he wears:

Didn't they know who he was by now? He was the man with the plan, the spy with the eye, the mole in the hole, but his tongue had inflated itself to fill his entire mouth...I'll tell you who I am...I am the gook being cooked. And if you say I am only *half* a gook? Well, in the orders of that blonde-haired major tasked with counting the communist dead after the battle...half a gook is still a gook (341).

Had he forgotten his name? No, impossible! He had given himself his American name.

As for his native name, his mother, the only one who understood him had given it to him, his father no help, his father who never called him son or by his name...No, he could never forget his name, and when at last it came to him, he freed his tongue from its gummy bed and said it aloud (342).

The narrator's name is never revealed, and thus the "side" he chooses, if he chooses at all, remains unknown. The commissar is displeased with his answer, stating that even with "all the light in the world" the narrator is "fundamentally blind" (342). Through a lifelong practice of improvisation, and now in isolation, the narrator struggles to assemble an identity that is "his."

He has no community to camouflage himself in. The logic of identity equates a subject with name, race, nationality—and yet the narrator cannot answer any of the commissar's questions.

The insistence on the narrator's simultaneous excess and lack of personhood underscores the link between nationalism, in contexts of the Vietnam War, French colonization, and American

immigration, and demands for singular identities. The non-identified individual cannot be registered as fully human without picking sides.

The narrator's performance of Vietnamese, Vietnamese American, spy, son, and revolutionary in effect produces its slippage between multiple assembled "lives" and resists totalization. *The Sympathizer* draws attention to the multiple intersecting, coexisting contradictions and assemblages that compose every identity formation—race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, class—that are funneled into enforced uniformity in the contexts of colonialism, immigration, and war. If one of the aims of *The Sympathizer* is a literary representation of improvised identities in the context of identity policing, mobilizing impersonation, mimesis, and sympathy as modes of engagement between "a" self and the subject to which the self should be, Nguyen's text prevails. However, *The Sympathizer* refuses a narrative of reconciliation that resolves the conditions of differentiation the narrator is subjected to.

The final scenes of the novel reveal the answers to the narrator's reeducation: "The answer is nothing! Nothing, nothing, *nothing!*" (370) The narrator's continual efforts to become "something" amassed in the turmoil that plagued his life. As the irony of "a revolution fought for independence and freedom" making "those things *worth less than* nothing" dawns on him, he too realizes the significance of "nothing." He is "nothing," there is "nothing" behind his masks, and so the narrative shifts once more to a pluralized "we" —"We had been through so much, me and myself" (376). Like Fred Moten questioning "blackness and nothingness," the narrator comes to a similar interrogation of the factors that produce that "nothingness." In one last move, in the face of "nothingness," the narrator doubles himself. *The Sympathizer* returns then to the

contradictions of lived social and political experience as produced by racism, colonialism, and war as a sum of double or nothing.

IV: Conclusion—Diasporic Multiplicity

Eric Nguyen's *Things We Lost to the Water* (2021), Charles Yu's *Interior Chinatown* (2020), and Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015) collectively discuss transgenerational haunting, distasteful performance, and the splintering effects of dislocation, and move from discussions of double consciousness into multi. The three novels are narratives of immigration and assimilation and the effects of that movement and process on the immigrant subject's consciousness. Diaspora is discussed as a structure of multiplicity, one that gets funnelled into a singular narrative of immigrant/refugee to model minority, highlighting the United States as central to the transformation from rags to riches.

Charles Yu and Viet Thanh Nguyen use satire to explore the limited presence Asian-Americans have in mass-media, and the lasting impacts of the few roles they are allowed to occupy. Yu illustrates the double consciousness of Willis who simultaneously understands the distastefulness of the roles he performs yet desires to continue to perform and conform to them in the hope of assimilation and acceptance. Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* satirizes the Asian-American stereotype of the double agent through a spy narrative in which the unnamed narrator arrives in America as a refugee, and even while participating in a production of a Vietnam War film titled "The Hamlet," satirizing films like *Apocalypse Now* (2001) and *Platoon* (1986), is unsuccessful in being able to write an authentic Vietnamese experience of the war into the film.

All three novels move towards discussions of multi consciousness in thinking through the multiplicity of the experience of diaspora that gets funneled into such a singular narrative of "Asianness" portrayed in mass-media, and the psychic splintering this creates. The sensation of being pulled across time and space—of inhabiting difference selves across different timelines and geographies, of always being conscious of multiple times, tongues, and spaces at once, of

attempting to cut ties with the home country to become the “good refugee” or the idealized minority. The novels move towards the more liberating possibilities of multi consciousness in discussing the children of immigrants. Willis’s daughter Phoebe stars on a show of her own making, which features a set that is an amalgamation of her differing ethnic and cultural identities. Phoebe is the creator of her own content, and in doing so, is also the force behind her own self-representation and self-fashioning. She embraces the multiplicity of diaspora in her multi consciousness. In Eric Nguyen’s *Things We Lost to the Water*, Ben, the son of Vietnamese refugee, struggles under the weight of his Vietnamese and American identities, and eventually moves to France to forge his own path and life. In doing so and in creating that distance, he is able to see the connections between all of his homes and his selves—the image and resonances of water, the converging histories that connect Vietnam, Versailles New Orleans, and France. Nguyen’s novel is multi-layered and multi-voiced as the family saga follows Ben’s mother Hương and his older brother Tuấn, both of whom were born in Vietnam, unlike Ben. The three family members illustrate degrees of separation and degrees of multi consciousness in their proximities to Vietnameseness, Americanness, Asian-Americanness.

Chapter 3: Fragmented Souls, Spirits and Ghosts in Indigenous-American Fiction

In previous chapters, the effects of the Middle Passage and refugee relocation/immigration on consciousness were explored in the context of multi consciousness. As we move onto an exploration of Indigenous-American literature and multi consciousness, the effects of physical dislocation (from the land and from the family/community) and systemic erasure will be explored. The discussion moves from thinking through Indigenous double consciousness, in which Indigenous individuals negotiate between their own ways of being in the world (via language, culture, spiritual beliefs) and the dominant culture imposed by colonial powers, resulting in language loss, mind/body disconnection, loss of tradition, and the erasure of traditional knowledge and practices, to examining the ways multi consciousness is represented in Indigenous-American texts to create a nexus of interconnected consciousnesses (spiritual, mythical, communal, individual, Native, white, merged).

Shalene Jobin discusses Indigenous double consciousness as a direct result of residential schools:

Residential school policy was envisioned by the state as a three-part process of separation, resocialization, and assimilation. First, the state-sanctioned view of Indigenous peoples as “savage” and backward justified the removal of children from their homes and communities. Second, a strict curriculum and regimented program were created with the intent of resocializing children—teaching them to feel ashamed of their culture and to strive instead to be whites. Third, policies were developed to assimilate certain graduates into the non-Indigenous world through enfranchisement, whereby the person would cease to be an Indian in the eyes of the government or society.

In short, residential schools aimed to reshape not only the behaviour of Indigenous people but their very perception of the world and patterns of thought. The goal was to produce subjects so thoroughly alienated from their original language and society that the society would eventually cease to exist... This system created a people who ceased to be 'actional' agents of their own societies, causing them to behave as the non-Indigenous 'other' and mimic non-Indigenous ways of being in order to seek colonial recognition (45).

Jobin provides an understanding of the effects of the enforced displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land and homes and the displacement of their children from their families and communities. Their spirituality, language, and knowledge had all been rewritten. Jobin explains this "mental disconnection" as having created a "false consciousness" in the Indigenous children—one that claimed their Indigenous identity was wrong and shameful (50). This false consciousness carries on through generations and perpetuates further feelings of dissociation, mental disconnect, and shame. Jobin asserts that the creation of a collective narrative memory via storytelling functions to combat the effects of double consciousness by preserving memory, experience, and Indigenous ways of being in and relating to the world, family, and community (52). Winfried Siemerling also points to the metaphor of the "New World" as a structure of doubleness that "articulates the contradictory mode by which the 'new' surfaces first through the structures of the 'old'" (12). The world is rewritten and reinvented by colonialism, and as such, the Native peoples of the land are left with two differing versions of reality. Siemerling gives the example of the doubled temporality introduced upon the imposition of Christianity, beginning with the Fall (86). Siemerling then provides a reading of King's ideas on Native American literature through the lens of double consciousness, highlighting King's understanding of the

“two literatures that merge within the novel” of the Native American yet the “merging is not a complete synthesis. It is a piecemeal affair” (King qtd. in Siemerling 75).

Siemerling also notes though that the “process of drawing on both Native oral and non-Native and later Native written traditions makes for an intertextuality and interdiscursivity” that is “multi-voiced” (73). These multiple voices are driven by the “aspect of the orality of creation stories” that offers “patterns of knowledge and temporality that are at odds with those of modernity; it maintains another consciousness at work *at the same time* and *within*” (76). A common thread amongst the Indigenous-American texts examined in this chapter is the use of multiple narrators, often originating from oral mythology, that tell stories of balance and creationism alongside the protagonists’ own narration of navigating the white world. Siemerling converges with King in a discussion of the significance of a character like Betonie in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977). Betonie, a mixblooded healer, creates ceremonies that draw upon aspects of both the Native and white world. Betonie represents this “piecemeal affair” as he is able to produce a third consciousness that merges the two differing realities, while still being a “product of both worlds” (77). Siemerling also discusses Thomas King’s works as calling for a “multiple cultural ‘literacy’”—King’s use of “hyperliteracy references” to Native oral and written traditions, American and Canadian literary traditions, and traditions of popular culture (85). Siemerling underscores too the trickster figure as one who transverses through “multiple time and ontological levels,” a figure who can bring forth dimensions from one consciousness into another (89).

I. The Distance Between “I” and “Myself”—James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974)

James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974) was published at the apex of the literary Native American Renaissance of the late 60s-70s. Suzanne Everts Lundquist identifies three forms of this renaissance: the reclamation of Native heritage by Native authors through their own literary expressions, finding and revaluating early literary works by Native authors, and anthologizing and translating traditional artistic expressions—myths, prayers, ceremonies, rituals, love songs, and oratory (38). The success of N. Scott Momaday’s 1969 Pulitzer winning *House Made of Dawn* allowed for a more accessible market for Native authors, and as such, a rush of works ready to establish their own literary tradition within the American publishing market emerged. Literary expression provided one way of memorializing what had been lost, preserving what remains, and recording the present moment.

Representation of Native life and identity was reclaimed by Native writers, and problems surrounding how to represent the condition of Native-Americanness surfaced. Generations of colonial trauma, displacement, erasure, and violence left Native Americans in an internal and physical liminal space—with their homes forcibly taken, and thus communities and families dispersed and broken up, and residential schools aiming to erase tradition, culture, and language, Native Americans were denied their own sense of identity. American identity remained out of reach, as it has for most marginalized individuals, and Native individuals expressed an ambivalence around American or hybrid American identity.

Welch’s novel presents a detached narrative of a nameless protagonist, a young Native-American man living on a reservation in Montana. The narrative, which straddles the line between poetry and prose, exposes the profound erasure of Indigenous identity—manifested in the narrator’s namelessness itself. The narrator experiences a deep fragmentation of self and

consciousness, alienation and isolation from his culture and community, and a despair that arises from the disconnect he feels between himself and everything around him—the world, his body, his family. The nameless narrator initially appears to operate in a state of non-consciousness—his actions are automatic, lacking in perception and emotion. This differs from an unconscious state where the subject is unaware but occupies a place in between unconscious and conscious. The narrator is awake and aware but has no sense of identity and no connection to his body or the world around him. He spectrally haunts his own body and observes its actions.

The nameless protagonist is of the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes and embodies a deep ambivalence surrounding his identity. Set on a reservation in Montana in the 1960s, the narrative is told in first-person episodic fragments. The narrator never reveals his name, and speaks about his life from a distant position:

The country had created a distance as deep as it was empty, and the people accepted and treated each other with distance.

But the distance I felt came not from country or people; it came from within me. I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon (8).

The narrator's description highlights his own internal experience of detachment and distance and the larger problematic of the permeation of distance throughout the land. The "country" the narrator describes is multiple. The first part of the quote casts blame on the external land and America as a country in their diligence in creating distance amongst its peoples. The land on the reservation is barren—a dried up river, dried grass, with very few remaining people. American policy, law, and culture segregated its Native population onto reservations, and the communities on the reservation in Montana maintained distances between the Blackfeet and Gros Ventres. The distances created by external and internal factors are accepted by all and practiced.

However, the narrator notes that the distance he feels is also individual—a distance between “I” and “myself.” The comparison of the hawk to the moon emphasizes the unbridgeable gap the narrator experiences between “I” and “myself”—the voice of “I” speaking, and the body of “myself.” He continues on to describe himself as having “no particular feelings” toward his mother, grandmother, and the girl who had lived with him (8). The narrator has no intimate feelings with his family, nor intimate knowledge even of himself. The novel begins with a deep existential dislocation.

As the narrator is unable to feel anything but distance, he exhibits a unique form of ambivalence. Instead of being pulled heavily toward two or more opposing ideas or feelings, the narrator feels equally apathetic towards everything, and as such, cannot come to any decisions regarding who he is or how he wants to live in the world. As Paula Gunn Allen notes, alienation is a major theme in contemporary Native American literature, which differs from traditional Native American literatures. Allen explains that in traditional literature, there is a thrust towards “wholeness” and “unification” because “relationship is a major tribal value” (3). In contemporary Native American literature, the tribe often no longer exists in its usual capacity, but there is also no other community that replaces the original tribe. For Allen, the experience of being “an Indian who is not an Indian,” those who are “a bit of both worlds...consciousness of this makes them seem alien to Indians, while making them feel alien among whites” (5) creates this deep internal divide. Allen emphasizes the deep isolation that can arise from cultural hybridity, how being conscious of one’s self as neither this nor that can contribute to feelings of dissociation from both one’s native culture and the dominant culture. Allen also identifies the affective aspects of alienation: “isolation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, lowered self-esteem, and self-estrangement, accompanied by a pervasive anxiety, a kind of

hopelessness, and sense of victimization” (4). Welch’s nameless narrator embodies this crisis as the novel unfolds as a series of disconnected stories of wandering through an internal fog towards an unknown fate or goal.

Cheryl Walker points out that the Western concept of a nation was quite different from a Native American sense of nation. For the West, the nation was a “political entity, with geographical dimensions and laws, and a people, whose ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ had to be identified and argued, even racially codified” (4). In Indian traditions, as Walker describes, the nation “originally meant simply the people and the environment they inhabited” (4-5). There is a common ground in the emphasis on “land, traditions, people, stories” (Walker 5). The narrator finds himself unable to fully inhabit either nation, however. He is not “correctly” racially codified in the dominant culture of the West, nor does he have intimate nor extensive knowledge of the traditions, people, and stories that bind his Indigenous community. His alienation from Western society is exemplified in his description of his experience of having lived in Tacoma, working in a rehabilitation clinic:

They liked me because I was smarter than practically anybody they had ever seen. That’s what they said and I believed them. It took a nurse who hated Indians to tell me the truth, that they needed a grant to build another wing and I was to be the first of the male Indians they needed to employ in order to get the grant (22).

When confronted with the ulterior motive for his hire, the narrator returns to the reservation and continues to wander between both spaces. He is objectified by the white world, turned into a token political gesture for economical gain. The narrator’s initial perception of being valued for his intelligence and his capabilities is fulfilling—he feels singled out in a remarkable way instead of singled out by virtue of his race. The revelation by the nurse however exposes the praise and

recognition as not genuine appreciation but as a means to secure financial resources for the institution. The narrator realizes he has been exploited and tokenized and is caught between the initial praise by his non-Indigenous community and the reality of tokenization.

Audra Simpson discusses a politics of refusal—in opposition to recognition (being recognized by the Other or recognizing them)—by Indigenous groups in North America. Refusal is a practice in which the “gifts of American and Canadian citizenship” are refused, a refusal to stop being themselves (12). Simpson highlights the turn then to issues around membership within Indigenous communities: “Who are we? Who shall we be for the future? Who belongs here, and why do they belong here?” (12). The conditions of membership determine “the conditions of belonging” and render some unknowable and illegitimate (13). The narrator is missing some of the crucial information that responds to questions of legitimacy and this excludes him from the possibility of membership within his Indigenous community. He is rendered “unknowable” and becomes unknowable even to himself. The web of kinship that ties him to his tribe is tangled:

My grandmother was not yet twenty when she became a widow...But because she was the widow of Standing Bear, a great leader, the young men of the tribe shied away from her, and the women treated her as an outcast...They must have laughed at her willowy body's bareness, for she had produced no children (33).

His grandmother eventually does bear a child, the narrator's mother, after living with a “half-white drifter named Doagie” (33) although it was “questioned whether Doagie was her real father or not” (33). The narrator and his family remain quite isolated on their cattle ranch. His mother seeks community outside the reservation in becoming a Catholic (10).

As with some of the other displaced characters of examined, the narrator's frustration in his inability to connect with anyone builds up to a violent outburst. A white woman, Marlene,

comes to his aid after he is thrown out of a bar and beaten by the Indian men there. After a sexual encounter with Marlene, the narrator reaches a point of ambivalence once again. At first he feels a kind of “pity...Her naked body seemed so vulnerable, so innocent, that I wanted to cover her with my own” (94). He then slaps her and attempts to suffocate her.

I was staring at the sobbing woman with the same lack of emotion, the same curiosity, as though I were watching a bug floating motionless down an irrigation ditch, not yet dead but having decided upon death (95).

Compassion and hatred pull the narrator apart. Unable to feel one way or the other, and feeling too much altogether, he dissociates from his reality. He views her as inconsequential—a bug dying in a ditch. There is a mixture of affection and shame that he was rescued by a white woman, after beaten by people in his own community. His violent outburst does not resolve the conflict within him. The power he gains from exerting his physical strength over Marlene does not absolve the shame he feels, nor does it jar him from his detachment from the world.

The narrator leaves Marlene alive and leaves town once again. He expresses the desire to escape the confines of his “self” and annihilate his existence altogether:

I had had enough of myself. I wanted to lose myself, to ditch these clothes, to outrun this burning sun, to stand beneath the clouds and have my shadow erased, myself along with it...I walked down the street...There were no mirrors anywhere (96).

The hatred for Marlene reveals the inner hatred for himself. The narrator wants to annihilate himself, to cease to exist and remove any mark he’s made on the world. He is unable to annihilate Marlene, whom he thought was the source of the shame, and he realizes that even doing so would not free him. The narrator feels a deep dissatisfaction with his current state of being. He wants to become invisible—to shed his exteriority, to move out of the sun and into the

shadows. Unable to identify himself, he sees no mirrors, no reflection of himself, anywhere. He haunts and wanders like a ghost.

The novel has four parts with numerous sections in each, but it becomes apparent there is a lack of continuity between the sections. Each is a fragment and pertains to a different timeline, a different plotline. The novel itself is the narrator's multi consciousness—travelling between timelines and selves. In some of the sections, the narrator's wanderings are driven by the goal of retrieving an electric razor and gun from the Cree woman he lived with, whom he states he has no particular feelings for (10). While sitting in a bar he meets a man from New York which he calls "airplane man" as the man told a story of tearing up his airplane tickets (38). The shift in tone in these fragments is noteworthy as it takes on a more absurdist aesthetic. Andrew Horton describes Welch's narrator as a human trickster figure in the novel, as he is a "humorous element of disorder" (132). The trickster figure transgresses boundaries, polarities and extremes and acts as a guide and mediator between them. The genre of the novel switches from a more realist mode to an absurdist text as the narrator ushers us through a nonsensical journey with the airplane man. These sections of the novel read as though they exist in an alternate reality the narrator is perceiving. The first conversation he has with the man is about fish. In one of the narrator's opening descriptions of Montana, particularly the reservation, he insists there are no fish in the river and have not been for years. The airplane man insists however that there are plenty of fish (39). The conversation continues to spiral out as the waitress and two other men join the airplane man and the narrator. Multiple voices have multiple conversations but no one is listening to one another or responding:

'I wouldn't be from Seattle for all the rice in China.' She counted some coins on her tray.

'Now Portland might be different—they've got roses there.'

‘My mother raises morning glories,’ I said.

‘Los Angeles?’...

‘Our cat smothered my baby sister. He lay on her face one night and she couldn’t breathe’ (41).

Nonsensical conversations continue to swirl. The narrator falls asleep dreaming of “ghosts of the night before” where the woman’s body is conflated with that of the fish, the airplane man rolls around a corral like a barn animal (43). The narrator then finds himself roped into the airplane man’s plan to drive to Calgary so he can hide from the F.B.I, yet the reasons are unknown other than he “took something that wasn’t exactly” his (73). The narrator is forced to carry a large purple teddy bear down the street as they head off (74). The airplane man says it is for his daughter who has a birthmark on her face (74) which is how the deceased (possibly twin) sister of the barmaid, who died via cat, is described (41). The airplane man then appears to be buying gifts for a doppelgänger and a ghost. The narrator is excited by the possibility of going to Canada and becoming “somebody else” (79), yet the airplane man gets arrested and disappears from his life (91).

The novel traverses the narrator’s multiple timelines—his empty and desolate present, the absurdist dream-like liminal space with the airplane man, and his traumatic past. In the fragments that return to the past, it becomes clear the narrator himself is haunted by the ghost of his deceased brother. What’s interesting about the narrator’s return to the past is that he inhabits his child body and consciousness, but also remains connected to his adult consciousness. He feels the pain of the incident, in addition to the knowledge he has of the future. Certain images or affects act as springboards for the narrator to jump into the past, for example, when the airplane man leaves the narrator in front of a Randolph Scott poster, he is immediately transported back:

“The twenty years slipped away and I was a kid again, Mose at my side” (80). The only wholeness and comfort the narrator appears to describe is in memories of his childhood with Mose. The narrator is Mose’s double—he sees Mose as his mirror and his guide:

Its shelves held memories of a childhood, two childhoods, two brothers, one now dead, the other servant to a memory of death (33).

The narrator’s childhood splits and becomes two—one lived with Mose, the other lived alone. One child becomes an adult, and the other does not. As such, the narrator describes himself as a “servant to a memory of death”—he is ruptured by Mose’s death and is left wandering without an understanding of who he is. Mose’s death haunts him and marks the death of his own identity. He meets no other figure he identifies with, and as such, there is no escaping the internal alienation he feels. Instead, the narrator describes the “helplessness of being in a world of stalking white men. But those Indians down at Gable’s were no bargain either. I was a stranger to both and both had beaten me” (92). Wandering back and forth between the “white” and “Indian” worlds, the narrator is confined, yet his consciousness of both worlds makes him an obvious outsider and a target. He disrupts the unspoken and ineffable fabric of both groups—he cannot mesh, and as such he is expelled to the outer limits of his confinement.

Mose dies when the narrator is twelve, and now at thirty-two he still feels locked in that adolescent space of identity formation. Mose is the only other person he knew of who occupied the same space of unbelonging. What’s interesting about the narrator’s descriptions of being transported into the memories. The narrator is not simply remembering but undergoes a process more akin to Toni Morrison’s concept of rememory. Morrison’s rememory implies a more layered experience than remembering. To remember is to voluntarily or involuntarily recall, or bring back into the present mind, a segment from the past. Rememory entails a process that is

collective, involuntary, and transporative. Morrison's description of rememory, as it is experienced by escaped slave Sethe, is a reexperiencing of the past—it is a haunting. Some people, places, and events hold weight in the present—Sethe suggests they exist outside of her mind and in the world, spiritually, even if they have lost their physical presences. The traumatic memories are fossilized in time, circulating around and haunting the sites of trauma, including the minds and bodies of those who have been traumatized. As such, rememory permits the individual to perceive multiple timelines and realities simultaneously—the present, the past, the individual and the collective.

Welch's narrator describes the liminal space of evening as being: "The time of day your eyes, ears, nose become confused, all become one gray blur in the brain, so you step outside your body and watch the movie of a scene you have seen before" (106-7). When the narrator describes the moment of his brother's death, he is actively participating in the memory. His horse riding in the present, "I cut back and forth behind the herd...a hawk circling above" occurs while at the same time he is psychically riding a different route in the past, "We pushed them through the first gate, up the incline and onto the highway" (107). The narrator experiences the past and present through a removed and omniscient third presence, as a spectre. He is removed from the past and the present, forced to watch the events unfold before him, simultaneously. Yet he actively participates in both—he observes his body riding the horse in two different timelines. He sees the memories through a "prism of tears"—the "futile lurch of the car as the break lights popped" (108). The narrator inhabits the past with his consciousness of the present. The way a prism disperses light, being transported back into the past resurfaces various nuances and layers. The narrator sees not just the lurch of the car now but its futility, further amplifying his feelings of powerlessness that are mirrored to him in his surrounding society.

The narrator is at war with these involuntary visits to the past. As such, his dissociation carries into the present, numbing himself to the pain. It is only when the narrator develops a relationship with Yellow Calf that he learns to embrace the multiplicity of his consciousness. Yellow Calf is a blind man who lives isolated on the reservation and goes by many names (51). The narrator notes that when the man walks his feet move “sideways as well as forward” and notes that his calendar still says December 1936 (52), suggesting his inhabitancy of multiple timelines and his movement in multiple directions at once. The narrator asks Yellow Calf if he is sure he’s “only half dead” and not “all the way dead” as he is unsure of what to make of him (53). Yellow Calf tells the narrator that he is not alone because he converses with the animals, he can understand them, and that they’ve told him the “earth is cockeyed” (54).

The narrator returns home and approaches Bird, the horse he was riding the day Mose died. He thinks of Yellow Calf (109) and begins to speak to the horse:

Now, old machine, I absolve you of your burden... Your face was molded when you were born and hasn't changed in a hundred years. Your ears seem smaller now, but that is because your face has grown. You figure you have hidden this burden well. You have. But don't think I haven't seen it in your eyes those days when the clouds hide the sun... It is the fault of the men who trained you to be a machine, to react to the pressure of a rein on your neck, spurs in your ribs, the sound of a voice. You weren't born that way; you were born to eat grass and drink slough water, to nip other horses in the flanks (109).

The narrator sees himself in Bird—a machine having carried the burden of Mose’s death, “No, don’t think it was your fault—when that calf broke” (111) the narrator tells Bird, as the two brothers were chasing after the calf when Mose died. The narrator speaks to Bird the words he is unable to speak to himself—“I absolve you of your burden.” The narrator sees his own guilt in

the eyes of the horse. He is only able to get in touch with his grief through connecting with Bird, through speaking to him and in turn, speaking to himself. He cries, and “found himself a child again, the years shed as a snake sheds its skin... ‘What use, what use, what use...’ and no one answered, not the body in the road, not the hawk in the sky” (111). The narrator can feel the “sharp pain” of his “smashed knee” and the sleet on his neck, reliving the moment in the present (111). The narrator embraces the pain of the incident and its arbitrariness.

Together, Bird and the narrator rescue a cow drowning in mud. The image of the calf in mud parallels the scene with Marlene—what the narrator saw as a bug in an irrigation ditch. However, the narrator is now moved by the calf’s struggle for her life, risking both his own and Bird’s life to save it. Bird falls and throws the narrator off him, as he did during Mose’s accident, and while on the ground, the narrator feels, for the first time in a while, love—“I wondered if Mose and First Raise were comfortable. They were the only ones I really loved, I thought, the only ones who were good to be with” (128). With his back on the ground, he feels connected and closer to his deceased brother and his father, feels their love, feels connected to the earth, to himself. He comes to appreciate his feelings of distance, “Some people, I thought, will never know how pleasant it is to be distant in a clean rain” (129). The narrator continues by stating that it’s “nothing like you’d expect” (129)—there’s some liberation here with the acknowledgment and acceptance of this distance. He no longer worries about trying to close the distance, but to live with it.

Another revelation occurs when the narrator learns the truth of his family tree. During his revisit near the end of his journey, the narrator realizes it is Yellow Calf who takes care of his grandmother when she is ousted from the tribe and who is also his biological grandfather, that the two outcasts formed their own bond. What marks the narrator’s journey as different from

other Native American texts in which the protagonist reconnects with their Native culture and abandons the white world is that the end of the narrator's journey is ambiguous and ambivalent. He instead decides to chase after the Cree girl, which is how he started at the beginning of the novel. The narrator restarts the circle, now with a deeper acceptance of himself.

Winter in the Blood introduces new elements of multi consciousness to consider by thinking through multiplicity in the Native-American context. The nameless narrator initially experiences a form of non-consciousness as he is so far removed from his own body, his family, and his Blackfeet and Gros Ventre communities, and America at large. The deep isolation and ostracization he faces becomes internalized, as his own consciousness detaches from his body. He experiences a further splitting of self when he does attempt to integrate into American society and comes into contact with how he is tokenized and not at all valued or perceived on an individual level.

The way in which the novel conceives of time is noteworthy too in its depiction of multi consciousness. In moving towards a more spiritual representation of the narrator as a trickster figure who is able to transgress boundaries, we maneuver through multiple timelines, conceiving of time as a far more fluid structure. As Grace L. Dillion describes, Indigenous understandings of time have always considered the multiplicity of time: "pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream" (3). The narrator's movement through his haunted present, the absurdist liminal space, and the traumatic past, depicts his inherently multiple perception of time, and furthermore, his challenging of linear thinking in terms of his own identity. The resolution the narrator eventually reaches is one of multiplicity—of reaching through the earth to reconnect with his loss loved ones, of reconnecting with nature—it is a movement of branching and reaching out, countering his initial barrowing inwards.

II. Body and Flesh—Otherwise Worlds in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977)

When we want to imagine *otherwise* possibilities—*otherwise* worlds—we must abolish the very conceptual frame that produces categorical distinction and makes them desirable; we have to abolish the modality of thought that *thinks* categorical distinction as maintainable (28-29).

—Ashon Crawley, “Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah”

But I would make a distinction in this case between "body" and "flesh" and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the "body" there is the "flesh," that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography (67).

—Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

Spillers’s distinction between body and flesh as being the distinction between captive and liberated subject positions is key to Crawley’s notion of “otherwise” worlds. Crawley understands the flesh, as he borrows from Wynter, as preceding the “coloniality of being” (29). Crawley discusses the flesh as having a liberative force because of its vibrational qualities: “Everything living and dead, everything animate and immobile, vibrations...Because everything vibrates, nothing escapes participating in choreographic encounters with the rest of the living world...This embodied refusal to be stilled will have been a gift, the gift of flesh, the gift of *otherwise* possibilities for thinking, for producing, existing” (29). Crawley reads the vibrational force of flesh as what generates the possibilities of the otherwise—the “refusal to be stilled” is the refusal to be categorized and captive. The choreography of the living can be read as the choreography of flesh becoming body, but Crawley also points to the capacity of the flesh to form new connections, new modes of being, that exceed binary categorization.

What does otherwise existence look like, though? Can we even perceive of an existence outside of categorization? Crawley points to “music and dance, sound and choreography” as “the performed excess of something heard, something, in the flesh, felt—some vibration or

movement” (32) as instances and objects of liberating vibrational force emerging from within the flesh. These vibrational practices allow for continually new forms of relationality as they exceed constraint, category, and captivity created by the forcing of flesh into word and sign.

Interestingly, Crawley also denotes numbness as an otherwise feeling that draws us “into and out of worlds. Even in our numbness is a means to withdraw to the mystery of interiority to allow feeling to flow freely, as if numbness becomes the womb for gestational temporal pause, a shield to allow the ongoing emergency for thinking—and in such thinking, producing—*otherwise* worlds” (34). I use Crawley’s concept of the otherwise in thinking through the numbness of multi consciousness—the dissociation of body/consciousness(es) as a numbness that shields but also allows for the “gestational” incubation that prepares the body to return to flesh—to return to a liberative flow that acts in excess of the “body,” the multiplicity that the subject learns to accept.

Particularly, I read Leslie Marmon Silko’s 1977 novel *Ceremony* through Crawley’s concept of the otherwise. Crawley extends the otherwise to read the dual histories of the Middle Passage and Indigenous genocide:

To privilege the flesh is to consider the *otherwise* possibility of relationality as not grounded in our capacity to endure suffering. There is something that exceeds the totalizing force of seemingly ceaseless violence, some excessive force that was already in us, in us as flesh, that refuses to be suppressed. What to make of the various modalities of violence that befall flesh, the violence of police and militarization, the violence of Middle Passage and Indigenous genocide? (33)

The force of selfhood exceeds the effects of violence and the violated body. The self, in new forms and new understandings, persists. I offer multi consciousness as a way of reading Black,

Asian, and Indigenous literature through the shared experience of numbness that permits for the separation of the body/consciousness, in order for the liberative, multiplied possibility of the flesh to occur.

Through Silko's portrayal of Tayo, a mixed-race (half-Indigenous Pueblo, half white) man returning from WWII, I argue that we see the otherwise possibilities of the body/flesh in the movement from the numbness of multi consciousness (a splitting of body/consciousness[es]) to the liberative resurfacing of the flesh and its capacity for ebb, flow, and multiplicity. Tayo enlisted in the U.S. military and has returned from the Philippines where his cousin, whom he thought of more as a brother, was killed by Japanese soldiers. Tayo's relationship to his cousin is akin to the one James Welch's narrator of *Winter in the Blood* has to his brother, whom he also loses. The figure of the lost brother is one to which both narrators strongly identify with and find a sense of self in. The death of this brother-figure marks the death of the identity of the narrator. The trauma of the war also alters Tayo's consciousness.

Silko begins Tayo's story by bringing us into his nightmares, which are auditory in nature:

Tayo didn't sleep well that night. He tossed in the old iron bed, and the coiled springs kept squeaking even after he lay still again, calling up humid dreams of black night and loud voices rolling him over and over again like debris caught in a flood...Tonight the singing had come first, squeaking out of the iron bed, a man singing in Spanish, the melody of a familiar love song, two words again and again...Sometimes the Japanese voices came first, angry and loud, pushing the song far away, and then he could hear the shift in his dreaming, like a slight afternoon wind changing its direction, coming less and

less from the south, moving into the west, and the voices would become Laguna voices, and he could hear Uncle Josiah calling to him” (5).

Tayo hears a multitude of voices in different languages—Spanish, Japanese, Laguna—and different affects, we move from singing love songs, angry yelling, to a familiar calling. Through these voices Tayo shifts spatially as well—south to west. Tayo is “flooded” by these voices and the disorientation they provoke. As such, Tayo is entirely decentred—he struggles to preserve a sense of self as his own voice is crowded out. He is driven by these competing voices. He is suspended temporally, spatially, sonically, and as such, experiences a splitting of body/consciousness. The trauma that Tayo experiences exceeds the boundaries of his consciousness—he hears too many voices, feels too many things, sees too many realities.

Tayo’s consciousness is ruptured, split into many fragmentary parts. He struggles to remain in one present as layers upon layers of images and voices intrude on his reality:

He could get no rest as long as the memories were tangled up with the present, tangled up like colourful threads...He had to sweat to think of something that wasn’t unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that existed by itself, standing alone like a deer. And if he could hold that image of the deer in his mind long enough, his stomach might shiver less and let him sleep for a while (6).

Tayo’s temporalities are enmeshed, the past is just as much his present. As such, he sees multiple layers of reality, multiple memories (perceived as “happening” in the moment) layered with the present moment, like colourful “threads,” knotted together, inhibiting his ability to act or think. He tries to hold onto the image of a single deer—concrete and singular in its image. He yearns to be that removed from his inner turmoil, to exist in his own space. Tayo has experienced immense trauma at war—he witnessed the death of his cousin, he was held captive in a death camp—but

Silko's narrative unweaves this present trauma to reveal its roots in the trauma of settler colonialism.

The structure of the novel is multiple in and of itself, reflecting Tayo's multi consciousness. There are multiple narrative threads presented in disjointed fragments— fragments that jump between multiple timelines: flashbacks, memories, myths, stories, personal histories. Alongside the omniscient narrative voice that jumps between Tayo's present and past, a spiritual timeline conveys the creationist story of Thought Woman (also known as Spider Woman), Corn Woman, and Reed Woman (the three main Pueblo spiritual entities) and the drought that descends upon the human world. The poems that tell the myth are intertwined with the rest of the narrative, and at times mirrors the personal narrative of Tayo. When recalling the story of his mother abandoning him at four years old, the narrative transitions into a spiritual poem:

“So that's where our mother went.

How can we get down there?”

Hummingbird looked at all the
skinny people.

He felt sorry for them.

He said, “You need a messenger.

Listen, I'll tell you
what to do:”

Cover the jar with a
new buckskin

and say this over the jar

and sing this softly

above the jar:

After four days

you will be alive (91-2).

The crisis in the spiritual world mirrors a crisis in the human world: the reservation also undergoes a major drought. Furthermore, the spiritual world and the external world mirror Tayo's barren, deserted consciousness. His mother and the spiritual mother are missing, Tayo must find the messenger, and come alive again.

The narrative voice of the novel uses third-person, amplifying Tayo's lack of personal identity and distance from himself and the world around him, but still remains introspective. The narrative voice blends multiple different voices and perspectives through Tayo as our medium. When discussing the relationship between Tayo and his aunt, the narrative seamlessly transitions between personal experience and tribal history. It is "Only Tayo" who could "hear it, like fingernails scratching against bare rock, her terror at being trapped in one of the oldest ways" (62). Tayo can understand his aunt in a way others cannot; he can hear the trauma of colonization she experienced:

...The oldest of times, when the people shared a single clan name and they told each other who they were; they recounted the actions and words of each of their clan had taken, and would take; from before they were born and long after they died, the people shared the same consciousness. The people saw, with the simple certainty of the world they saw, how everything should be.

But the fifth world had become entangled with European names: the names of rivers, the hills, the names of the animals and plants—all of creation suddenly had two names: an Indian name and a white name. Christianity separated the people from themselves (62). The Pueblo people's origins are in a unified, collective consciousness, in a single and shared identity. Their deep connection and identification with their culture, community, and interconnectedness with the natural world created a sense of unity and a shared consciousness. European colonization created a duality: everything suddenly had two names. There were two ways of being, two contesting realities, two contesting worldviews. There is a movement then into a splitting of collective consciousness into individual consciousness, but furthermore, a doubling of consciousness—the world, and the self, are built anew through the European gaze. The integral connection to community is severed, and collective identity dissipates. The Indigenous individual is left to rebuild their own identity, but now seeing the self through a double vision, this feat proves traumatic and complex.

This primary duality is exploited further in Tayo. Tayo is the product of generational trauma. His mother is described as having been a girl who was “shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people” (63). She was taught that white people, men particularly, were benevolent. Tayo's mother was “excited to see that despite the fact she was an Indian, the white men smiled at her from their cars” (63). To be seen through white eyes is to be seen as worthy, as better than the rest:

She looked at her own reflection in the windows of houses she passed; her dress, her lipstick, her hair—it was all done perfectly, the way the home-ec teacher taught them, exactly like white girls...The feelings of shame, at her own people and at the white people, grew inside her like, side by side like monstrous twins (63).

Tayo's mother performs colonial mimicry and surveys her reflection to see if she has met her own standards of assimilation, those formed by her teacher and surrounding society. By mimicking white girlhood, Tayo's mother feels she can perhaps cross over into the white world and experience the power of white girlhood. However, she finds the "truth in their fists and in their greedy feeble love-making" (62) and feels equally ashamed of them, and what she has done for white attention, and her Pueblo community. The metaphor of the monstrous twins emphasizes the interconnectedness of these inseparable feelings of shame.

Tayo is seen as the product of this double-shame with his mixed-blood heritage. As such, he faces alienation within his own community and his own family. Tayo attempts to find a sense of belonging with his cousin Rocky by joining the American military. Rocky, much like Tayo's mother, exhibits a deep dissatisfaction with and shame surrounding his Native heritage. He is described as studying hard from his American school textbooks and using them dispel their grandmother's "superstitions," feeling as though he had to "win in the white outside world" (68-9). Tayo wants to emulate Rocky—Rocky has a family, unlike Tayo. When the two stumble upon a military recruiter, Tayo makes note of the "serious and proud" look on Rocky's face (92). The recruiter tells them that this is their chance to "show" Americans how much they love America (92), and Rocky and Tayo take him up on the opportunity. During the war, Tayo loses Rocky and his own sense of self.

To cope with the immense trauma that overwhelms his consciousness, Tayo retreats into a state of non-consciousness. Upon returning from the war, Tayo is institutionalized in an American hospital. Tayo describes his mental state as feeling lost in a "white smoke":

For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their

bedsheets and walls...He had seen outlines of grey steel tables, outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth...They saw his outline but they did not realize it was hollow inside...the days and seasons disappeared into a twilight at the corner of his eyes, a twilight he could catch only with a sudden motion, jerking his head to one side for a glimpse of green leaves...He inhabited a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely (13).

Tayo has no consciousness of himself—the white smoke obscures his thinking, prevents him from seeing his true self. He is stuck in a state of disconnection of body and mind. The pervading “whiteness” of the smoke, the hospital walls and bed, exemplify his fading into the white world and his erasure by it. Tayo describes seeing the “outline” of things but not their totality—the world reflects the profound state of emptiness he inhabits internally. The times of the days and seasons blur as he remains frozen in the fog. He speaks of himself in third-person:

The new doctor asked him if he had ever been visible, and Tayo spoke to him soft and said that he was sorry but nobody was allowed to speak to an invisible one...Tayo heard a voice answering. The voice was saying, ‘He can’t talk to you. He is invisible. His words are formed with an invisible tongue, they have no sound...He can’t go. He cries all the time. Sometimes he vomits when he cries...It had been a long time since he had thought about having a name’ (14-15).

Tayo hears his own voice but cannot feel himself speaking. The voice describes him as an invisible being, a ghost. The quote calls forth Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* (1952), 24 years prior to Silko’s novel, where the unnamed narrator undergoes a similar experience. The narrator, an African-American man, is expelled from college upon a misunderstanding and finds work at a paint factory known for its pure white paint: “Optic White” (216) made from black

paint. At the factory, a paranoid fellow black worker involves the narrator in an explosion, leaving the narrator in a psych ward undergoing shock therapy. The narrator loses his sense of self even more: “We’re trying to get you started again” (232), “My mind was blank, as though I had just begun to live” (233), “Their meanings were lost in the vast whiteness in which I myself was lost” (238). He is unable to answer anything about himself: “What is your name?...I realized that I no longer knew my own name” (239-241). He then declares himself the “invisible man,” the man that no one can truly see. Silko’s and Ellison’s narrators describe this form of non-consciousness and amnesia as losing oneself to “whiteness”—being erased by the dominant culture of whiteness, being unable to see the self beyond whiteness. Both enter a completely blank state of being. In both, this state of mind/body split and numbness marks a moment of rebirth. Ellison’s narrator notes: “When I discover who I am I will be free” (243). The narrator and Tayo eventually remember who they are and rewrite their existence, to allow the totality of themselves to exceed the confinements of the ways in which their bodies have been scripted.

The American hospitals were of no help to Tayo, he notes their “medicine drained memory” and pushed him into the white fog where he could not remember anything (14). They also offered him no follow up support upon leaving the hospital. He is further ostracized from his Native community for serving in the military, having a mental illness, and being the half-blooded son of his mother who abandoned the tribe. He is brought to a Laguna medicine man named Ku’oosh, whose ceremony is unfortunately unhelpful to Tayo as Ku’oosh does not understand the extent of Tayo’s trauma from being a mixed-blooded outcast and from the war. “Maybe you don’t know some of these things,” he says to Tayo, “vaguely acknowledging the distant circumstance of an absent white father” (74). Tayo feels he must pay retribution for his actions in the war, that the drought on the reservation is his doing, but that Ku’oosh cannot comprehend the

scale and immensity of modern warfare: “The old man would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died...the old man would not have believed anything so monstrous” (75). Ku’oosh leaves him with a bundle of Indian tea and says, “There are some things we can’t cure like we used to...not since the white people came” (75). Tayo’s trauma exceeds what Ku’oosh and the community have been used to. The ceremonies are no longer effective, as the consciousness of the subject is completely altered by the white world.

Tayo only begins to make peace with his multi consciousness and exit the non-conscious numbness he inhabits when he meets Betonie. Betonie is a Navajo healer who also mixed-blooded. Ku’oosh spoke to Tayo in “childish English”, but Betonie speaks to him in “good English” (110) which comforts Tayo as he is not as familiar with the Pueblo language. Tayo sees his own hazel eyes reflected in Betonie’s (112). When Tayo enters Betonie’s room he can “see bundles of newspapers...telephone books with the years scattered among cities—St. Louis, Seattle, New York, Oakland—and he began to feel another dimension” alongside his “brown goatskin” and dry roots and willow twigs (113). There are also “layers of old calendars” where “the sequence of years confused and lost as if occasionally the oldest calendars had fallen or been taken out from under the others and then had been replaced on top of the most recent years” (114). “In the old days it was simple. A medicine person could get by without all these things” (144), he tells Tayo. Tayo sees evidence of Betonie’s mixed heritage and duality coexisting in his space. Betonie acts as the bridge between Tayo’s non-consciousness and his multi consciousness. Betonie himself occupies multiple places and timelines simultaneously, evidenced by his layered sense of time and place. His ceremonies are characterized by a sense of

improvisation—combining traditional rituals with elements of Euro-American cultures, times and places.

Betonie encourages Tayo to reconnect with all of his personal experiences, and to integrate them with the broader collective history of his people. Tayo tells Betonie of his time at the American hospital:

They sent me to this place after the war. It was white. Everything in that place was white. Except for me. I was invisible. But I wasn't afraid there. I didn't feel things sneaking up behind me. I didn't cry for Rocky or Josiah. There were no voices and no dreams. Maybe I belong back in that place (116).

Betonie tells Tayo that he could go back, but that in those kinds of hospitals they “don't bury the dead, they keep them in rooms and talk to them” (116). Tayo is unsure at first, he says he “wanted to yell at the medicine man, to yell the things the white doctors had yelled at him—that he had to think only of himself...that he would never get well as long as he used words like ‘we’ and us” (118). The American hospital and the white doctors try to suppress Tayo's plurality and multiplicity, but even in his numbed state Tayo can sense that his “sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything” (118). What is interesting about Betonie's ceremonies is that he acknowledges that they must always change, that they cannot remain stagnant, that it is their tradition to change: “But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies...things which don't shift and grow are dead things” (119). Betonie's ceremonies incorporate the white American world, they acknowledge multiplicity and work in hybrid ways. “Nothing is that simple,” Betonie tells Tayo when Tayo asks him if the betrayal to the tribe by his mother brought shame to him and his family. “You don't write off all the white

people, just like you don't trust all the Indians" (120). Harboursing hatred and shame for both sides of Tayo's heritage has not served him, and caused deep psychic numbness and splintering. For his final ceremony, he must move towards multiplicity.

Tayo sets out to complete his ceremony of healing. He feels compelled to seek out his Uncle Josiah's stolen cattle, as he died while Tayo and Rocky were at war. Josiah was a father to Tayo, and his loss weighs on him tremendously as he wasn't there to help Josiah find the cattle. In his nightmares, Josiah's face is juxtaposed onto the body of one of the Japanese soldiers they killed. Betonie tells him: "The Japanese...it isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (117). Betonie guides Tayo towards seeing the common humanity amongst people. While Tayo was fighting for the Americans, he still identified with the extreme "Other," the Japanese, and saw his own family in them. To reconnect with that common humanity, Tayo must see beyond borders and divisions, the very binaries that have caused such deep self-separation within him. He spots the cattle, a specific breed that can endure droughts because of their thin build, on the property of a wealthy white farmer. As Tayo cuts into the wire, he begins to cut away at the borders within his mind:

He knew then he had learned the lie by heart—the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted.

The lie. He cut into the wire as if cutting away at the lie inside himself. The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike (170).

As Tayo frees the cattle and returns them to Josiah's ranch, Tayo completes his ceremony. He frees his own mind from the barricades of whiteness and Indianness. He frees his own repressed

memories, he accepts his own hybrid identity, and he comes to a new understanding of his multi consciousness. He no longer lives in fear of it, but instead cried at the “relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (214). Tayo suggests an understanding of reality that is more fluid—where traditional notions of boundaries, structures, and separations dissolve. Everything is interconnected, and this premise extends beyond physical and temporal limitations. Tayo highlights the significance of storytelling—through stories, he is able to bridge his experiences of alienation and violence with the larger narrative that continues to unfold, that has multiple layers. His story has roots in the individual past and the present and collective past and present, in the human and spiritual world, in the white and Indian world. The spiritual narrative of restoration parallels Tayo’s relief:

They unraveled
the dead skin
Coyote threw on him.

They cut it up
bundle by bundle.

Every evil
which entangled him
was cut

to pieces (224).

The spiritual world and the human world are reborn upon the end of the drought. Tayo's "dead skin" is shed, and in doing so, he is freed by the constraints of the body. The dead skin he was trapped in, the evils that ensnared him, have been released upon his perception of the connections between the various fragments of his consciousness. As Tayo moves away from attempting to suppress his multi consciousness, and attempting to funnel his identity into a singular, linear, more palatable unit, he is able to experience the liberation of multi consciousness.

III. Indigenous Futurism: Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018)

Indigenous Futurism, paying homage to Afrofuturism in its name and similar study of the recontextualization of the sci-fi genre, began primarily as a visual arts movement but has grown to encompass a wider range of media, including literature, film, music, and theatre and beadwork (Fricke 107). Indigenous Futurism challenges the representation of Indigenous peoples as static and archaic and brings forth the interweaving of Indigenous tradition and knowledge with sci-fi and speculative elements. As Jason Edward Lewis observes:

Given that popular science fiction has historically been the provenance of Western writers, it tends to reflect a particular set of imperial and colonial biases and prejudices.

One consequence of this lineage is the fact that recognizable descendants of Indigenous people do not often appear in the settler future imaginary, nor does one see any indication of indigenous culture having survived into the seventh generation and beyond (2).

Lewis highlights the capacity of Indigenous sf to envision a future they are a part of, one where Indigenous populations, knowledge, culture and traditions are preserved. As H. Lidchi and S.N. Fricke write, “Indigenous Futurisms are part of a larger trend to disrupt and diversify the frames of reference of speculative fiction” (100).

Grace L. Dillon describes the sf tropes that are rewritten by works of Indigenous Futurisms. Native slipstream, for example, “infuses stories with time travel, alternate realities and multiverses, and alternative histories. As its name implies, Native slipstream views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time” (3). As Dillon explains, “Native slipstream thinking...has been around for millennia” and its closest approximation is the concept of the

multiverse (4). Indigenous understandings of time often incorporate concepts such as cyclical, nonlinear time, and transgenerational continuity. Time is conceived of as web-like, where all times are simultaneous and interconnected. The multiverse is rooted in the possibility of multiple parallel universes or alternate realities that coexist with our own. Multiverse media often revolves around the possibility of these multiple universes connecting in a single subject—a multi consciousness.

Jason Lewis and Skawennati Tricia Fragnito discuss cyberspace as an alternative reality imagined as a “free and open space, much like the New World was imagined by the Europeans” (“Aboriginal Territories”) where Indigenous individuals can “speak more easily in their own voices without having to go through approved representatives or channels” (Belton 197). In Tommy Orange’s prologue to his collection of interwoven stories *There There* (2018), he states: “Plenty of us are urban now. If not because we live in cities, then because we live on the internet. Inside the high-rise of multiple browser windows... We are the memories we don’t remember, which live in us, which we feel” (25-26). The urbanization of Indigenous peoples extends to the digital realm, and Orange highlights the multifaceted nature of this hybrid existence: the multiplicity of their experiences as urban Indians, and the multiplicity of their transgenerational, collective, and ancestral memory and heritage.

Technology permeates Orange’s stories in uncanny ways. The prologue begins with a history of the Indian head symbol “drawn by an unknown artist in 1939, broadcast until the late 1970s to American TVs everywhere after all the shows ran out. It’s called the Indian Head test pattern... You’d see that Indian, surrounded by circles that looked like sights through riflescopes” (15-6). As Orange recounts, the Indian head is a persistent symbol in American culture—the “Indian head on a spike... the Indian Head test pattern... broadcast to sleeping Americans... over

the blue-green glowing airwaves” (19-20), “Our heads are on flags, jerseys, and coins” (22). The omniscient symbol of domination and massacre bleeds out from the material world into the technological and further contributes to the subliminal mass-production and commodification of colonial violence. The symbol is passively consumed on coins, jerseys, in sleep while the TV is on through the “glowing airwaves.” The distorted and decontextualized Indigenous imagery co-opts colonial violence as commercial and national emblems.

The structure of the novel is fragmented and polyphonic, employing multiple narrative voices and weaving together various storylines that eventually build towards and converge during a climatic event—a final powwow. The multiple narrators and multiple interconnected narratives emphasize the complex nature of their experiences as urban Indians. The internet, like the urban Indian, inhabits both a non-space and an “everything, all at once” space. Technology is the common thread that links the stories, delving into the relationship between the internet and digital media and the influence on Indigenous community, identity, representation, and culture. The characters in the novel navigate both the physical urban realm and the virtual realm, both of which can serve as spaces of finding a sense of belonging or spaces of continued colonial violence.

The first story introduces Tony Loneman, a 21-year-old Indigenous man with fetal alcohol syndrome. Tony, after mishearing the name of his disease as a child calls it the “Drome”: “The Drome first came to me in the mirror when I was six...In front of the TV, before I turned it on, I saw my face in the dark reflection there. It was the first time I saw it. My own face, the way everyone else saw it...Most people don’t have to think about what their faces mean the way I do...” (31-2). Tony recounts an interesting moment of recognition—he looks at himself through the eyes of others, his reflection is mediated by the screen and the gaze of the television. He

becomes the Indian head floating on the screen. Interestingly, Tony's name for his condition, the "Drome" also has sci-fi and speculative resonances. "Drome" as a suffix is often used to denote a location or setting designed for a specific purpose, but is also often used in the realm of science fiction to create names for futuristic or fictional locations. David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) comes to mind, as the power of technological media to manipulate perceptions of reality is explored similarly. The boundaries between the real, hallucinated, and the technological worlds converge in the film as the protagonist Max Renn becomes obsessed with a show depicting the extreme torture of real victims. *Videodrome* exhibits how media can alter consciousness and explores the merging of human and machine consciousness with the show eventually physically transforming its viewers as well as mentally. The viewers become infused with the show as the broadcast signal is found out to contain a carcinogenic that causes brain tumors, and furthermore, mind control in which the virtual world takes over reality.

Tony is a victim of alienation from both his Indigenous community and the white world. "Everybody runs like they seen a ghost. Maybe I am a ghost...Maybe I'm'a do something one day, and everybody's gonna know about me" (38). He harbours immense resentment towards his mother, now in jail, for what she's done to him. He protects himself through violence, and sustains himself through selling drugs. What Tony longs for though, is to be seen beyond his Drome. When a friend suggests robbing the powwow with a 3-D printed gun (45), Tony feels that this is his opportunity to regain power, to be seen beyond his condition. The 3-D printed gun transgresses the boundaries between the technological and the real world—bringing an object created digitally into the real world with real world consequences. The technology increases access to weaponry, and for Tony, access to empowerment.

When he returns to the television screen, dressed in his regalia, Tony sees himself differently: “I went into the living room and stood in front of the TV...I watched the feathers flutter on the screen...I looked at my face. The Drome. I didn’t see it there. I saw an Indian. I saw a dancer” (48). Tony’s self-perception is complex here—for the first time, he sees himself as belonging to his community, as an Indian person, and furthermore, something of beauty—a dancer. The knowledge of the act he will commit—the knowledge that everyone will finally “know about” him—grants Tony a sense of power, morphing his image of himself. Yet he takes on the role of a victimizer, and in doing so, he identifies more with the victims.

Tony’s experience of recognition in the regalia is in stark contrast to another character, Orvil Red Feather’s. Orvil looks in the bedroom mirror and is convinced he has his “regalia on all wrong” (179). Like many of the other characters, he had never been taught anything about being Indian. He asks his grandma, and she says she is too busy trying to work to provide for them, “learning about your heritage is a privilege, a privilege we don’t have” (181). Orvil faces a systemic barrier, the fact of his socio-economic status limits his opportunities to learn about his culture, reinforcing feelings of alienation and dissociation. Orvil turns to the internet—“From watching hours and hours of powwow footage, documentaries on YouTube, by reading all that there was to read on sites like Wikipedia, PowWows.com, and *Indian Country Today*. Googling stuff like ‘What does it mean to be a real Indian’” (184). Orvil’s experience is mediated through the internet, as this simulation is the closest he can get to learning about the traditions of his community. Orvil is a passive observer through a screen—watching a world he is locked out of. His use of online platforms and resources reflects the contemporary reality of urban Indians Orange wants to depict—seeking community and connection through the virtual space that is more accessible, but also overwhelming and disconnected. When he realizes “virtually

everything he learned about being Indian he'd learned virtually" he continues to feel detached from the culture he so badly wants to be a part of (184). Orvil does eventually go on to participate in an Indian dance competition and experiences a moment of collectivity—"They're all one dance" (346). His experience of Indianness and the internet is the opposite of Tony's, Orvil represents the positive possibilities the internet can provide. Orvil attempts to bridge the gap he feels between himself and his heritage through the Internet, and eventually uses that knowledge to bridge the gap between himself and his community. Tony, while he more readily sees himself as an Indian, uses his knowledge to widen the gap, to annihilate those who made him feel distant in the first place.

The rest of Tony's fragments are narrated in third person. In losing the Drome, in choosing violence, he detaches from himself. Tony faces polarizing desires again at the shooting. At first, as planned, he participates in the mass-shooting as a means to rob the powwow. Suddenly, he is seized by a fit of rage, and launches himself at one of the shooters. As he fades out of consciousness and into death, Tony "watches himself go up, out of himself...and remembers that it was never actually really him. He was never Tony just like he was never the Drome. Both were masks" (429). Tony has spent his life grappling with the complexities of his marginalized identity. He is keenly aware of the impacts of colonization, displacement and cultural erasure on his Indigenous identity and community—"All those Indians probably knew but couldn't do anything about it. They didn't have guns" (36). The gun is a symbol of retribution for Tony. Section II of the novel is even titled "reclamation"—where Tony imagines the shooting. As an urban Indian living in Oakland, Tony traverses different cultural and racial boundaries, and engages in American gang culture in order to reclaim a sense of agency, of capital, and power. Furthermore, he is characterized to the outside world by his physical

appearance, his noticeable physical differences, alienating him from his own community and the world at large. Indigenouness and Americanness are realities that remain out of reach for Tony. The “Drome” is not just his condition, but the world on the television screen he sees himself in—a distorted alternate reality where he believes himself to be a villain and a monster.

In this detached state near death, Tony comes into contact with his true essence—he recalls watching *Transformers* with his grandmother and being profoundly moved by the death of Optimus Prime: “We’re made of metal, made hard, able to take it...So if you get a chance to die, to save someone else, you take it” (431). Metal is a symbolic image for Tony that follows him throughout his lifetime. In one of his earliest memories, he recounts seeing “smears of blood on the metal” and the “taste of metal” in his mouth when another boy asked him why his face looked the way it did, pointing to Tony’s early violent outbreaks (31). He also describes his favourite rapper “MF Doom” or Metal Face Doom who always wears a metal mask and “calls himself a villain” (36). Tony’s alienation, the masks he feels he wears as Tony and as the Drome, lead him to create a violent persona akin to Metal Face Doom’s. By adopting the persona of a villain, Tony feels he can challenge what others think of him and escape from the constraints imposed upon him. He feels he can gain power through his metal mask, his metal bullets. Yet, when the shooting occurs, Tony finds himself compelled to become the hero and sacrifice himself—becoming more like his childhood hero of Optimus Prime. His desire to embody the resilience symbolized by the metal of the transformer emerges instead.

Orange also brings the metaverse and virtual reality into his stories. Daniel Gonzales, the young boy who printed the 3D gun, watches the shooting via drone footage live on his VR headset. “When you spend enough time online...you can find some cool shit...Figuring out a way around a big fucking bully system that only gives those that came from money or power the

means to make it. I learned from YouTube how to code. Shit like JavaScript, Python, SQL, Ruby, C++, HTML, Java, PHP. Sounds like a different language, right?” (283). Daniel realizes that through the virtual space he can generate a source of power for himself, to find ways around oppressive systems. The virtual world opens up a new space for Daniel, a new language he has mastered, a space in which he has control and capital. The allure of the online world creates too deep of a distance in Daniel though, “We’re already like fucking androids, thinking and seeing with our phones all the time” he says (285). Daniel, feeling too dissociated from his Indigenous roots, “Dad never taught us anything about being Indian” (288) feels ambivalent about the guns being used to shoot up the powwow. Daniel feels detached from reality on multiple levels—the Indigenous world, his home of Oakland, which he says he only sees online now, and humanity at large. The guns provide a source of income for Daniel, a source of power, and that is all he seeks. When he watches the shooting via VR, he becomes a passive observer and oblivious to the immediate consequences. The lines of the virtual and the real become blurred in virtual reality—a liminal, non-space. He describes watching the video “over and over...Shit was exciting” (291). The shooting becomes entertainment, a thrill for Daniel as he sees the extent of his power but remains at a safe distance from it.

Edwin Black suffers from technological addiction in order to search for authenticity, what it means to be a “real” Native American, and to distract himself from his deep dissatisfaction with the reality of his life. He becomes addicted to the game *Second Life*, a metaverse that allows players to customize their own avatars, homes, and landscapes and interact with thousands of other players. The lines between his virtual reality and his physical reality blur as his virtual life seeps into his present consciousness. Edwin describes having “screen-saver dreams” of “dark geometric shapes” (103). He becomes a recluse:

I think I logged two whole years there. And as I was growing, getting fatter in real life, the Edwin Black I had in there, on there, I made him thinner, and as I did less, he did more. The Edwin Black in there had a job and a girlfriend, and his mom had died tragically during childbirth. That Edwin Black was raised on the reservation with his dad.

The Edwin Black of my *Second Life* was proud. He had hope (101).

Edwin's virtual double, living his "second life," the life he truly wants underscores the lack of power and control Edwin has in his physical reality to escape from the limitations of his life.

Edwin is distanced from his Indigenous heritage—he does not know his father and grew up an urban Indian. Interestingly, Edwin turns to the metaverse to recreate his more "traditional" Indian life, as it is the only space he has control over, and the means to live out that fantasy.

"When you discover something new, it's like you're thinking with another mind, like you have access to a bigger, collective brain" (118) he describes. The metaverse gives Edwin access to a multi consciousness, his knowledge transgresses the boundaries of his individual experience as he gets to "live" a second life that feels more fulfilling and authentic.

The digital identities the characters create, the reclamation they can achieve through the virtual world, blur the lines between metaverse, VR, the internet, and reality and create multiple layers of reality, of consciousness, that create, often dangerous, distance between the Indigenous individuals and their physical realities. Yet, these digital spaces offer solace and escapism and power in ways the physical world simply can't. The digital space is not untouched by colonialism but can continuously be rewritten. The digital space is an infinite multiverse itself.

IV. Conclusion: Non-consciousness and the Third Space of the Virtual World

Through discussing James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Tommy Orange's texts in tandem, we can trace an arch from Indigenous double consciousness, which stems from the effects of colonial history, forced relocation, loss of land and cultural hybridity, where Indigenous individuals negotiate between their own ways of being in the world (via language, culture, spiritual beliefs) and the dominant culture imposed by colonial powers, resulting in language loss, mind/body disconnection, loss of tradition, and the erasure of traditional knowledge and practices, into discussions of multi consciousness as a framework in which Indigenous subjectivity returns to its multiplicity. By embracing interconnected consciousness—mythical, spiritual, nature, communal, between selves, ancestors, and the future—the Indigenous subject is able to escape the non-consciousness of psychic fragmentation.

Similar to the other texts discussed in this chapter, Orange approaches multi consciousness by discussing a numbing of multi consciousness that results in a form of dissociation and non-consciousness. The multiple voices he deploys to discuss the multifaceted nature of urban Indian experience also come into contact with modern technology, which poses its own complications in consciousness formation. As the characters already struggle with feelings of dislocation as urban Indians, feeling equally dislocated from their Native communities and American society at large, Orange highlights modern technology as site which creates another layer of dislocation and another site of consciousness. As the characters already navigate between their Indian, American, and urban Indian identities, technology offers another space in which the characters simultaneously learn more about their heritage and history but become further dislocated and detached from it. The juxtaposition of Orvil learning about his culture through the internet and Daniel participating in the violence against his community

through VR represents the polarities of the internet as a space of interconnection and deep disconnection. Modern technology has added another layer of dislocation and dissociation, furthering the psychic splintering of the urban Indian characters described. They bear the extreme tension of multi consciousness in which they are pulled in various directions and are overwhelmed by the simultaneity. The virtual world represents a place of interconnected-disconnect for Orange, but the act of returning to the Native community in reality, as Orvil does after taking what he learned from the internet in the real world, represents interconnected-unity. Orvil is simultaneously multiple and unitary in his first dance at the powwow, exhibiting the flip side of Daniel's narrative—interconnection through multiplicity versus disconnected splintering.

Chapter 4: Multi Consciousness and the Multiverse

The multiverse narrative has become a recipe for blockbuster success in twenty-first century cinema—the sensation of the Marvel multiverse works (with 9 installations including film and television from 2016-onward) is the most prominent example. Contrary to its contemporary fascination and characterization as peak futurism, the multiverse is an ancient concept—the first recorded musings surrounding the topic are that of the ancient Greeks, dating back to the fourth and fifth century B.C., surrounding the possibility of other *kosmoi*—“cosmic systems composed of an Earth, planets, and fixed stars, like the *kosmos* the Greeks believed was the home of man” (Dick 2). Mary-Jane Rubenstein notes that while the ongoing debate on whether or not the multiverse exists is the foregrounded debate, the underlying issue surrounding what a multiverse is remains the starting point:

For James, the many things of our one, visible world constitute a “multiverse,” whereas the coherence among those things is the “universe.” For contemporary physicists, by contrast, our one, visible world constitutes the universe (a sphere 40 billion light years in radius also called our “Hubble volume” or “observable universe”), whereas the greater ensemble of unseen worlds constitutes the multiverse (sometimes called the “metaverse” or “megaverse.”) In terms of numbers alone, then, this one world constitutes a multiverse, whereas for the physicists, many worlds constitute a multiverse (5).

Rubenstein also outlines the four major “types” of multiverse models (5). Firstly, the type that “configures universes *spatially*, with an infinite number of different worlds separated either by gargantuan expanses of ordinary space-time or by rapidly expanding sea of energy (5-6). The second type “configures universes *temporally*, so that each universe or part of a universe ‘collapses’ in order to form a new universe, a process repeated throughout infinite type (6). The

third type is “based on the Many-Worlds-Interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics, which suggests that the universe separates into different branches every time a subatomic particle ‘decides’ on a position” (6). The final model is the “modal” type, where “all possible worlds must actually exist, and, moreover, that an infinite number of each possible world must actually exist” (6). One thing is clear: there are as many theories of the multiverse as there are (possible) - verses.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be examining the multiverse as a recurring contemporary metaphor and the relationship between the cosmos and consciousness—the multiverse reflected in the individual as multi consciousness. The multiverse’s value (as artistic conceit) lies not just in its maximalist (shock and starlet) appeal, but also in its near-perfect representation of diasporic experience. The multiverse acts as the ideal vehicle and metaphor for the impact of displacement on an individual’s consciousness. The act of uprooting one’s life is the catalyst—the starting point from which all possible branches of otherwise possibilities emerge. To enter a foreign land where the language, the culture, the terrain, the time, the law, the food, the sun, the wind—everything—is different, is to enter a parallel world, one that exists alongside its familiar counterpart, a point of comparison that never ceases its grip. This decision to leave is also a severance—the departed can never return to the homeland as it was, as the time apart, the experiences in the other world, render that parallel homeland impenetrable. Even upon return, “home” will never feel the same way it did—the homeland that is now a part of the departed’s universe is distorted. In multiverse theory, the universe of the departed and the universe of the one who stayed can both exist—and multiple versions of these worlds exist, too.

Furthermore, this chapter will also investigate representations of multi consciousness across different media and different genres as we move from literature to film, and from realism

or historical realism texts to primarily sci-fi films. In examining the difference between media and genre, I discuss the differences between the channels through which multi consciousness is represented and the different groups of work that multi consciousness appears in. There are also some cross-media examples of multi consciousness here that are within the same genre of sci-fi. With literature relying on the written or printed word on the page as its primary medium, we have seen writers deploy different literary techniques to encapsulate experiences of multi consciousness—writing from a dissociated, spectral third-person perspective, fragments from different timelines, spaces and selves, dialogue between selves. As I move into examining film, there are various other visual and auditory elements to consider. The films examined here make use of jump cuts, various colour palettes, camera angles, and a repurposing of sci-fi tropes. The shift in genre too, from primarily realist fiction to sci-fi film, emphasizes the merging of diasporic or displaced consciousness with technological consciousness.

In thinking through the merging of the diasporic with the technological, we begin with Salman Rushdie's concept of the imaginary homeland. Rushdie points to the world of the homeland that continues to move in the departed's imagination—"we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (428). Rushdie comes into contact with his own experience of the multiverse upon returning to Bombay after having lived half his life in England: "There it was; his name, our old address, the unchanged telephone number, as if we had never gone away...It was an eerie discovery. I felt as if I were being claimed, or informed that the facts of my faraway life were illusions, and that this continuity was the reality" (9). Rushdie looks up his father's name in the phonebook and finds the entry untouched by time and the fact of their departure—his childhood home too remains unscathed. To Rushdie, this brings to light the universe—in which Rushdie stays in Bombay—

that appears to have remained intact, unbroken, its existence continuing into the present. The fact of this pathway's existence also renders the life in England "unreal"—that his "real" life is and was lived here, in Bombay.

Rushdie notes the uncanny feeling that accompanied this experience of encountering this alternate universe, but also the uncanny feeling that had accompanied him throughout his life in England, the feeling that led to his return, to the life in England feeling unreal compared to the life in Bombay. The losses attached to this geographical dislocation oscillate between material and interior—community, family, property, language, culture, and a version of the self—a self teleologically different from the one that departs. The idea of home intersects, evidently, with identity—what we call home, or identify as *heimlich*, "homely," as we get from Freud (2), embeds itself in the ego. As such, ideas of homeland and familiarity inform our consciousness, and subsequently, our identities. If the motherland is more fantasy than factual, rendering the homely an unstable illusion, in addition to the new homeland remaining persistently "unhomely" the effect is a psychic splintering—a multiverse of the mind, multi consciousness. The decision to leave, or the enforced departure from, one's home country bares such cosmic weight; its enormity creates ripples that carry on into the lives of the displaced indefinitely. Rushdie comes up against his India "of the mind" and the India that exists in the present of his visit, realizing then that his India was a "version no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions" (10). Thinking Rushdie's experience through multiverse theory however shifts the idea of versions to verses—the India of his mind, the India of the past, the India he visits—all exist as their own continuities.

Multiverse theory is also a theory of haunting, and immigrant stories are often ghost stories—a life lived haunted by those left behind, including the self, the one still emmeshed in

the symbiosis of the home country, and all the lost versions of that self that could have been.

Ghost stories are also multiverse stories—counterpoints where multiple universes intersect, subjects who carry all of their ghosts in with them. Rushdie describes his experience of haunting as also one of mourning:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost” (10).

For Rushdie, to look back is “mutating” and annihilating—the self built in the universe of the departed is shattered by the act of looking back, at all that is lost and has changed, in realizing “home” can never be retrieved or returned to. Rushdie uses a Biblical metaphor—the pillar of salt—to exemplify the longing and guilt associated with looking back for the immigrant subject. Lot’s wife turns back to see her city of Sodom being destroyed, despite the angels’ warnings never to look back. She is turned into a pillar of salt as punishment—looking back is the betrayal of God’s plan, the signal of uncertainty, wavering faith, of longing for the home. Looking back, for the immigrant subject, can feel too like a dishonouring of the sacrifices made to get to the new land, an uncertainty about the path taken and the decisions made, a realization that the new land is not inherently better than the homeland. The illusion of salvation is shattered, the one who looks back is frozen in time for longing for the wasteland—a permanent specter left to haunt what has been left behind, unable to return, unable to move forward.

The relationship between haunting and mourning is particularly relevant in the context of displacement. Eng and Han re-examine notions of melancholia in a racialized context—their theory of racial melancholia is a “depathologized structure of feeling” in which the subject experiences a splitting of the psyche (344-8). They locate this discussion in Asian American immigrant experience:

The experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning. When one leaves one’s country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, one must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract—homeland, family, language, identity, property, status in community. In Freud’s theory of mourning, one works through and finds closure to these losses by investing in new objects—in the American Dream, for example. Our attention to the problematics of mimicry, ambivalence, and the stereotype, as well as the history of juridical exclusions of Asian Americans, reveals a social structure that prevents the immigrant family from fully assimilating. From another perspective, this structure might be said to deny him or her the capacity to invest in new objects (352).

As Eng and Han note, the immigrant subject is caught in melancholic cycle of a double loss—the loss of one’s country of origin and the loss of American ideals due to the inability to invest in new identity-objects. As such, the immigrant subject remains spectral and ghostly, identifying with the “lost object or ideal” (346)—the self left behind and the unobtainable American idealized self. A psychic “cleaving” also comes from the immigrant subject’s “faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time as he displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals” (349). The immigrant subject is thus cleaved by a yearning for belonging and the acceptance that this belonging will be denied by virtue of their race. The opposing pulls of

yearning and acceptance split the subject, off-shooting into multiple versions of the self created by unfulfilled desire and nihilistic acceptance. The cycle of mourning remains incomplete, leaving the immigrant subject entrapped in a liminal, haunting space.

The immigrant subject becomes a vessel—inhabited by all the versions of themselves that could have been or will be, the lives of those left behind, the lives instilled into the subject by the unfulfilled generations prior. As Eng and Han explain:

If the losses suffered by the first generation are not resolved and mourned in the process of assimilation—if libido is not replenished by the investment in new objects, new communities, and new ideals—then the melancholia that ensues from this condition can be transferred to a second generation... Can the hope of assimilation and mastery of the American dream also be transferred? If so, mourning and melancholia are re-enacted and lived out by the children in their own attempts to negotiate the American dream... The loss experienced by the parents' failure to achieve the American Dream—to achieve a standard of living greater than that they could putatively achieved in the homeland, is a loss transferred onto the child to “work out” and repair (353).

Transgenerational haunting, as theorized by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, is a phantom, a “formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious—for good reason. It passes—in a way yet to be determined—from the parent's unconscious into the child's” (173). The process of transgenerational haunting in the context of immigrant familial experience includes the transference of unfulfilled desires, dreams, and hopes for assimilation and success in the new home, alongside buried identities, secrets, and history that remains suppressed by the parent. Evidently, the incomplete cycle of mourning is transferred to the consciousness of the immigrant child. As Abraham and Torok elaborate: “The phantom's periodic and compulsive return lies

beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography" (173).

Transgenerational haunting is an experience of multi consciousness, of turning the subject into a puppet through which many stilled voices speak. When the voices of the parent and child clash, the subject faces extreme anguish and immobility—a stagnation created by the inability to move in any one direction.

Grace M. Cho reconfigures the ghost as “not just a psychic representation of the dead or repressed but as a body assembled to transmit traumatic memory or a force of desiring-production” (40). Cho borrows Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desiring-production, a feature of the body as desiring-machine, in which desire is not just a yearning in relation to lack, but rather a productive force that is “pure multiplicity...an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity” (42). Desire is a connective force:

The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature: "and . . ." "and then . . ." This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow (the breast—the mouth). And because the first machine is in turn connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction. Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented (5).

Cho argues that ghosts can be byproducts of transgenerational trauma, and these ghosts can be assemblages of traumatic memory and desiring-production—not the unfulfilled desires themselves as transferrable objects, but the mechanism of desiring-production is implanted in the new host; the force of the production of the act of desiring is carried over to the next generation.

As such, desiring-production is connective between generations, and subjects the immigrant child to the possession of a multi consciousness. The immigrant child not only mourns for what they do not know they have lost, but also yearns for what they do not know they have left behind or cannot acquire.

Cho furthermore “reconceptualizes the self as necessarily entangled with other bodies and unconscious experiences” and as such, considers the unconscious a space of multiplicity (46-7). Through transgenerational haunting, the child of immigrants comes to possess dislocated memories, traumas, and desires that had even yet reached cognition in the consciousness of the parents. Anne Anlin Cheng reads Freud’s understanding of melancholia as a “kind of consumption...The melancholic eats the lost object—feeds on it” (8). The unlived lives of the parent are absorbed by the child, sustaining and splitting them. Cheng further delineates the difference between the experience of multiplicity and fragmentation—“a body occupying several places” versus a “body in pieces” (53). I argue that multi consciousness is both an experience of multiplicity and of fragmentation—of occupying several places at once, and of being split into multiple pieces.

I. Transgenerational Trauma in the Multiverse: *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022)

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) uses the metaphor of the multiverse to encapsulate the multi consciousnesses of an immigrant mother and her daughter. The film begins with a more traditional narrative of immigrant experience, introducing Evelyn Wang, a Chinese-American woman running a laundromat being audited by the IRS. The narrative explodes when her husband Waymond is suddenly possessed by an alternate version of himself who enlightens her on the multiverse and the many Evelyns that exist within it, but also its impending destruction at the hands of Jobu Tupaki—the alternate version of their daughter who seeks the annihilation of Evelyn, herself, and all possible universes. When Evelyn begins to “verse-jump”—jumping between universes and selves that allows the jumper-self to acquire the memories, skills, and traits of the alter-selves they possess—she is both multiplied and fragmented. The lens of the camera shatters but does not break, and Evelyn's face is sliced into multiple segments, with each segment moving out of sync (19:04). She occupies multiple universes and selves, and the totality of Evelyn in what is described as the “worst” possible universe, is fragmented, as each of these alter-selves inhabit her.

While Evelyn's multiplicity and fragmentation serve a narrative function in reading the film as a sci-fi—she is literally jumping across universes and selves—it is also evident how multiplicity and fragmentation stem from Evelyn's mourning, desire, and displacement. Alpha-Waymond understands Evelyn's inner turmoil: “With every passing moment you fear you have missed your chance to make something of your life” (22:28). As an immigrant subject, every moment and every decision bears great life-altering weight—“Every tiny decision creates another branching universe” (34:09). Evelyn is haunted by the person she has become and all of

the people she has never been. The multiverse is an externalization of her interior landscape—her multi consciousness where all of these selves reside.

The alter-selves Evelyn encounters are not ones she hasn't already seen and felt glimpses of before. She revisits the moment Waymond asks her to move to America with him, and again the glass splits (45:49). This is a decisive moment in Evelyn's history—on the left side of the screen Evelyn and Waymond embrace, while on the right, Evelyn walks away. We see a digitized version of Evelyn's lifepaths, where "leave home" and "stay home" create the ultimate crossroads—numerous branches fan out from each pathway. This is the breaking point that creates all the counterpoints in Evelyn's multiverse. To leave home or to stay home is the decision in every immigrant's life that sets the grounds for multi consciousness—to be a body that inhabits multiple places simultaneously, a body inhabited by other consciousnesses, and to be a fragmented body, split across time and place. One version of Evelyn who stays becomes a famous martial arts actress, living out the dreams of the Evelyn who left. This alter-Evelyn always lived on in Evelyn, and the confirmation of this doubt—that her life would've been better had she never married Waymond and come to America—justifies her resentment.

Evelyn takes all of this resentment and transfers it to her daughter, Joy. Joy inherits and is inhabited by Evelyn's unfulfilled dreams and desires, all the people Evelyn left behind and could never be. Evelyn's hopes for her life in America become expectations for Joy's life. Joy's alter-self, Jobu Tupaki, is said to suffer from "mind fracturing"—in the Alphaverse, Evelyn "saw her potential" and pushes Joy "beyond her limit...Now her mind experiences every world, every possibility, at the exact same time" (50:40). Joy thrashes around in pain, her body haloed by a plethora of alternate selves (50:30). The consequence, Waymond notes, is that Joy now "has seen too much" and has "lost any sense of morality, any belief in objective truth" (50:53). Evelyn

instills in Joy the condition of continuous possibility—that she can, and should, always be doing more, doing better, that she should always be something other than who she is. To be enough she must be everything, everywhere, all at once. With the ticking of her head, like a dial between stations, Joy/Jobu jumps between universes and selves seamlessly (33:25). She can bend reality to her will—turning men into confetti, guns into vapes, blood into organic ketchup (54:54-55:48)—she has traversed universe after universe, and in not a single one has she found an Evelyn who understands her. Evelyn lived with the constant fear of missing her chances to make something of her life and ensured her daughter would not do the same—in all of their encounters. She has created a daughter who perceives all possibilities, all selves, all pathways at once, and as such, desires nothing but annihilation.

In the present world, Evelyn and Joy have a distant relationship—their conversations consist of continual overlapping (Joy in English, Evelyn switching between English and Mandarin), yelling from across rooms, being distracted by other ongoings, continuous chaos and movement—“Mom, just wait,” Joy asks as she chases after the ever-moving Evelyn, “Wait? Wait” No time to wait today” Evelyn responds as she descends the staircase (5:37). Joy is attempting to ask to bring her girlfriend Becky to meet her grandfather, Evelyn’s father, Gong Gong. “You are very lucky your mother is open to you dating a girl” (5:58) Evelyn begins in a mix of English and Mandarin, “But Gong Gong, his heart cannot take it” (6:12). Evelyn, through her continuous movement and cutting-off of the subject, her concealment of Becky, reveals her own discomfort with Joy’s queerness that does not go unnoticed by Joy. Jobu Tupaki then becomes the perfect scapegoat—when Evelyn first encounters her, the Joy from the Alphaverse, she makes known her true feelings: “It’s you. You’re the reason my daughter doesn’t call anymore. Why she dropped out of college and gets tattoos. You are why she thinks she is gay”

(56:43-56:59). Evelyn's whisper as she utters the word *gay* further announces her shame and disappointment—to her, Joy has made choices that are absurd, and entirely in opposition to what she wanted and expected Joy to be—obedient and “normal.” She views Joy's queerness as confusion. Evelyn sees Jobu Tupaki as having possessed Joy, an outside force that has created this daughter she does not understand. She fails to recognize that she created Joy and Jobu—“Every version of Joy is Jobu Tupaki. You can't separate us” (1:32:40) Jobu tells her. Joy is not possessed—she is splintered, she inhabits all of the selves denied to her by Evelyn, and becomes resentful, like Evelyn. This resentment builds, creating Jobu, the Alpha-Joy who has felt all of the pains each Joy has endured in every world, and decides that annihilation—of the self, and of everything, is the only way out.

Jobu creates the “Everything Bagel”—an immense black hole—that contains “everything,” all of her “hopes and dreams,” her “pain and guilt” (63-4) as a thinly veiled metaphor for suicide. She admits, later, that the intention behind the bagel wasn't to swallow the multiverse, but to end her own life: “It was to destroy myself... I wanted to see if I could escape, like actually die” (1:42:35). Evelyn has always been everything, everywhere all at once—rarely is she seen in stillness, in silence, without chaos. Prior to even unlocking the ability to verse-jump, Evelyn is first seen in her small dining room, a “still life of chaos” with “workout equipment, self-help and inspirational business books, an old TV playing a Chinese soap opera, a live security feed for the laundromat downstairs, a rice cooker spewing steam, & a microwave with one minute to go” (1). Evelyn is never in one present moment—she constantly strives to do more, to be more, to have more, and time is working against her, dissolving like steam into air. This is Evelyn's trauma from her father—of never being enough for him. When Evelyn sees the totality of her life, her entry into the world is a view of her father's disappointed face when the

doctor says “I’m sorry. It’s a girl” (14:23). “You’re not my daughter anymore” (14:47) Gong Gong says when Evelyn makes the decision to leave for America with Waymond. Her life begins to crowd—Evelyn sits in the front desk of the laundromat with rows upon rows of laundry supplies around her in a time-lapse; people move past her still body in shadowy blurs as her gaze remains fixed on nothingness (15:05). Time and space are luxuries not afforded to people like Evelyn—yet internally, her sense of time and space is expanded. As Cho describes, one of the core sensations associated with trauma is the sense of being “continually uprooted” (79). Evelyn feels she must be everything, everywhere all at once to appease Gong Gong, and also cannot help but imaginatively live out the multiple lives that could have been when faced with the immense isolation and disappointment of her life in America.

Cho further describes trauma as having permeated “the cellular memory of survivors” (83). This perpetual state of uprootedness, of chaos, this multi consciousness, is what Evelyn passes on to Joy: “Not a single moment will go by without every other universe screaming for your attention. Never fully there. Just a lifetime of fractured moments, contradictions, and confusion (1:38:05-24) Joy describes to Evelyn. The metaphor of the multiverse here functions to illustrate the condition of multi consciousness—both Evelyn and Joy are plagued by possibility and the pressure to be more than what they are. The present moment and the present self are never satisfactory—one lifetime and one personhood are not enough to make amends for the disappointment, the sacrifice, to regain what was lost, to make it big in America, to fulfill the desires of the parent and of the self. Joy is pushed a step further—she carries on the weight of Evelyn’s unfulfilled dreams from Gong Gong and Evelyn’s immense losses and sacrifices, leading her to the “mind fracturing” and annihilation-seeking she experiences. The two women

are only offered partial presents and live as fragmented subjects torn apart by contradictory desires—parental desire versus one’s own desire.

What Evelyn gains through verse-jumping are not just abilities that aid her in combat against Jobu, but also a new understanding of Joy. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* at its core is a mother-daughter narrative, of two women together in a present moment, separated by time, place, language, and culture but united by blood and inherited trauma. Circles are a running motif throughout the film, like Jobu’s “everything bagel,” a statue of two figures bending backwards and linking arms and legs appears can be seen (1:02:45), they permeate Joy’s consciousness. What Joy seeks is connection through understanding—the wholeness of mother and daughter. It is not the emptiness in the middle—of the bagel, of the statue—but the framing connection, the bending around the emptiness, the forming of something around nothing, around what has been lost. Evelyn asks Jobu what she wants, and Jobu responds with: “let me help you open up your mind” (59: 48). Grabbing Evelyn’s hands, she splits Evelyn’s middle finger from her ring finger, creating a V-shape (59:57). Jobu inserts her own hands into Evelyn, repeating “open up” (1:00:00). The insertion of hand into hand has both the implications of lesbianism and birth—Jobu forces Evelyn into connection, to see through her eyes. Evelyn opens her palms and sees through the canal they have created (1:00:13). For a brief moment, she sees Joy’s pain, the collapse, what “happens when you really put everything on a bagel” (1:01:07), or, what happens when you put everything onto your child.

Some of the other universes Evelyn enters are entirely foreign to her—much like America was initially. Through verse-jumping, Evelyn discovers a universe “off the map” where humans have hot dogs for fingers (58:16). In this universe, Evelyn is also in a romantic relationship with Deirdre, the auditor, whom Evelyn hates. Here, Evelyn must learn to love and

confront all that she is disgusted by—all that she finds abject—manifested through the absurd image of hot dog fingers, being in a romantic relationship with her archnemesis the auditor. Evelyn gags when watching a couple on TV caressing each other with their unusual fingers (59:21). Evelyn, in the world of her disgust—having to use one’s feet to perform tasks—must now confront her discomfort with queerness. “This is wrong!” Evelyn shouts when Deidre approaches her (1:27:15). Evelyn and Deidre have matching haircuts, wear matching outfits, and have portraits of their cats on the walls, indicating their obvious intimacy and symmetry in this universe. Evelyn from our universe brings her disgust, disrupting this Evelyn’s once-happy life. Evelyn’s transformation occurs when she learns to lean into the unknown, to open herself up to what she doesn’t understand. She learns from Waymond to approach life with kindness—Waymond too carries a circular symbol with him, that of a googly eye. The googly eye is the inverse of the bagel; it has everything at the centre, no matter how small or insignificant, holding together in the face of vast nothingness. When Evelyn wears the googly eye on her forehead (1:54:33) she opens up her “mind’s eye,” she sees the world through the lens of kindness, through openness, and as such, through Joy’s eyes. When she returns to the hot dog universe, she kisses and holds Deidre as Deidre plays the piano for her. “You’re not unlovable!” (1:52:53) she screams at her. In sharing this with Deidre, Evelyn learns that this is what both she and Joy need to hear as well.

EEAAO is the most recent object of discussion in this dissertation and also the most explicit illustration of multi consciousness. We are taken on Evelyn’s journey through her attempts at funnelling herself into the ideal daughter, the ideal minority—dreams she is unable to achieve and as such, ones she passes onto her daughter—to embracing the fragments of her identity by perceiving the interconnectedness of all of her selves, of all timelines, and universes.

Evelyn was once weighed down by the failed possibilities of her life—finding herself constantly “drifting off” from the reality she was so discontent in. Moving to America was unfulfilling—and Evelyn (as represented by her house full of unfinished projects and failed hobbies) became overwhelmed by all the people she could not be. As Evelyn encounters different versions of herself, all the different lives she has lived—the ones she could only imagine before, had the circumstances of her life turned out differently—she is confronted with the idea that her identity is not confined to a single existence. As her individual awareness is no longer confined to a singular perceptive, she becomes a more understanding person—and a mother who seeks a deeper connection with her daughter. She realizes too that she does not regret the decisions she has made nor the life she currently lives.

The use of the multiverse as a metaphor aids in discussing immigrant experience as one of multiplicity. Multiverse theory encapsulates the experience of immigration—of being in multiple places at once, perceiving multiple realities simultaneously, of feeling and living all the lives that should have or could have been, the lives that have been lost. The movement towards the multiverse as metaphor marks a shift completely away from metaphors of the double and discussions of double consciousness. In an interesting turn, the film also gestures towards the universe as a metaphor for consciousness, conceiving of consciousness and its potentials on a far larger scale than what we’ve seen, underscoring the expanded ways we should be thinking about consciousness and individuality instead of the limited and linear narratives that have proliferated mass media.

When Evelyn dons the googly eye, her “third” eye, she inverts the void Joy, who suffers from “mind fracturing” creates. Evelyn inhabits multi consciousness as an opening up of perceptions, a framework of interconnectivity, to counter Joy’s version of multiplicity that leads

in collapse. The trauma Joy endures however is not easily reconciled in a neat narrative at the end of the film. Evelyn is able to see that she and Joy must spend time apart to find their way back to each other again.

II. Multilayered Temporalities, Multiple Selves: Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998) and *Arrival* (2016)

For Deleuze, one of the most interesting things to come out of cinema is the representation of time. The invention of cinema brings what Deleuze calls the “movement-image”—not “an image to which movement is added...but a section which is mobile” (*Cinema I* 2). From its conception, cinema aims to recreate the human eye and mind—human perception—but this renders the viewpoint of film “fixed” and as such, cinema must evolve, and does so through the innovations of “montage, the mobile camera and the emancipation of the viewpoint” (3). The movement-image must be created with image and movement as two simultaneous elements. Deleuze categorizes this evolution as the movement of the shot from being a spatial category to a temporal one (3), as we move into cinema’s ability to create the “impression of continuity” through movement (5). The problem with representing time via another medium is that time itself is inherently complex and our understanding of it is continuously evolving. Deleuze puts forth a simultaneous and non-chronological sense of time:

It is true that these regions (my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life, etc.), appear to succeed each other. But they succeed each other only from the point of view of former presents which marked the limit of each of them. They coexist, in contrast, from the point of view of the actual present which each time represents their common limit or the most contracted of them. What Fellini says is Bergsonian: 'We are constructed in memory; we are *simultaneously* childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity.' What happens when we search for a recollection? We have to put ourselves into the past in general, then we have to choose between the regions: in which one do we think that the recollection is hidden, huddled up

waiting for us and evading us?... We have to jump into a chosen region, even if we have to return to the present in order to make another jump (*Cinema 2* 99).

Interestingly, Deleuze describes time in terms of space—we jump to and from different regions of time and selfhood, each existing simultaneously with and in relation to the present.

Furthermore, there are simultaneous selves that occupy the present body. What's interesting is Deleuze's use of Fellini where we have a self constructed of future memory. Maturity appears as a final stage of life. Is there memory in us constructed of future maturity and finality? Deleuze borrows St. Augustine's conception of time: "there is a *present of the future*, a *present of the present* and a *present of the past*, all implicated in the event...simultaneous and inexplicable" (100). This is the paradox of time: "An accident is about to happen, it happens, it has happened; but equally it is at the same time that it will take place, has already taken place and is in the process of taking place; so that, before taking place, it has not taken place, and, taking place, will not take place" (100). The possibility of this singular present presupposes the existence of multiple other presents. The paradox of the self for Deleuze, like the movement-image, is that we are conceived of and exist in constant motion in multiple directions, that the facts of our deaths are inscribed into us at the simultaneous moment of our births.

Arrival, directed Denis Villeneuve and based on the novella "Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang, explores the complex relationship between linguistic relativity and temporal perception. The film and story revolve around Dr. Louise Banks (Amy Adams), a professor recruited by the military to decipher an alien language. As Louise begins to delve deeper into the alien language (a logogram-based alphabet) the profound interplay between language, temporality, and her multi consciousness being begins to unravel. The heptapod language is a visual system not bound by linear time or cause-and-effect structures, but rather a more elastic concept of time that

encompasses all times simultaneously. The heptapods exhibit a higher level of consciousness and temporal awareness, and gift this to Louise through sharing their language with her. Ian, Louise's colleague and later, partner, describes the heptapod language as: "Imagine you wanted to write a sentence using two hands, starting from either side. You would have to know each word you wanted to use, as well as how much space they would occupy" (55:15-55:25). Each sentence has its beginning and ending at the time of its conception.

Everything, Everywhere All at Once and *Arrival* introduce new ways of representing time in film in addition to new ways of representing consciousness. As Brian McHale describes, heteroglossic texts traditionally include "juxtaposing and interweaving a variety of languages, styles, registers, genres, and intertextual citations; yet their heteroglossic form is held in check by a unifying monological perspective" (166). The issue with layering a narrative is that it foregrounds the issue of accessibility, which in turn, foregrounds issues of boundaries. Those in the present, in one world, must be able to imagine and conceive of the other time or world in order to be transported into it. *EEAAO* and *Arrival* make use of multiple simultaneous timelines as a heteroglossic technique in order to convey the experience of multi consciousness using the unifying viewpoint of a singular female character—a mother—as the vehicle (the body) through which we are ushered into the new world(s) reconfigured by new conceptions of time. Inger H. Dalsgaard identifies three modes of time travel, or "alternative time perception" in contemporary literature:

Orthological time has been figured as a unidirectional, linear "arrow" on which the passage of time is measured and predictable... Though traditionally conceived time travel does reverse passage along this time line 180 degrees to voyage into the past, it still respects those basic rules: a conventional time traveler does not change the concept of the

arrow of time...A second is that of a curved, rotating, or circular time line, which allows (external) return...A third image exemplifies ideas of coexistent (multiple, parallel, or radiating) time lines...of multiple, coexisting identities (116-7).

EEAAO and *Arrival* deal with this third conception of time where “presents” and identities are multiplied. If identities are multiplied, consciousness must be in turn multiplied. Both *EEAAO*’s Evelyn and *Arrival*’s Louise undergo a transformative crisis (via motherhood) which allows them to tap into and connect with the consciousnesses of their other selves in other timelines. They perceive multiple layers of “presents” and reality, they learn from their other selves, and as such, occupy each self simultaneously.

In *EEAAO* Evelyn experiences multiple possible lifepaths and unifies the multiple experiences and selves in her “present” body. In *Arrival*, Louise experiences only one lifepath but experiences it in its totality and simultaneity. Evelyn inhabits multiple “presents” of multiple lives, and Louise inhabits the different “presents” of multiple timelines. Both women connect their consciousnesses to other versions of themselves—selves that exist across universes and/or temporalities, and in doing so, multiply the consciousness of the present body. Villeneuve’s *Arrival* takes up the task of representing this circular idea of time through the logograms the aliens produce—in which they must know the beginning and ending of the sentence at the time of writing—in addition to jump-cuts, retrieval cues, and colour-coding Louise’s different timelines.

Villeneuve runs through multiple scenes in various timelines in quick succession. At the beginning of the film, we are introduced to Louise as a mother and a not-yet mother—a woman remembering the future she will have with her unborn child Hannah, at the moment of her conception. In the first four minutes of the film we witness Louise and Hannah’s life together

from beginning to end. Hannah's childhood is coloured in an organic palette with soft lighting (2:53). The colouring appears to indicate that time has passed, that this is a memory of the past. Hannah's adolescence, the end of her life, takes on an overwhelmingly blue and cool palette (3:18). The contrast is low, and the shadows are deepened—it is difficult to make out the figures and faces. Louise's present is also quite muted and darkened (8:05). Visually, some tension is already present in the rapidly changing timelines. Louise's present and her "past" are colour-coded similarly, suggesting they aren't too far separated in time. Yet the present haunted by darkness and emptiness—shots of Louise in large and empty spaces permeate the film.

The film makes use of retrieval cues in a way that challenges the chronology of time and the unity of consciousness. As Louise is in discussion with the U.S. military regarding the situation with the heptapods, the phrase "non-zero-sum game" (1:24:12) triggers what appears to be a memory of using the term with her daughter Hannah. As the film unravels, these memories are revealed to be future-memories—having familiarized herself with the heptapod written language, Heptapod B, Louise can now tap into the future as she would memories of the past. Louise converses with her future self—the blue of the conference room flips immediately to the warmth of Louise's home as her present self passes the term Hannah was looking for, "non-zero-sum game," on to her future self (1:24:12). The heptapod language expands and multiplies Louise's consciousness—she is now connected to other versions of herself and shares knowledge and experience across timelines.

The film and the short story it is based on—"Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang—work through the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or the theory that language affects its speakers' worldview and cognition, and thus people's perceptions are relative to their spoken language (Leavitt 2). In the film, Louise discusses the hypothesis with her working partner and future husband Ian. Ian

says of the theory: “if you immerse yourself into a foreign language, then you can actually rewire your brain” (1:01:58-1:02:02). As Louise and Ian talk, we enter Louise’s consciousness—with her, we hear birds (that aren’t in the room) chirping from some other timeline. When she finishes speaking, she turns to one of the heptapods, who appears to be in the room with her (1:02:42). Sights and sounds from other temporalities intrude on Louise’s present. Her consciousness is multiplied—she perceives other “presents” in tandem with her current one. What’s interesting in Villeneuve’s film and Chiang’s story is that the acquisition of a new language is the mind-opening mechanism. The discussion of language in relation to the splitting and multiplying of consciousness is quite often discussed by writers of diaspora and displacement. Madeleine Thien writes:

In English, consciousness and unconsciousness are parts of a vertical plane, so that we wake up ↑ and we fall ↓ asleep and we sink ↓ into a coma. Chinese uses the horizontal line, so that to wake is to cross a border towards consciousness → and to faint is to go back ←. Meanwhile, time itself is vertical so that last year is ‘the year above’ ↑ and next year is ‘the year below’ ↓. The day before yesterday is the day ‘in front’ ↑ and the day after tomorrow is the day ‘behind’ ↓. This means that future generations are not the generations ahead, but the ones behind. Therefore, to look into the future one must turn around (199).

Language alters our consciousness by constructing our relationship to time, to even consciousness itself. In Thien’s example, to move forward into the future in English is moving forward into the already-past in Chinese languages. In English, the coupling of the future and forward motion appears natural, but evidently this natural pairing is not universal. Chiang’s story is not of diaspora but offers a unique description of the way language alters consciousness and

the possibility of simultaneity and multiplicity. Chiang, an American writer born to Chinese immigrant parents, has stated that while “race inevitable plays a role” in his life it’s not something he’s wanted to write about: “I’m hesitant about making my protagonists Asian Americans because I’m wary of readers trying to interpret my stories as being about race when they aren’t. People have looked for a racial subtext in my work in a way I don’t think they would have if my family name were Davis or Miller” (“The Occasional Writer”). As such, I am not discussing “Story of Your Life” as a story about race, but Chiang’s representation of simultaneity, multiplicity and the impact bilingualism/multilingualism has on consciousness, is a shared thematic structure in contemporary diasporic literature I want to investigate.

The way language is manipulated in Chiang’s novella is striking, particularly in terms of tense. Interestingly, the narration is directed to Banks’ daughter, who is simultaneously not-yet born and already dead. The story is addressed to empty space—a phantom who exists in Banks’s consciousness after the aliens have granted her the gift of their language, and with that, the ability to perceive all time (past, present, future) simultaneously. Chiang makes use of complex grammatical structures to establish this simultaneity:

Your father is about to ask me the question. This is the most important moment in our lives, and I want to pay attention, note every detail...Right now your dad and I have been married for about two years, living on Ellis Avenue; when we move out you’ll still be too young to remember the house, but we’ll show you pictures of it, tell you stories about it. I’d love to tell you the story of this evening, the night you’re conceived, but the right time to do that would be when you’re ready to have children of your own, and we’ll never get that chance (111).

“About to” and “right now” are adverbial phrases indicating time—the immediate future, and this very moment in present time. To follow then with “when we move out” indicates a shift to future tense, but the additional context indicates a certain future, challenging the expectations of narration—Banks is a narrator who experiences the present simultaneously with the future, and thus the present is also her past. Even more challenging is that the text is also entirely in second-person, addressed to a child who is both unborn and already deceased. “I remember one afternoon when you are five years old, after you have come home from kindergarten. You’ll be coloring with your crayons while I grade papers” (99-100) she recounts. Again, the grammatical construction of each sentence leaves us unbound by time. “I remember...when you are five” instead of when you were five. Louise is remembering the future, a daughter who is not yet of the world and already gone from it. “You’ll be”—you will be—colouring, someday in the future, of which Louise can recall perfectly. Louise speaks as a woman not-yet a mother, a mother, and a grieving mother.

It is noteworthy that it is the “alien” language that produces the expanse of human consciousness—that in possessing more than one language, there is a sense of inhabiting more of the world, in differing temporalities. As Viet Thanh Nguyen writes in *The Sympathizer* (2015):

We were displaced persons, but it was time more than space that defined us. While the distance to return to our lost country was far but finite, the number of years it would take to close that distance was potentially infinite. Thus, for displaced people, the first question was always about time: When can I return? Speaking of punctuality, I said to Madame, your clock is set to the wrong time. No, she said, rising to fetch the beer. It’s set to Saigon time. Of course it was. How could I not have seen it? Saigon time was fourteen hours off, although if one judged time by this clock, it was we who were fourteen hours

off. Refugee, exile, immigrant—whatever species of displaced human we were, we did not simply live in two cultures, as celebrants of the great American melting pot imagined. Displaced people also lived in two time zones, the here and the there, the present and the past, being as we were reluctant time travelers. But while science fiction imagined time travelers as moving forward or backward in time, this timepiece demonstrated a different chronology. The open secret of the clock, naked for all to see, was that we were only going in circles (192).

The theme of a divided consciousness via multiple temporalities persists in Chiang and Nguyen's writing. Nguyen studies the symbol of the clock in the home of a Vietnamese refugee, Madame, who refuses to change the time. The displaced live in multiple time zones, and approach the world through multiple relationalities and understandings of it. The circular clockface Nguyen points out, suggests, like Chiang, the simultaneity of the experience over linearity. Immigration is not an experience of moving forward to a new country, a new life, and a new language, with the past easily shed and left to decay. It remains imminently present. The displaced occupy multiple spaces, multiple timelines, and as such, have multiple selves that exist simultaneously.

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's script for *EEAAO* reflects a similar splitting and simultaneity. The dialogue is often written in columns, with Mandarin on the left and the English translation on the right. There are also bits of English in the Chinese dialogue, and bits of "broken" English in the English dialogue, where we run into the untranslatable.

EVELYN

Later. Maybe. I need to
finish this before 爸醒來
你先去 steam the table cloths
for tonight. Then paint over
the ceiling water stain.

EVELYN

Later. Maybe. I need to
finish this before *my father*
wakes up. Go steam the table
cloths for tonight. Then
paint over the ceiling water
stain.

She gets a text message on her laptop. The sound of a POT OF WATER BOILING OVER in the kitchen.

WAYMOND

已經辦好了。對了，我剛剛跟Byron提
到晚上的事...他的men's choir
準備了一個fun surprise給爸爸。

WAYMOND

Already did. Also, I just
talked to Byron about
tonight. The men's choir have
a very fun surprise for—(2).

On the page, there are two Evelyns and two Waymonds, having two conversations simultaneously. There is a clear divide between Evelyn and Waymond in Chinese and Evelyn and Waymond in English. The two bleed into each other, but they are separate spheres. In the film, this manifests as Evelyn and Waymond switching between languages, almost with each sentence, sometimes repeating a phrase in Mandarin and in English (1:59). Displacement—multiple senses of time, multiple languages, multiple understandings of the world—creates this split, this multiplicity, these simultaneous presents.

While race does not play a part in Chiang's original story, there is a U.S.A versus China subplot in Villeneuve's film adaptation. The Chinese are criticized early on for their use of

mahjong as a means of communicating with the heptapods. Louise argues that communicating through a game structures every conversation around loss and gain: “Every idea expressed through opposition, victory, defeat” (1:04:46). *Mahjong* is a strategy-based tile game in which tiles are drawn and discarded—a game relying on both skill and luck—until one player has a legal winning hand. Culturally however, *mahjong* is often played around major holidays with loved ones, and an invitation to play is often considered a gesture of friendship. When Louise finally asks the heptapods about their purpose on Earth, Louise translates their reply as “offer weapon” (1:06:53). Immediately after, China and Russia “go off the grid” (1:08:53) when the Chinese translate the heptapod’s purpose as “use weapon” (1:09:40). Interestingly, Louise and the Chinese linguists end up at similar translations. The Chinese government decides to shut down the linguistic operation and opt for “destruction” if the aliens refuse to depart (1:19:23). The character of General Shang, chairman of the People’s Liberation Army, portrays China as merely an impulsive and war-hungry country. The U.S. army is portrayed in a similar vein, preparing for war when China does, but on their side, they have Louise.

One of Louise’s defining features is that she is multilingual. At the beginning of the film, she is recruited by the U.S. army because of her previous work with them translating Farsi, and later her translation of the Sanskrit word for war—“a desire for more cows” over her colleague’s translation: “an argument” (14:55). Already, Louise is the quintessential compassionate American hero who sees beyond the confining language of war. This is perhaps why she is the only character gifted the language of Heptapod B which allows her to perceive the unity of time—and the unity of the nations. Due to Louise’s expanded consciousness because of her fluency in multiple languages, she is already attuned to the simultaneity and multiplicity of temporality. When Louise becomes fully immersed in Heptapod B, she is able to link her

consciousness to the consciousness of her future self. She enters a future memory of a gala with General Shang, who gives her his private number (1:40:25). “What do I say?” Louise of the present asks her future self. She taps into that consciousness again—“You told me my wife’s dying words” Shang says to Louise, and Louise repeats his words from the future into the present (1:42:25). The film flips from the warm palette of Louise in the future, having succeeded in changing General Shang’s mind, to the cool blue of the present, on the cusp of mass destruction, and between Shang’s Mandarin and Louise’s. Interestingly, Villeneuve chose to keep General Shang’s wife’s words concealed, subtitling Louise and Shang with only “(Speaking Mandarin)” (1:42:40). Scriptwriter Heisserer revealed the translation of the final line: “In war there are no winners, only widows” (“The Mystery Line”). With this knowledge, Louise saves the world: “You’re the reason for this unification” General Shang tells her (1:40:07).

Louise surrenders to her multi consciousness by the end of the film, and as such, achieves unity amongst her differing selves and humanity. She gives her daughter a palindrome name, Hannah, to symbolize Louise’s ability to see her and Hannah’s life from start to finish. Hannah, as a name, is perfectly symmetrical and can be read in either direction. Louise is able to see life in its simultaneity, to read it any which way. The film and text are largely about themes of fate, free will and determinism. The film ends with an interesting voiceover from Louise as we flip through scenes of her future, ones she is experiencing in the present, as she embraces Ian. Louise says: “Despite knowing the journey and where it leads, I embrace it” (1:46:35). The use of “embrace” is noteworthy and can be read in multiple ways. Louise seems two possible outcomes: that she accepts the realization that she has no free will, that life will run its course as she has seen it, or that because she has seen the life she will live, she chooses and wants to live that life. Louise grips tightly onto Ian’s body, symbolizing her decision (1:50:38). She is embracing her

life: holding it tightly and closely, and accepting it as it is and will be. Louise's multi consciousness does not lead to destruction, but rather acceptance and unity. While she sees all time at once, she is no longer overwhelmed by the possibilities. She embraces the path she is on.

In thinking through multi consciousness, Chiang and Villeneuve posit the possibility of multi consciousness as a potentially universal structure. In the film and novella, polyglot Louise, who is racially undermarked in the novella and a white-American woman in the film, becomes radically displaced in space and time in her meetings with the aliens. The dichotomy of "us versus them" shifts upon their arrival, and the power struggles that ensue between the humans becomes mute in the face of potential annihilation. It is perhaps her already expanded perspective and understanding of the multiplicity of reality via her access to multiple languages that allows her to be perceptive to this multi consciousness she is gifted, and it is her multi consciousness that saves humanity from the single-lensed perspective of those in power.

Conclusion: New Metaphors of Multi Consciousness

In 1974, Wilfred Watson discussed Marshall McLuhan's use of multi consciousness in "The Place Marie Dialogues" in which McLuhan conceived of multi consciousness occurring due to the "multiplicity of movements" via multi-media—the "shifts in sensibility, the difference between script and print cultures, between the visual sense ratios of the nineteenth century and the audile-tactile ratios of the twentieth" (199-200). The mediums have changed quite drastically since, as we move into the realms of cyberspace, virtual reality, and the metaverse. The various media platforms have shifted modes of perception and understanding, and the contrasting experiences between script-based cultures to print culture to digital culture has had a profound impact on consciousness formation. By highlighting the shifts in consciousness via the shifts in media technologies and cultures, McLuhan conceives of multi consciousness as emerging from the interplay between individual and collective consciousness and media consumption and production. Conceived of this way, multi consciousness itself will only continue to evolve with further developments of new technologies, new discoveries about consciousness and the universe(s).

Yet as we've seen, multi consciousness emerges more assuredly in texts of displacement. The figure of multi consciousness explored here is further multiplied and multilayered beyond the technological environment. As we move through the body of texts spanning the last fifty-two years (1970-2022) and disparate displaced peoples—African-, Indigenous-, and Asian-Americans—the experiences of multiply-marginalized subjects have been explored. Metaphors of the double turn into metaphors of multiplicity and questions around hybridity. Evidently, this shared structure of feeling is emerging in contemporary texts and film—even more directly with multiverse works—to communicate an understudied mode of contemporary consciousness in

displaced peoples, a consciousness formed in reaction to transgenerational trauma, haunting by ghosts of selves past and could-have-been, and the extreme divisions of body/mind created through the development of distasteful selves and consciousnesses. This dissertation is a springboard into further examinations of multi consciousness, as this framework can certainly be applied to the fictional works of other authors who offer different experiences of multi consciousness, new ways of exploring multiply-marginalized identities.

I describe multi consciousness, in Raymond Williams' terms, a shared structure of feeling, in part because at the time of starting this dissertation, multi consciousness had not fully emerged in public consciousness as a concrete metaphor for the particular experiences faced by displaced peoples: "We find some art expressing feelings which the society, in its general character could not express" (89). The texts from the 1970s begin to bring to surface the pattern, to articulate the condition of multi consciousness as it branches off from experiences of double consciousness. As we move closer to the present day, new technologies and new perceptions of our universe at large present further avenues to express the condition of multi consciousness. *Everything, Everywhere All at Once* is the most lucid example of multi consciousness discussed here and brings us nearly to the present moment. The metaphor of the multiverse provides a direct visual for the experience of multi consciousness. The implementation of the multiverse narrative explicitly draws the connection between displacement and the multiplicity of consciousness. The multiverse narrative is a narrative of unfulfilled desire, of alternate selves, of parallel homes, of various conflicting timelines and tongues, of universes that overcrowd and overwhelm the individual mind. When I began the dissertation in 2018, I had observed the patterns, the structure of feeling that arched across this disparate group of texts, but *Everything, Everywhere All at Once* in 2022 was the anticipated final piece that expressed, with clarity, the

inexpressible. With the immense success of *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, a film very overtly about multi consciousness, and estimated to be the most awarded film of all time, it is evident multi consciousness and metaphors of multiplicity are particularly resonant at this present moment.

As Valle and Eckartsberg note, “metaphors...form the very ground of human consciousness; perceived reality *is* metaphorical. Every act of perception carries us *beyond* ourselves into the world. Metaphor literally means ‘to carry’ (*pherein*) ‘beyond’ (*meta*)” (xxi). Reality relies on our ability to create and cross the bridges between our internal and external worlds, between our individual and collective experience. The metaphor, at the heart of language, is the vehicle that carries us through these gaps. Eckartsberg catalogues the various psychoanalytical metaphors used to describe consciousness and its different facets: Freud’s iceberg, Jung’s shadow and archetypes, Maslow’s hierarchy (30-8). Eckartsberg also goes into the technological and cosmic metaphors used to describe consciousness: Charles Tart’s use of “computer processing” (1975) for the construction of consciousness using input-output models and Kurt Lewin (1951), who used concepts of energy, valences, forces and vectors to describe states of equilibrium or homeostasis in the brain (40-6). Interestingly, discussions of multiplicity have also remained consistent. Eckartsberg calls this movement the “existential-phenomenologists” citing Alfred Schutz’s discussion of “multiple realities of consciousness” in 1962 and Aron Gurwitch’s “multiple orders of existence” in 1964 (50).

The intersection of multiplicity, consciousness, and metaphors of technology persists into present day formulations of multi consciousness. Metaphors of the body and brain are used to describe our technological counterparts: computers have memory, they sleep, and vice versa: our brains are wired, our batteries drain. As we look forward into new metaphors of multi

consciousness, it is perhaps worth considering where the lines are drawn between the organic and the technological, where the metaphor becomes literal. Elsewhere¹I have written about the metaphor of AI used to discuss colonial violence in Denis Villeneuve’s *Bladerunner 2049* (2017):

K is referred to by the derogatory terms “skinner,” and “skinjob,” having his apartment door defaced and co-workers ostracize him, echoing histories of racist and homophobic violence. Upon the discovery of Rachael’s remains, a replicant from the original Blade Runner, the lab worker dismisses her death as “another skin job...maybe [another replicant] ate it,” refusing to refer to her as subject rather than object. Replicants are dehumanized, associated with acts of savagery, rendering them nonbeings. Dr. Ana Stelline muses: “Replicants live such hard lives, made to do what we’d rather not.” Replicants are thus made to be the “shadow” of humans — their dark counterparts who engage in murder and slave labour, whom humans offload all of their societal taboos onto, not unlike the histories of slavery and colonial control.

As Payne and Pitsis note, *Blade Runner 2049* makes extensive use of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, in particular Nabokov’s attention to environment and illusion. They point to Nabokov’s “Canto One”: “I was the shadow of the waxwing slain / By the false azure in the windowpane.” Nabokov plays with a string of associations here: the speaker is not the bird but a “shadow” of the bird, like the replicant to the human, and the window is not the sky but a false illusion, trapping the bird but perhaps not its shadow.

Blade Runner 2049 surfaces the subliminal “dispersing” of power that has become a part

¹ Jaksic, Yasmina. “Alone in Sci-Fi: The Impossibility of Oneness in *Blade Runner 2049* and *Empire of the Senseless*.” *Tba: Journal of Art, Media, and Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, Dec. 2020, pp. 86–94.

of the modern environment, that provides the illusion of endless skies when instead they present only the window of glass screens (Jaksic 89).

Furthermore, the discussion of K's consciousness is contentious. His desire for a mother, for freedom, exceed his programming. His memories are transferred to him by Ana—the memory-maker—they are now shared, and are shared, amongst all replicants who use Ana's memories. K thus inhabits a spectral space—he feels alienated from his “replicant” body, convinced he is woman-born, as his collective/inherited memories misalign with his reality. The parallels between the discussions of AI consciousness and multi consciousness are apparent and could provide a new narrative framework for further discussions of multi consciousness in fictions of displacement.

This brings us to the limitations of the study. In the dissertation, I move from discussing texts primarily in the realism or historical realism genres, and end with sci-fi texts and films. As we transition into texts and film that rely more heavily on sci-fi tropes, which is a natural progression as newer and newer technologies become integral to our everyday landscape, we also potentially move away from the emergent formula of multi consciousness in which issues of race, indigeneity, and intersectionality are crucial, especially when discussing Denis Villeneuve's film *Arrival* where we have a white American woman as the subject of multi consciousness.

The presence of technological influence can be seen in some of the earlier texts, such as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and the merging of technological consciousness with diasporic multi consciousness is more clearly outlined in Tommy Orange's novel *There There* (2018). Technological consciousness adds another element and layer of dissociation, fragmentation, and isolation to the original framing of multi consciousness. However, what's interesting about *Arrival*

is that the rupturing technology introduced is an alien language, and Louise, the polyglot protagonist, taps into multi consciousness through this language. The influence of diasporic rupture is still very present in the film as it is based on Ted Chiang, a Taiwanese-American writer's novella, which focuses largely on the relationship between linguistic relativity and temporal perception. The alien language itself is described as being a logographic language like Chinese writing, and the possession of this language alters Louise's consciousness by allowing her to perceive all times at once, in a situation where she enters the space of the aliens and is thus displaced, and faces the potential annihilation of humanity, by the hand of the aliens or by the hand of humanity as they prepare for war.

As with *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, it is also the fact of Louise's motherhood that acts as the axis of her multi consciousness. It is the fact of her motherhood that leads her into accessing these various selves across various timelines. After the encounter with the aliens, Louise has a child who dies very early. Motherhood is an interesting thread that runs throughout many of the texts—in *Things We Lost to the Water*, *Everything Everywhere*—emphasizing pregnancy and motherhood an interesting state where the body is multiplied physically and on the level of consciousness. We looked briefly in *Things We Lost to the Water* at transgenerational memory and shared consciousness between mother and fetus, and as Louise continues to learn more of the alien language, she begins to access future-memories of her unborn and already-dead child. Her trigger points to enter various consciousnesses of herself across different timelines centre around this child. As such, *Arrival* and "Story of Your Life" do complicate the initial conception of multi consciousness as an inherently intersectional structure, however the influence of diasporic and intersectional identity still underscores the text, which gets carried over into the film. The film does pose some other interesting questions around the experience of

motherhood as multi consciousness and gestures towards the universal displacement of human beings under the existential threat of alien invasion as a scenario in which multi consciousness becomes more universal.

Multi consciousness is still an emergent and fragile concept, and as such, the lines between double consciousness and multi consciousness can sometimes still be unclear. In quite a few of the works here we have sets of doubles—twins, siblings, real and fake selves, doppelgängers—which are common devices used as metaphors for double consciousness. However, other factors discussed—the various lenses of intersectionality subjectivity, diasporic rupture and transgenerational trauma, technological consciousness, exceed the framework of double consciousness and move towards multi. We see doubles used here to compare figures—one who is able to find cohesion within multiplicity, and another who moves further into fragmentation. The metaphors used to describe the pathologies that develop as a result of multi consciousness also make use of the imagery of the double, but these pathologies differ from the condition of multi consciousness itself.

There are various other groups that have been left out of the study that could have been discussed in relation to multi consciousness. We see metaphors of multi consciousness are becoming increasingly foregrounded in art, literature, and film—pushing us to acknowledge the effects of an era in which individuals must navigate multiple realms of existence, each with their own unique modes of perception and consciousness. Understanding multi consciousness is pivotal because doing so unravels the intricacies of how individuals negotiate their identities, experiences, and relationships across these diverse realms.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis Vol. 1*. 1987. Translated by Nicholas T. Rand. University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- *Willful Subjects*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- Aigner-Varoz, Erika. "Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera." *MELUS*, vol. 25, no. 2, June 2000, pp. 47–62.
- Alarcón, Norma. "The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo American Feminism." *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. Aunt Lute, 1990, pp. 356–369.
- Allen, Paula Gunn. "A Stranger in My Own Life: Alienation in American Indian Prose and Poetry." *MELUS*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1980, pp. 3–19.
- Andrews, Hanna and Morgan Parker. "It's About Multiplicity." *MELUS*, vol. 43, no. 3, fall 2018, pp. 148–162.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Arrival*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner, Forest Whitaker, Michael Stuhlbarg, Tzi Ma, Paramount, 2016.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. 1981. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- Belton, Kristy A. "From Cyberspace to Offline Communities: Indigenous Peoples and Global Connectivity." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2010, pp. 193–215.
- Bennett, Brit. *The Vanishing Half*. Riverhead Books, 2020.
- Bhabba, Homi K. *The Location of Culture: Of Mimicry and Man*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bladerunner 2049*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Ryan Gosling, Harrison Ford, Ana de Armas, Sylvia Hoeks, Robin Wright, Jared Leto, Warner Brothers, 2017.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge Classics, 2011.
- Chen, Tina. *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture*. Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Chiang, Ted. *Stories of Your Life and Others*. Picador, 2014.

- Cho, Grace M. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood*. Routledge, 1994.
- and Sirma Bilge, eds. *Intersectionality*. Polity Press, 2016.
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
- Crawley, Ashton T. “Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah.” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 2015. <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/stayed-freedom-hallelujah/>. Accessed July 7 2023.
- Darwish, Mahmoud. “Counterpoint.” *Le Monde diplomatique*, 2005, <https://mondediplo.com/2005/01/15said>. Accessed 28 June 2023.
- Davis, Kimberly Chabot. “‘Postmodern Blackness’: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the End of History.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1998, pp. 242–60.
- Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” *October*, vol. 59, 1992, pp. 3–7.
- *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. 1983. Translated by Hugh Timlinson and Barbara Habberjam. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. 1975. Translated by Dana Polan. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. 1987. Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*. Translated by Anne Boyman. Zone Books, 2005.
- Dick, Steven J. *Plurality of Worlds: The Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant*. Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Dover Publications, 1994.
- edited by Bill. V Mullen and Cathryn Watson. *W.E.B. Du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*. U of Mississippi Press, 2005.
- Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. 1952. Vintage, 2010.

Eng, David L., and David Kazanjian. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. University of California Press, 2003.

——— and Shinee Han. “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia.” *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. University of California Press, 2003, pp. 343-371.

Espiritu, Yen Le. “The Vietnam War and The ‘Good Refugee.’” *The Routledge Handbook of Asian American Studies*, ed. Cindy I-Fen Cheng. Routledge, 2016.

Everything, Everywhere All at Once. Directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, performances by Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Ke Huy Quan, Jenny Slate, Harry Shum Jr, James Hong, Jamie Lee Curtis, A24, 2022.

Falcón, Sylvanna M. “MESTIZA DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: The Voices of Afro-Peruvian Women on Gendered Racism.” *Gender and Society*, vol. 22, no. 5, 2008, pp. 660–80.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto Press, 1986.

Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology, edited by Scott MacKenzie, University of California Press, 2014.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1975. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage, 1995.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. 1919. Translated by David McIlintock. Penguin, 2003.

——— ——— *Civilization and its Discontents*. 1930. W. W. Norton & Company, 1962.

——— ——— “Mourning and Melancholia.” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Translated by James Strachey. The Hogarth Press, 1994.

Fricke, Suzanne Newman. “Introduction: Indigenous Futurisms in the hyperpresent now.” *World Art*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2019, pp. 107-121.

Full Metal Jacket. Directed by Stanley Kubrick, performances by Matthew Modine, Adam Baldwin, Vincent D’Onofrio, Warner Brothers, 1987.

Gooding-Williams, Robert. *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Gregory, James N. *Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

- Guattari, Félix and Suely Rolnik. *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. 1986. Translated by Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes. Semiotexte, 2007.
- Higgins, Kathleen. "Double Consciousness and Second Sight." *Critical Affinities: Nietzsche and African American Thought*, edited by Jacqueline Scott and A. Todd Franklin, SUNY Albany, 2006.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. 1807. Translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford U Press, 1977.
- History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige*. Directed by Rea Tajiri, Women Make Movies, 1991.
- Hobbs, Allyson. *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life*. Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Horton, Andrew. "The Bitter Humor of 'Winter in the Blood.'" *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1978, pp. 131–39.
- Huping, Ling and Allan W. Austin. "The Vietnamese American Experience: History and Culture." *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*. Routledge, 2015.
- Jaksic, Yasmina. "Alone in Sci-Fi: The Impossibility of Oneness in Blade Runner 2049 and Empire of the Senseless." *Tba: Journal of Art, Media, and Visual Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, Dec. 2020, pp. 86–94.
- Jacques, Lacan. *Écrits*. 1966. Routledge, 2001.
- Jeanne F. Theoharis. "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960–1976." *Radical History Review*, vol. 81, no. 1, 2001, pp. 61–93.
- Jobin, Shalene. "Double Consciousness and Nehiyawake (Cree) Perspectives: Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Knowledge." *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place*, edited by Nathalie Kermoal, et al., Athabasca University Press, 2016, pp. 40-60.
- Johnston, John. "Machinic Vision." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 1, The University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 27–48.
- Jones, Paul Christian. "Counterparts: Poe's Doubles from 'William Wilson' to 'The Cask of Amontillado.'" *The Oxford Handbook of Edgar Allan Poe*, J. Gerald Kennedy and Scott Peeples, eds. Oxford Handbooks, 2019.
- Joseph, Peniel E, ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*. Routledge, 2006.

King, Deborah K. "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 1, Autumn 1988, pp. 42-72.

Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love*. Columbia University Press, 1987.

Kwan, Daniel and Daniel Scheinert. *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. *Scriptslug*, <https://www.scriptslug.com/script/everything-everywhere-all-at-once-2022>. Screenplay.

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. 1929. Dover, 2004.

Lewis, Jason Edward. "A brief (media) history of the Indigenous Future." *Public*, vol. 27, no. 54, 2016, pp. 36-50.

——— and Skawennati Tricia Fragnito. "Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace." *Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples Bridging the Digital Divide*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2010. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/aboriginal-territories-cyberspace>. Accessed 7 July 2023.

Lidchi, Henrietta and Suzanne Newman Fricke. "Future history: Indigenous Futurisms in North American Visual Arts." *World Art*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2019, pp. 99-102.

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

Lundquist, Suzanne Evesten. *Native American Literatures: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2008.

Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color. Edited by Gloria Anzaldúa. Aunt Lute Books, 1990.

Metaphors of Consciousness. Edited by Ronald S. Valle and Rolf von Eckartsberg. Plenum Press, 1981.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." *Inscriptions*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1988.

Moten, Fred. "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4, 2013, pp. 737-780.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987. Vintage, 2004.

——— ——— *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage Books, 1992.

Nguyen, Eric. *Things We Lost to the Water*. Knopf, 2021.

- Nguyen, Viet. *The Sympathizer*. Grove Press, 2015.
- O'Connor, Ellen and Lisa G. Materson, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of American Women's and Gender History*. Oxford Academic, 2018.
- Ono, Kent A., and Vincent N. Pham, eds. *Asian Americans and the Media*. Polity Press, 2009.
- Orange, Tommy. *There, There*. Knopf, 2018.
- Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*. Translated by A.S. Kline. University of Vermont, 2000.
- Patches, Matt. "The Mystery Line in 'Arrival' Revealed." *thrillist*, 2016.
<https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/nation/arrival-chinese-line-ending>. Accessed 7 July 2023.
- Pittman, John P. "Double Consciousness." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, March 2016,
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/double-consciousness/>. Accessed June 29th 2023.
- Ponce, Martin Joseph. "Diaspora as Frame and Object of Analysis in Asian American Studies." *The Routledge Handbook of Asian American Studies*, ed. Cindy I-Fen Cheng. Routledge, 2016.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton, 1976.
- Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 1983. The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Romagnolo, Catherine. *Opening Acts: Narrative Beginnings in Twentieth-Century Feminist Fiction*. University of Nebraska, 2015.
- Román, Miriam Jiménez and Juan Flores, eds. *The AfroLatin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Roxworthy, Emily. *Racial Performativity and World War II*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.
- Roynon, Tessa. *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Rubenstein, Mary-Jane. *Worlds Without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse*. Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. 1982. Granta, 1991.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978. Vintage, 1979.
- Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Routledge, 1943.

- Senna, Danzy. *Caucasia*. 1998. Riverhead Books, 1999.
- Siemens, Daniel. "The 'True Worship of Life': Changing Notions of Happiness, Morality, and Religion in the United States, 1890–19401." *Fractured Modernity: America Confronts Modern Times, 1890s to 1940s*, edited by Thomas Welskopp and Alan Lessoff, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016, pp. 43-60.
- Siemerling, Winfried. *The New North American Studies: Culture, Writing and the Politics of Re/Cognition*. Routledge, 2004.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. 1977. Penguin, 2016.
- Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014.
- Singh, Vandana. "The Occasional Writer: An Interview with Science Fiction Author Ted Chiang." *The Margins*, October 3rd 2012, <https://aaww.org/the-occasional-writer-an-interview-with-science-fiction-author-ted-chiang>.
- Slethaug, Gordon E. "Doubles and Doubling in the Arts." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 6, no. 2/3, 1994, pp. 100–06.
- Spickard, Paul. *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race and Colonialism in American History and Identity*. Routledge, 2007.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, Summer 1987, pp. 64-81.
- Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Translated by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- . *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*. Translated by Stephen Barker. Stanford University Press, 2010.
- . *Nanjing Lectures 2016-2019*. Edited and translated by Daniel Ross. Open Humanities Press, 2020.
- Stephoe, Tyina L. *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City*. University of California Press, 2015.
- Tang, Eric. "A Gulf Unites Us: The Vietnamese Americans of Black New Orleans East." *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 1, April 2011, pp. 117-149.
- Thien, Madeleine. *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*. Vintage, 2017.

- Walker, Cheryl. *Indian Nation: Native American Literature and Nineteenth-Century Nationalisms*. Duke University Press, 1997.
- Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*. Edited by Grace L. Dillon. University of Arizona Press, 2012.
- Wallenstein, Peter. *Race, Sex, and the Freedom to Marry*. University Press of Kansas, 2014.
- Welch, James. *Winter in the Blood*. 1974. Penguin, 2008.
- Welang, Nahum. "Triple Consciousness: The Reimagination of Black Female Identities in Contemporary American Culture" *Open Cultural Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2018, pp. 296-306.
- Williams, Raymond. "From Preface to Film." 1954. *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*. Edited by Scott MacKenzie. University of California Press, 2014, pp. 855-866.
- . *The Long Revolution*. 1961. Broadview Press, 2001.
- Wise, Sheila J. "Redefining Black Masculinity and Manhood: Successful Black Gay Men Speak Out." *Journal of African American Men*, vol. 5, no. 4, March 2001, pp. 3-22.
- Wu, Ellen D. *The Colour of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority*. Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Yan, Kimmy. "NYPD Reports 361 Percent Increase in Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Last Year." NBC News, 10 December 2021. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/nypd-reports-361-percent-increase-anti-asian-hate-crimes-last-year-rcna8427>. Accessed 6 July 2023.
- Yu, Charles, *Interior Chinatown*. Pantheon Press, 2020.
- Zamir, Shamoan. *Dark Voices: W.E.B Du Bois and American Thought 1888-1903*. The University of Chicago Press, 1995.