

Chapter One

Language, Matter, Movement

Dynamic Community in Cathy Park Hong's Dance Dance Revolution

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Explorations of poetry's political valence often center on postmodern experimental or language poetics that critique language itself as the producer of identities and cultural communities. However, as the burgeoning theoretical field of new materialism makes clear, it is not only inaccurate but dangerous to view reality as a disembodied chain of signifiers. In light of this renewed attention to matter, a number of contemporary poets are now writing poetry that conveys the dynamic, emergent relationship between language and material reality. Cathy Park Hong's second poetry collection, *Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)*,¹ is exemplary of this new poetic current. Published in 2006 by W.W. Norton, *DDR* tells the story of the Guide, a former South Korean dissident who now works in "the Desert," a planned resort city full of themed hotels (à la Las Vegas) that replicate the world's major cities. Hong's Desert is the epitome of a globalized world in which cultures, ethnic groups, and languages entangle to create a new community and a new language. The majority of the poems are written in the Guide's voice, and as such, are written in Desert Creole, a language invented by Hong. As the "foreword" explains, Desert Creole is "an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city, a rapidly evolving lingua franca" (19). Desert Creole evokes both standard and slang words from Middle English, Spanish, French, and many other languages, while also utilizing malapropisms, neologism, and portmanteaus.

Hong's creation of Desert Creole highlights language as something both emergent and dynamically tied to material reality. By telling the Guide's life

story in this invented language, Hong artfully communicates how material locations (including bodies) shape language, and conversely, how language shapes material locations. Set against a backdrop of war and revolutions, *DDR* demonstrates the linguistic and material consequences of imperialism and global capitalism, as well as the shifting boundaries that result. Furthermore, the identity and subjectivity of the characters in *DDR*, just as in real life, are a result of interchanges between various bodies and forms of discourse, with all entities engaged in an ongoing dance of what Donna Haraway calls “*becoming with*” (4). As this chapter argues, Hong demonstrates two important concepts about community in the twenty-first century: (1) community is shaped by both material and linguistic boundaries, and (2) because these boundaries are constantly shifting, community is dynamic and never static.

Hong’s focus on the relationship between language and material reality—and the way this material-semiotic interplay shapes both the individual body and the communal body—makes *DDR* an example of what I am calling “a posthuman poetics.” Instead of viewing the human self as an autonomous rational being, posthumanism understands the human as a material being shaped by physical, biological, social, linguistic, political, economic, and historical forces; a material being entangled and interconnected with all living and non-living forms. In challenging the liberal humanist viewpoint, posthumanism allows for the emergence of an ethical position that encourages responsible interaction between humans, as well as between humans and non-humans. Thus, posthuman poetry promotes a positive posthuman ethics that takes into account the biological and material alongside the cultural and social as factors that shape both the human body and subjective experience.

New materialist theory (which is inherently posthuman) claims that the postmodern focus on social constructivism has only served to reinforce the illusory divide between nature and culture, human and non-human.² In contrast, instead of relegating and limiting human existence to the realm of intangible words and ideas, new materialism understands that humans *have bodies*, indeed *are* bodies. And these bodies suffer from physical discomfort, illness, and pain but also joy and pleasure; moreover, new materialism suggests that these sensations derive primarily from contact and interaction with other material bodies that are both human and non-human. As Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman point out, “Focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse excludes lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration,” and this negating of materiality “can actually inhibit the development of a robust understanding of discursive production itself, since various aspects of materiality contribute to the development and transformation of discourses” (4). The important point made

here, a point Hong’s *DDR* so delightfully illustrates, is that material locations (including the body) shape language *and* language shapes material locations.

Hong’s attention to material-semiotic relationships makes her project an ethical one. Embracing the material does not mean abandoning the role language and discourse play in constructing material reality. Rather, as Alaimo and Hekman explain, it means recognizing that “discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses. Ethics must be centered not only on those discourses but on the material consequences as well” (7). Thus, in my examination of *DDR*, I will pay particular attention to the way Hong represents the material consequences of the discourses surrounding global capitalist imperialism. This representation is crucial to Hong’s conception of a dynamic global community, because, as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost claim, “[F]oregrounding material factors and reconfiguring our very understanding of matter are prerequisites for any plausible account of coexistence and its conditions in the twenty-first century” (2). Advancing greater understanding and awareness of our bodily relationship with the material world, of how our actions affect *all* others, across time and space, is essential for creating a better community for all.

Hong’s poetry reflects a deep interest in how language can be used as a political tool—how language, even as it fails to accurately represent matter, can *shape* matter. Influenced by the Language poets during her formative years, Hong later became disillusioned with Language poetry’s lack of political valence, realizing “she was more drawn to poets who severed syntax out of a sense of cultural or political displacement rather than for the sake of experimentation” (“How Words”). In other words, it was simply not enough to draw attention to the *production* of meaning; showing the real material consequences *of* the production of meaning became imperative for Hong. In “*Fabula Poetics*,” published a year before the release of *DDR*, Hong discusses the need to move forward from simply critiquing language to writing a poetics that reflects the material reality of our contemporary global world:

I followed [the Language poets’] Marxian critique of language and borrowed their techniques of macerating the lyric down to “word as such.” But while the de-familiarized non sequitur might have been fresh awhile back, it has now become an old stylistic tick that just adds white noise to all the random associations and informational clutter that are out there. Why splice around syntax when your local spammer does it better than you? So as history dictates, perhaps the pendulum should swing wildly the other way and we should plunge back into the aural. Inject a kind of layered dynamism into poetry, a highly concentrated polyglot song where the voice is not a mimesis of the natural plain spoken but instead “speaks” in a stylized invented language that reflects and ultimately synthesizes the careening sounds of a shrinking late capitalist world. (36)

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Hong's three poetry collections have indeed "plunged back into the aural" with the use of a language "stylized" or "invented" by the poet herself. As John Yau notes in his review of Hong's oeuvre, all of Hong's books "contain poems in which translation, pidgin, invented dialects, and made-up slang play a central role in a fabricated language that, in its treacherousness and slipperiness of sound and orthography, mirrors the turbulence that is central to our current state of affairs," a turbulence bound up in the migrations and uneven border exchanges characteristic of the current crisis of global capitalism.³ Hong herself describes this "way of engaging with the present" as "build[ing] worlds to critique world building" ("Artists"). Through her creation of speculative worlds like "the Desert," Hong critiques both the imaginary and very real physical worlds built and shaped by discourses of power. *Dance Dance Revolution* critiques the world "built" by capitalist imperialism while offering hope for a new world community that embraces the dynamic nature of both individual identity and communal identity.

DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COLLECTIVE

DDR conveys the life story of the Guide, as told to "the Historian." To help situate the reader within Hong's created world, the book begins with the "Chronology of the Desert Guide" which provides a timeline of the key events in the Guide's life, including her birth in 1960 near Kwangju, South Korea, and her participation in the real Kwangju Uprising in May of 1980. The Uprising was a student-led movement for democracy in South Korea, then under military rule. The U.S.-supported military killed hundreds of South Korean citizens in order to crush the rebellion. After serving time in a prison camp for her role in the student movement, she moved to the Desert to work, first as a housekeeper and then as a guide at various hotels in the Desert. The "Chronology" also lists 1988 as the year of the fictional Dance Dance Revolution, although it does not specify whether the Guide participated in the revolution that pitted the Desert's native inhabitants against the Desert establishment.⁴ We do learn that, as a result of the uprising, the natives are exiled to New Town, an encampment bordering the Desert (17).

Next comes the Historian's "Foreword," which serves to announce Hong's major enterprise by introducing the reader to Desert Creole. The Historian's description of Hong's invented language demonstrates the shifting, emergent nature of language but also the dynamic nature of embodied subjectivity and community:

In the Desert, the language is an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city, a rapidly evolving lingua franca. The language, while borrowing from the inner structures of English grammar, also

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borrow from existing and extinct English dialects. Here, new faces pour in and civilian accents morph so quickly that their accents betray who they talked to that day rather than their cultural roots. (19)

The embodied inhabitants, as well as their language, "morph" and shift as "new faces pour in" to the Desert community. It is also telling that Desert Creole is rooted in English, the language of both the United States and global corporate empires. As a paragon of what capitalist imperialism produces, Hong's fictive Desert provides a glimpse of our current and future global landscape, which includes growing wealth and income inequality, conditions which, as Berch Berberoglu notes in his work on global capitalism, lead to a continued period of crises and conflicts ("Global" 123-24). In his foreword, the Historian indicates that the Desert is currently in a volatile state, mentioning the "canny acts of sabotage engineered by exiled natives" and perhaps even the hotel employees. No one knows who to trust when "the city of rest is also the city of unrest" (21). However, as I discuss later, *DDR* ends with a glimmer of hope that community can replace empire.

This hopeful possibility is partly due to the dynamic nature of Hong's invented language. As Andrea Quaid contends, "the implied continual and swift linguistic change suggest [Desert Creole] may soon be wholly an 'amalgam,' a combination of dialects and vernaculars without a center. . . . Unmoored from national identification and identity, the Desert city's language is being created by other categories of belonging" (123). While Hong leaves us wondering whether or not these "other categories of belonging" will lead to a community based not on power and control but on a form of kinship rooted in our shared materiality and bodily vulnerability, the important point *DDR* makes is that communities and individuals, as well as discourses and languages, are dynamic; they can and do change. In this sense, *DDR* provides an example of an affirmative political approach, one that does not deny the reality of past pain and trauma but instead reshapes it into a positive alternative. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti cites Edouard Glissant's *The Poetics of Relation* as an example of posthuman affirmative ethics at work. Braidotti writes, "Calling for hybridized poly-lingualism and creolization on a global scale is an affirmative answer to the coercive monoculturalism imposed by the colonial and imperial powers" (133, emphasis added). She refers to Glissant's critique of dominant "nation-bound" discourse, but she could easily be referring to Hong's linguistic project.

The eight sections following the foreword are filled with mostly first-person lyric poems in the voice of the Guide, and as such, the bulk of the poems are also written in Desert Creole as transcribed by the Historian. Although the individual poems are primarily lyric poems, *DDR* has much to do with our collective communal existence. Because the Virgil-esque Guide leads the Historian (and the reader) through both the Desert and her life,

DDR is also an epic narrative, and as such, addresses the collective. In a 2007 interview, Hong articulates DDR's concern with the collective:

I wanted to work beyond the parameters of identity in *Dance Dance Revolution*. Korean history plays a large part in the book and there is a latticework of border-crossing, but that has less to do with the self per se than with history and collective . . . [Terry Eagleton] said that with alternate universes, "the point is not to go elsewhere, but to use elsewhere as a reflection on where you are." The Desert is an omnibus city, an allegorical space of a present condition, which could be present-day Korea or America as well as other places. ("An Interview")

In addition to the epic form of the text, the language within speaks to the collective. Hong's Desert Creole invites us to imagine what our present day community is and could be, and to imagine "the collective" as fluid, dynamic and open to both revision and otherness. In her study of Asian American poetry, Xiaojing Zhou writes that for

Asian American poets, there is no fixed ethnicity to reclaim, no "home" to dwell in in English. Rather than seeking refuge in English, Asian American poets reinvent new ways of saying and hearing in that language, rendering it inflected with "alien" sounds or "foreign accents" (2). By inventing a new language, Hong provides a new home, or world, for us all to dwell in, while also reflecting on our present condition and how we might change it for the better. Thus, as an instrument of change, the creation of Desert Creole is also a subversive act, a kind of revolution on its own. As Hong contends: "To exist between tenuous borders gives you liberty where you're less beholden to tradition and the expected parameters of the English language, forms, and genres." ("An Interview")

The Historian is crucial to this subversion—despite his perfect English and training as a historian, it is the female Guide who tells the story, in *her* language, not the Historian in his.

The presence of the Historian functions in multiple ways relevant to Hong's political project, including to convey global interconnections across time and space. As we learn from the Historian's foreword, the Historian's father, Kim Yoon-Sah, was the Guide's lover and fellow dissident in the Kwangju Uprising. After the uprising, Sah, as the Guide refers to him, moves on to become a physician for Doctors Without Borders in Sierra Leone, where the Historian was born to an American mother. (We later learn that the Guide lost contact with Sah during the chaos of the rebellion, and thus presumed he was among the many who died.) The Historian spent his formative years in boarding schools and his relationship with his father was non-extant. The Historian writes, "[E]ven to his death, he revealed nothing about his past life. . . . Then I discovered that she moved to the Desert after

Kwangju. The woman my father loved before my mother" (21). The Historian comes to the Desert to learn more about his distant father, but in the process, gives the Guide the opportunity to examine her own past and the way it has shaped and continues to shape her present and future.

The Historian's role as both foil *and* companion to the Guide is subtly solidified through a series of prose poems, all of which are titled "Excerpt from the Historian's Memoir." These single-page poems, written in the Historian's voice (and in perfect English), appear at the end of each section (but one), and provide a glimpse of the Historian's identity and past. We are never given the Historian's name, but the Guide refers to him as "Samsy," which is likely a reference to Uncle Sam and, thus, a metonymic for the United States. This is important given the role the United States has had in shaping world politics, the world economy, and, as I discuss later, the Guide's life. Although he spent his life attending boarding schools in London, Hong Kong, and Connecticut, Hong gives the impression that the Historian, like his "shy Midwestern" mother, identifies as American. And although he lived in Sierra Leone until the age of ten, in the midst of a civil war that killed over 50,000 people, he was, in contrast to the Guide, fairly isolated from violence. He describes himself during this time as a "peaceful, oblivious child" who "owned dozens of cookie tins filled with crayons," spending his "days drawing pictures in a sitting room" (37). Partly functioning as a figurative representation of the dominant narrative, the Historian represents everything that the Guide is not: "well-spoken," American, male, privileged, isolated from violence, and free to move (without fear of reprisal).

These differences between the Historian and Guide draw attention to the difference between the dominant discourse and a multivalent minoritarian discourse, but, at the same time, this disparity also serves to underscore the commonalities shared by the Guide and Historian, which in turn, actually assists Hong in promoting a minoritarian discourse, one that recognizes a collective is always filled with varied individuals.⁵ Because the Historian's "Excerpts" are written in "perfect" English—in contrast with the Guide's speech—and do not discuss race, ethnicity, or culture in anyway, it is easy to "forget" the Historian's partial Korean heritage. Furthermore, Hong does not provide any firm evidence leading us to interpret the Historian's gender as male or female.⁶ Thus, the Historian functions to represent the dominant discourse, while at the same time belying such normative strains. By excluding signs of race and gender from the Historian's own narrative, Hong shows the reader how we ourselves associate white maleness with certain characteristics, while simultaneously demonstrating that no one *actually* matches up with dominant narrative because we are *all* Other in various ways.

Despite their asymmetry, the Guide and the Historian have much in common: both grew up motherless (the Guide's mother died shortly after giving birth, while the Historian's died when he was three), both had a distant

relationship with their fathers, both are fairly “globalized” (the Historian through actual travel, and the Guide through life in the Desert), and both are also connected through their relationship with Sah. Although not overtly, each “Excerpt” from the Historian mirrors or corresponds in some way to the knowledge and anecdotes imparted by the Guide. For example, in the second “Excerpt,” the Historian tells of the time his father “traveled halfway across the globe” to help his ten-year-old son move into boarding school. During a layover, his father imparts dental hygiene advice, which in the context of the book as a whole, is an allusion to the relationship between whiteness, success, and power. The Historian writes:

He had something important to tell me. I leaned in and he began. When he was young, he could not afford the proper hygiene to care for his teeth. His teeth were so rotten, he had them capped. But beneath the white enamel sheath, his real teeth hibernated, corked and stained. He sighed. He feels the deepest shame because of this. . . . Now that he wasn't around, it is vital that I am responsible for my teeth. (47)

The poem concludes with the father telling his young son that he is going to order him a “Water Pik” that he should use three times a day, insinuating that whiteness is “something important.”

The correlation between whiteness and power expressed in this “Excerpt” can only be grasped in context of the poems that come before. In “St. Petersburg Hotel Series,” the Guide takes the Historian through the hotel, stopping at the “[w]hitening wadder fountain” outside the arboretum, which contains fluoride, sulfate, and xylitol. She tells the Historian that everyone at the hotel “hab bes’ teef! Shinier den ‘Merikken / Colgates,” and, as “mine fadder ses, ‘You triumph only wit de whitest’”(30). And in “The Importance of Being English,” her father says she must learn English in order to survive (46). Through these exchanges, Hong conveys the importance of being American, white, and English-speaking—a discourse that weighs heavily on the lives of her two main characters. Both the Guide’s father and the Historian’s father associate having white teeth (or whiteness itself) with survival and success, an association that has shaped their children’s lives in various ways. Thus, the Historian’s excerpts work in conjunction with the Guide’s story to further demonstrate how discourse shapes both the collective and the individual’s bodily experience.

THE ROLES WE PLAY

The first poem in *DDR*, “Roles,” serves to introduce the Guide, the Desert, and the language of the Desert while setting up the book’s thesis and core themes. The Guide, as first-person speaker, introduces *her* role in the Desert,

but the plural nature of the title indicates that all of us, not just the Guide, are playing roles, and these roles, although assigned via discourse, are actually carried out via the body. Furthermore, the specific roles of “Guide” and “Historian” provide Hong with the space to illustrate the larger roles bodies play throughout time, space, and politics, as well as the way specific discourses shape various bodies and vice versa. As a “tour guide,” the Guide represents the tourism industry, the global-capitalist system that makes such an industry possible, as well as the bodies that suffer so that the industry may thrive. As a “historian,” the Historian represents the formation of discourse and the dominant narrative, and as such, he also represents the capacity to change, recompose subjectivities, or shift the dominant narrative.

A historian’s job is to analyze past events and “write” history. As an interpreter of the past, a historian also aids in the construction of the language and discourse that shapes the future. Thus, Hong uses the Historian to demonstrate the communal and interconnected nature of language construction, as well as the relationship between language production and embodiment. While the Guide is given vocal authority, at the same time, we must not forget the role the Historian has had in bringing her story to us. In the foreword, the Historian writes that he had “difficulty deciding whether to transcribe her words exactly as said or to translate it to a more ‘standard’ English.” He ultimately decides to “preserve her diction” except in places he felt “clarification was needed” (20). In these moments he is, as Andrea Quaid puts it, the “decision-maker, interpreter and explicator, as well as policeman of language” (125). But ultimately, because of *DDR*’s overall emphasis on the communal and bodily element of discourse construction, because Desert Creole and the Guide’s story itself are the result of the interplay of bodies and language, the *role* of Hong’s historian is to counter the dominate narrative of “history as written by the victors.” The story we are given is the result of not only the Historian’s body traveling to the Desert, but of the Historian walking through the Desert as the Guide tells her story. Several of the poems are appended with a footnote relaying the Historian’s perspective of what he saw as he was walking with the Guide, so that her story is layered with his. Thus, (his)story is created not just through the Guide’s talking, but by the act of bodies walking through space. The Historian engages in an act of transcription and translation, and the shared root of these words, *trans*, as Quaid notes, suggests the movement and fluidity of language itself (125).

The multiplicity of story construction is also illustrated though Hong’s use of ellipses throughout the poems.⁷ Because the Historian left his cassette recordings out on the patio during a storm, portions of the Guide’s story are damaged. The Historian uses ellipses to indicate these lapses in the Guide’s testimonials. This incident provides further evidence of matter’s influence on the creation of text and history: the rain, the cassettes (a body holding information), and the Historian physically leaving the tapes out all influenced the

version of the narrative we receive. The creation of history, language, and discourse is always a collective act, regardless of whether the end-product is used as a tool for oppression or for positive change. As Quaid contends, the Historian's (and Hong's) editorial decision to use ellipses in the lyric indicates the communal potential for meaning making:

Ellipses may signify either intentionally extracted words or missing information from an initial text. Given the Historian's active role as translator, the ellipses' significance hovers between both uses throughout the book . . . lyric's intimacy is interrupted and explicitly marked as partial and multi-authored. In these poems, lyric is at the service of narrative and history while exposing the gaps such stories may contain. (126–27)

Thus, while no easy task, the dominant narrative *can* be disrupted and, as such, can be shifted toward the construction of positive alternatives.

Hong uses Desert Creole, a multi-authored language, then, to disrupt dominant narratives related to capitalism and America's global imperialist mission. "Roles" begins with an allusion to Western concepts of beauty, concepts often shaped and promulgated via capitalist discourse, which in turn shape the individual's experience:

. . . Opal o opus,
 behole, neon hibiscus bloom beacons!
 "Tan Lotion Tanya" billboard . . . she
 your lucent Virgil, den I's taka ova
 as talky Virgil . . . want some tea? Some pelehoo? (25)

With these initial stanzas, the reader is thrust headlong into Hong's invented language, the Desert, the reciprocal roles of guide and tourist, and the role discourse plays in shaping material reality. Behold! The Guide announces in reference to both "Tan Lotion Tanya" and the high wattage spectacle that is the Desert. The first line, ". . . Opal o opus," brings to mind the lights of Las Vegas and the opulence of Dubai, while the billboard advertisement connects the whole enterprise to free-market profit, indicating the Desert may be capitalism's greatest "opus" yet. The poem continues:

Mine vocation your vacation!
 . . . I train mine talk box to talk yep-puh, as you
 'Merikkens say "purdy," no goods only phrases,
 betta de phrase, "purdier" de experience,

twenty t'ousand guides here but I'm #1 . . .
 once, Helsinkian arrive, I's say "I guide I guide"
 but Helsinkian yap "No! Too many guides!" den I sleep outside
 'im door, 'im wake, I say calmly "I guide"
 y Helsinkian say "Goddammunt, ja okay, guide me!"

. . . a million lightbulbs en Desert wit cleanest latrines
 en our strobe lit lobbies since desert non sin . . . each
 hotel de McCosm o any city . . . Bangkok ova here,
 Parea ova dere . . . (25)

The reference to what "Merikkens say"—and to McDonald's via "McCosm"—connects the Desert to American capitalism specifically, despite the indication that the Desert receives visitors from all over the globe. The "Mc" label carries the connotation of a mass-produced inauthentic copy, as well as something dependent on low-wage workers, such as those who work in the fast food and service industries. The Guide's willingness to literally throw herself at the feet of the Helsinkian tourist is indicative of the precarious existence of such workers. "Roles" also introduces the interplay between matter, discourse, and subjective experience—a theme that comes up throughout *DDR*—as the Guide announces that she trained her "talk box" to talk "purdy" in order to enhance the tourist's experience.

In this single poem, Hong incorporates Korean, English, Latin, Finnish, and Spanish. The Guide claims to have knowledge of these languages, and she may well, but the language used throughout *DDR*, Desert Creole, provides a fictional example of plurilingualism at work.⁸ Linguist Suresh Canagarajah describes plurilingualism as a "highly fluid and variable form of language practice" in which different languages are used in a single integrated system (5). Proficiency in each language is not measured individually, and advanced proficiency in all the languages is not required. More important than individual proficiency is the ability to use plurilingual language as "a form of social practice and intercultural competence" (Canagarajah 5). These skills are not developed in school, but in real-world social situations. Plurilingualism has gained recent attention due to the nature of our increasingly globalized world—one where languages interact in "contexts of transnational affiliation, diaspora communities, digital communication, fluid social boundaries, and the blurring of time/space distinctions" (Canagarajah 5).⁹ Nearly all of these contexts apply to Hong's Desert, which is a microcosm of our current global situation.

Plurilingual language develops through interaction with others who may or may not speak the same native tongue and, thus, is an example of how bodies shape language and of the dynamic nature of both language and communities. With plurilingual language, language barriers need not necessarily shut one out of a community, nor does it mean forsaking one community for another. Instead, plurilingual competence allows members of various language groups to interact, resulting in "unity" and "a continuity of affiliations." As Canagarajah notes of South Asian plurilingualism, "Unlike other communities where individual differences have to be sacrificed for group identity, South Asian communities preserve their group differences while also developing an overarching community identity with other groups" (10).

Thus, despite the Desert's still precarious state at the end of *DDR*, there is hope in the possibility that the speakers of Desert Creole—the desert natives and migrant workers—can come together to combat the oppression that exists for the sake of monetary profit.

Furthermore, if plurilingual languages are dynamic and indeterminate, there is no dominant language to master; this makes Desert Creole a more democratic kind of English. As Indian linguist E. Annamalai observes of the plurilingual English of South Asia, “The words taken from the English language differ from speaker to speaker and even in the same speaker from time to time. Even the same sentence repeated after a few seconds may not have the same words from English” (qtd. in Canagarajah 8). The Guide also uses different words to say the same thing. As she says, “Desert Creole en eva-changing dipdong / ‘pendable on mine mood” (25). This is also one way bodies influence language. An individual's mood often depends on how the body is feeling—hot, cold, in pain—at any given time. In this sense, the body can dictate language use and practice.

Despite the dynamic nature of plurilingual languages, plurilingual communication is possible between speakers with completely different first languages and different levels of proficiency in English. Speakers are able to “negotiate their different Englishes for intelligibility and effective communication” and “English and local languages may be combined in idiosyncratic ways as it befits the speaker, context, and purpose” (Canagarajah 7–8). Which is to say, successful communication depends as much on being able to decipher the meaning of time and place as it does on language. This also applies to reading *DDR*; some readers may find Hong's use of an invented language uninviting and difficult. However, once the reader becomes acclimated to the situation and context, reading and understanding the poems in *DDR* is as easy (or hard) as reading any poem written in standard English. Most reviewers of the book express a similar sentiment; reading *DDR* becomes easier and easier as we become more familiar with the context created by Hong. The reward is a renewed understanding of the possibility for unlikely community. As Susanna Childress writes in her review of *DDR*, “[L]eading linguists see homogeneity as the exception, not the norm,” and *DDR* “leads us into the potential of plurilingualism with gusto, expanding and making possible a place where no common code is expected and the process of language, rather than the product, allows the speech act to be consensus-oriented rather than a target-language to be ‘mastered.’” Such a place, a place where there is no master narrative, is likely to be one where perceived differences are not seen as barriers to kinship.

In a world where money is most often made at the expense of marginalized others, such a view of community and kinship—one where no “common code” is expected—is crucial to establishing a posthuman ethical stance in

our increasingly globalized world. “Roles” ends with an allusion to the human cost of capitalist imperialism:

... Many 'Merikken dumplings unhinge dim
talk holes y ejaculate *oooh y hot-diggity*,
dis is de *shee-it* . . . but gut ripping done to erect Polis,
we exploit gaggle o aborigini to back tundra country . . .
Bannitus! But betta to scrape dat fact
unda history rug, so shh . . .

O tempora, O mores! I usta move
around like Inuit lookim for sea pelt . . . now
I'mma double migrant. Ceded from Koryo, ceded from
'Merikka, ceded y ceded until now I seizem
dis sizable Mouthpiece role . . . now les' drive to interior. (26)

As the Guide reveals, the excitement and pleasure of “the Desert” was made available to American tourists at the expense of the original inhabitants of the desert. However, the Guide's characterization of Americans as “ejaculating dumplings” also indicates the consumer may not be mindful enough to think or care about the “gut ripping” done in the name of capitalism.

Hong's invented language enhances her ability to convey multiple meanings. For example, when the Guide says, “we exploit gaggle o aborigine,” the word “exploit” could mean exploit, export, or both. As we read *DDR*, we come to learn the native inhabitants were both exploited by the Desert resorts and also exported to “New Town” as soon as they revolted against the establishment, a policy still implemented twenty-eight years later when the Historian arrives in 2016. The Guide's warning to “scrape dat fact / unda history rug,” shows this exploitation and banishment of workers is not something the establishment wants advertised. It also brings to the fore *DDR*'s central concern with discourse and power. *Who* gets to write history? *Who* gets to speak and why? What happens when marginalized voices, such as the Guide's, are finally heard?

In raising these questions, “Roles” serves as an apt prologue for *DDR*, a book that illustrates how discourses of power affect material bodies, while also helping us to imagine an alternate global community. The last lines of the poem suggest that when the oppressed are “ceded y ceded,” they will eventually rise up and seize the “Mouthpiece role.” The Guide's use of “O tempora, O mores,” a lament from Cicero's *Catiline Orations*, provides another allusion to the power of discourse. The phrase, translated from Latin to “Oh the times, oh the customs!” comes from a series of inflammatory speeches designed to quash a conspiracy against Rome. The phrase is still commonly used to lament perceived societal illness. Here, the Guide laments the treatment of the natives and her own treatment as a migrant worker. This is followed by a description of what she “usta” do, migrate from place to

place in order to survive, to what she does *now*: a seizure of language and voice in order to take control of her own bodily existence.

Recognizing the physical repercussions of certain normative discourses and the need to imagine an alternate global community is especially timely given the recent mass migrations of Syrian refugees into Europe. One argument against accepting Syrian refugees into Western countries is that refugees will have trouble assimilating or that their culture and/or religion will overtake the majority. Because “no common code is expected,” plurilingual communication, such as Desert Creole, provides a promising figuration for the creation of a kinder, interconnected multivalent community.

MATERIAL-SEMIOTIC INTERPLAY: DISCOURSE SHAPING MATTER

Discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses. Hong’s project specifically illustrates the material consequences of the inter-related discourses of globalization and capitalist imperialism. Berberoglu construes globalization as “the highest stage of capitalist imperialism” and describes it as “a process of exploitation and accumulation on a global scale” that depends on “the subjugation of the working class and all of humanity to the dictates of capital, the capitalist class, and the capitalist state on a worldwide basis” (“Introduction” 2). Capitalist imperialism involves the expanding of advanced capitalist economies beyond national borders in order to dominate and control the societies of less developed nations. This neoliberal globalization of capitalism has led to and continues to lead to the following consequences: the super exploitation of the working class and developing nations, the growing militarization of society, mass migrations, and the conversion of a manufacturing economy into a service economy, among other consequences (Berberoglu, “Global” 174, 179). *DDR* addresses all of these material consequences.

As Berberoglu contends, the global expansion of capital “has meant first and foremost the ever-growing use of cheap labor across the world” (“Global” 124). The need to maintain this exploitation in developing nations often leads “capitalist centers” (i.e., nations such as the United States) to intervene militarily (i.e., backing a dictator that serves U.S. economic interests) (“Global” 119). The exploitation of workers is a focal point of *DDR*, as Hong illustrates how the Guide’s life has been shaped by her working class position in both South Korea and the Desert. In the poem “Cholla Village of No,” the Guide relays the story of the wig factory in her childhood village, and the factory workers’ planned strike:

... but hours killim workas, in window black
paint room ... bone cramp backs en airless room y hack

a lot so plan a mass sit down,
non work til betta pay. . . (54)

The Guide “naifly” tells her father about the planned strike, and her “gor-belly fadder” then reports the strike to the police. As a result, the police raid the factory, spraying the workers with a heavy duty water hose that “shatta workas rib cages” (54). Ashamed of her father and herself, the Guide, then fourteen years old, moves in with her teacher, which in turn leads to her later involvement in the Democratic Movement and the Kwangju Uprising.

Employment in the Desert is no less rife with bodily violence and exploitation in the name of profit. The fifth section of *DDR*, “Intermission: Portrait of the Desert,” deals with the development of the desert into “the Desert,” along with the mistreatment and profiteering that often accompanies such development. The first poem in the section, a brief poem of five lines, mourns (as the poem’s title of “Elegy” implies) those who immigrated to the Desert for work:

Parachute in cloudless cielo und school o jellyfish,
émigrés land in dusty tureen,
and ladled a job
:tram blower,
:jackfruit seller. (71)

“Elegy” highlights both the increased mass migrations that are a consequence of capitalist imperialism as the increasingly impoverished working class searches for employment, as well as the types of jobs made available to immigrants: low-paying jobs in the service industry, such as a gardener or fruit vendor.¹⁰ As Berberoglu points out, factory work has largely been “replaced by a service industry that is based on low-wage, low-skill, non-union, contingent labor, which enriches wealthy capitalists and impoverishes working men and women in the United States and around the world” (“Global” 174). Hong also speaks to this in a later poem, “Once the Factory, No Longer the Factory.” Here, the Guide takes the Historian to the “[r]emain o last factory,” a now defunct carp cannery because “tourists wanna carp fish / en lily pond not en dim soup” and “all customa is king service” (95). Besides the brief use of German and Spanish in “Elegy,” this fifth section is the only one in the book not written in Desert Creole. This sudden switch to “proper” English reminds readers of the Historian’s decision to transcribe the Guide’s words into English whenever he thought clarification was needed; as the only section receiving this treatment, the switch to English causes this section to stand out, thus adding an element of heft and importance.

The four poems that follow “Elegy” all have the same title: “Almanac.” As an almanac, the poems serve as an account of the development of the Desert and the toll exacted on the desert’s native inhabitants. Placed after “Elegy,” the “Almanac” poems also serve as a lament for these victims of

global capitalism. In the first "Almanac," readers learn the desert was the site of a prior war, and as a result, much of the outer area is pocked with landmines. Hong writes, "Once, the Desert was actually a desert," but then "A honeycomb of lights. / The world pours in" (72), indicating the arrival of the Vegas-like "Desert" with its brightly lit themed resorts, and the subsequent displacement of the inhabitants who "now live where the mines sleep," and are left looking "iris-to-knothole / into the city of too many lights" (73).

The subsequent "Almanac" poems illustrate how the Desert's big resorts stay afloat on the backs of marginalized others, a population kept down through force and violence. The third "Almanac" captures the fear and unease that season the plight of both native and migrant workers who cross "the ratcheting bridge" separating the Desert (and the tourists) from the displaced and marginalized:

how they frisk their heads around
when they hear the shots, but see,
those shots are not for them

A lot nearby, a man whose job
it is to put to rest greyhound dogs
too slow for the track.

Succumb he says the dog succumbs.
Cradle its deer-like head whisper a prayer
into the dog ear's felt and aim. (77)

The workers understand the shots could have easily been meant for them. The dog, who has lost his monetary value, is a figuration for both the way we treat non-human others and the way we marginalize and treat certain groups of humans. The exploited dog, like the exploited worker, is disposed of once he ceases to be valuable. The fourth "Almanac" illustrates further the material repercussion of profit-driven exploitation. Once the natives decide to revolt, they begin "misguiding travelers to stumble / into mines from last era's war," so that "rended travelers" become "tissues wrestling / in flame" (78). This final move toward violence demonstrates how capitalist imperialism carries bodily repercussions for both the exploited laborer, as well as those whom, on the surface, may benefit from capitalism.

DYNAMIC COMMUNITY: THE DANCE OF BECOMING WITH

The constant interchange between material bodies and discourse means we (and all others) are constantly moving, shifting—constantly *becoming with*. As Donna Haraway argues in *When Species Meet*, those "who are to be in this world are constituted in intra- and interaction. The partners do not pre-

cede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters" (4). Over time and space, bodies encounter various objects and subjects shaped by various discursive and material elements, resulting in an ongoing dance of relating, or becoming with.¹¹ The subject is a multi-layered, non-unitary embodied being embedded in a corporeal landscape; the body's boundaries are thick but permeable. Thus, the stuff of the human is always shifting, always in flux, as he or she relates, either consciously or unconsciously, to others.

This constant material-semiotic interplay means bodies, through embodied action, can also shape discourse. After all, it is the Guide's own body that leads her to become the voice of the Kwangju Uprising. Because she suffers from alopecia, the Guide has worn a wig her entire life. In the poem "The Voice," the Guide describes how during an early student rally, she loses her wig "en passion o rally." The same passion that causes her wig to fall off also moves her to approach the podium to rally the crowd. Due to her bodily appearance, this doesn't go quite as planned:

mine ball head necked, mine oysta eyes
filla-up wit wadder, stompim podium
spout ricanery to rally crowd . . .

. . . but crowd dim boo me, t'row rocks a'me,
rocks intend fo plis boi patos, balfastards, trown a'me!
So I's paddles tru clog, aways from Sah, run
y hide en me dead fadder's house, hid like
I's hidim now en Desert . . . (104)

Embarrassed by the crowd's reaction to her appearance, she no longer wants anything to do with the Democratic Movement. But three days later, with all the leaders dead or arrested, Sah begs her to come guide the movement. Since she still refuses to face anyone, Sah "pirated a notch en radio," away from "de scourgim / eyes." "[C]loaked deep en broom sweepa closet wit mike," the Guide's voice rallies coal miners, housewives, "pot-belly war veterans," and "steetwalkas" to take up the cause (105). Because it is her voice—her language—that rallies the crowd, one could argue that this is just another example of language shaping our reality. However, because the Guide's body plays a role in her becoming the Voice, it is more accurately an example of material-semiotic interplay. In the next poem, "Kwangju Replayed," (a poem that also vividly portrays the material consequences of discourse in its graphic description of what happens when the military government murders the protestors), the Guide further alludes to the role her body played in creating the Voice: ". . .lika lady liberty from Tinny-man, I was mascot / cos me ball head, me haole eyes [. . .] now me fes in / all de postas" (108). It is not just her voice, but the image of her embodiment that calls the people to action. Thus, Hong's portrayal of the Guide's early in-

volvement in revolution illustrates how our material body shapes both our subjective experience and the way others perceive and shape our subjectivity.

If our very existence is tied to others in the form of an ongoing multi-knotted kinship based on our location in a material body, then our embodiment is also directly linked to the formation of community. As Haraway notes, "To be one is always to *become with* many" (4). Throughout *DDR*, Hong communicates this embodied formation through the figuration of the dancer and the embodied action of dancing, which Hong connects to the physical movement of revolution. In "The Voice," the Guide describes herself as the "uprising's danseur principal" (104). As the lead voice in the movement, she is also the one guiding literal bodily movement. To truly affect change, we must understand our bodies as constantly moving, changing, dancing, and *becoming with* something else. Although the two revolutions in the book—the Kwangju Uprising and the fictional Dance Dance Revolution—are violent and seemingly futile, they serve to highlight and contrast the other meanings of revolution, those largely related to movement: a convolution, a twist, a turn, a loop.

As Hong demonstrates, this ongoing dance can change the way we view community. Although the revolutionaries are "miming" as guides—miming itself a kind of dance—in order to subvert the establishment, there are other less violent forms of dance that can work to affect change through the formation of community identity. In "Music of the Streets Series," a five-section poem, the Guide takes us closer to the outskirts of the Desert and the border of New Town. Here we see various forms of movement and dance, whether it's the music and movement of the hagglers in the market bazaar, or the hula hoopers moving their hips in a "fast rondeau" (89), or the many dance hall stalls at the end of the bazaar. As Susannah Hollister notes, "These border region dances do not merely repeat the failed strategies of the uprising. They are active steps toward building a changed community; dance becomes a new form of protest," a way to claim belonging and assert identity (263). In the final section of the poem, entitled "Toasts in the Grove of Proposals," the dancing is a celebration of multi-knotted kinship as the "gay sashayim crowd" claps and cheers for the many nuptials between migrants from a variety of locales:

Lo, union o husky Ontarian y teacup size Tibetan,
wreath en honeysuckle y dew-studded bracken,
lo, union o Cameroon groom kissim 'e gallic Gamine's cheek
en miscegenatin' amour dim seem to reek
les' toast to bountiful gene pool,
to intramarry couple breedim beige population! (92)

Together the inhabitants of the Desert and New Town shift and adapt to become something else. Just as the Guide shifts and adapts to each new setting and surrounding, so does every individual. A body in the world, the

Guide has moved, shifted, and adapted to a variety of situations, all of which have depended on her body's location in the world and her body's interaction with other bodies. As the Guide says herself, "I's sum o all I's rued, sum o me accents / y twill mine worn, travels mine tilled, [and] deaths mine endured" (119). She has mastered languages, including Desert Creole, because of the places she has found herself in and the bodies she has been in contact with. And if each individual within the community is shifting, then so is the community itself. As "Toasts in the Grove of Proposals" illustrates, both individual and group boundaries are open to revision, and this openness has the potential to bring about positive change.

The final section of *DDR*, aptly titled "Dance Dance," serves as an imperative to act, to move, to become. The section contains three poems, excluding the Historian's excerpt, and all three contain references to feudalism, which serves to draw a parallel between the exploitation of the peasantry in medieval Europe and the exploitation of the working class in our current era of capitalist imperialism. The penultimate poem, "Orphic Day," highlights the precarious role language plays in making things happen. When language "misfires," bodies suffer, "electricians drop dead," "birdcallas attracts mosquitos, / y lovelorn Balladeers incite Brueglia mobs," and guides lose their sense and trap tourists in explosive marshes, until "we [all] float like incubated bodies" (117). However, as the title of the last poem, "The Refinery of Voices and Vices," indicates, language can be "refined" or converted into something oppressive *or* something of positive value. The Guide knows the violence in the Desert will continue, with "miming guides plotting, potting more mines," but she desires something more:

... a silence to crave, not dis babel,
a sly unrest, a sly darting dance, no delightful
marches fo mo dreadful measures . . .

... I's unpeel mine insides fo one clean note
tru all de marshy crowd sounds, tru all de trademark
cowed libel, I's unpeel mefelf lika pin-hole
neck sweater . . . (118)

When she says "not this babel," she is speaking to both the "trademarked cowed libel" induced by capitalist imperialism *and* the rebellious actions of the natives. "Babel" denotes a discordant, cacophony of sounds, but it is also "an ambitious or unrealistic project," especially "one doomed to failure." Seeing that the natives' revolution is perhaps doomed to the same failure as the Kwangju Uprising, the Guide craves a different kind of revolution: a sly dance instead of the "dreadful measures" the revolutionary guides have enacted. She is searching for the "one clean note" that will get through the language of violence—the "crowd sounds" coming from the bloody marsh—and the language of oppression—the "cowed libel" of capitalist imperialism.

Throughout her life, the Guide has been torn between giving in to the discourse of oppression and fighting oppression. Her grandfather and father catered to imperialist power, and she wished to live her life differently. In “Years in the Ginseng Colony,” we learn the violence in Kwangju changed her mind about revolution’s potential (111). She decides to give in to her “yesman lineage” (44), a “lineage biggum on survival” (45), and simply look out for herself. The Guide reveals to the Historian that she has been spying on the exiles who are trying “to wrest desert back” from the establishment (98). Because the tourism industry is “not so hop now,” she needs the extra money the establishment pays (99). She admits Sah would be ashamed of her actions, but until the Historian arrived, she thought Sah was dead.

The final poem ends with the Guide inviting the Historian to “have dim dance,” an invitation that signifies the Guide’s renewed belief in the affirmative possibilities of community:

... Summon mine last sieved blood
 invocation det roused tousands not fluke
 o me guided flute which led you
 to dis mine poked river, sum me might
 so I’s be righted . . .

Might I brush out dragonfly wings
 from mine wig.
 If de world is our disco ball,
 might I have dim dance. (119)

For a moment, one may wonder if the Guide, having led the Historian to the mine-filled river, is not a revolutionary after all. She could have brought the Historian to the river to suffer an explosive, as the “miming” guides have done, in order to make amends for betraying the desert revolution. However, because she juxtaposes the “blood invocation” that led to the death of thousands in Kwangju against the option of guiding the Historian, the phrase “so I’s be righted” likely has a different meaning. Instead of engaging in the kind of revolution that leads to more bloodshed, and instead of engaging in profit-based spying for the establishment, she chooses to “dance” with the Historian.

The final stanza of the poem is the only stanza without ellipses, indicating there was no content missing from this section of the recording, and thus, no mistaking the Guide’s intent. The lack of ellipses in this final stanza also gives the impression that it is the end product of the refinery process. After all the stories have been told, and all the transcribing and translating has been completed, this stanza is the final product. It all comes down to brushing the wings from one’s wig, grabbing a partner and dancing; engaging in a reciprocal, embodied action. As a disco ball revolves, it reflects light in various

shifting directions; as such, the disco ball is a perfect closing metaphor for the shifting nature of both individual and community boundaries.

Hong’s demonstration of community’s dynamic nature is an example of affirmative posthuman ethics, which Braidotti describes as an ethics “based on the praxis of constructive positivity, thus propelling new social conditions and relations into being, out of injury and pain. It actively constructs energy by transforming the negative charge of these experiences, even in intimate relationships where the dialectics of domination is at work” (*Posthuman* 128). Hong’s creation of Desert Creole, the use of Desert Creole by the community of indigenous and migrant workers, and the subsequent relations that exist as a result of plurilingualism, provides an illustrative example of the possibility to turn oppression into a positive social condition.

NOTES

1. Quotes from *Dance Dance Revolution* by Cathy Park Hong. Copyright © 2007 by Cathy Park Hong. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

2. See Coole and Frost for a discussion of the relationship between posthumanism and new materialism. See Coole and Frost, Alaimo and Hekman, and Iovino for an overview of new materialism and its history.

3. Hong’s other poetry collections include *Translating Mo’um* (2002) and *Engine Empire* (2012). *Dance Dance Revolution* was chosen by Adrienne Rich as the winner of the 2006 Barnard Women Poets Prize.

4. Hong never explicitly states who is responsible for “the Desert” or who orchestrates the mistreatment of the natives and migrant workers. From the Guide’s story, the reader comes to understand that there exists a nebulous *they*, driven by profit, who somehow rule with an oppressive thumb. This construction of power is certainly in keeping with the shadowy nature of global corporate entities.

5. For more on “becoming minoritarian” see Rosi Braidotti’s *Transpositions*. For Braidotti, becoming minoritarian is about “overturning the dialectical logic that legitimates a central norm through hierarchically organized binary oppositions” (133). Thus, a multivalent minoritarian discourse disavows the existence of a normative identity or pre-given measurement for inclusion.

6. Due to the Historian’s role as foil to the Guide, I’ve chosen to refer to the Historian as male. Andrea Quaid takes the name “Samsy” to indicate a male gender. However, in her review of *DDR*, Shanna Compton challenges this common assumption and assigns the Historian a female gender.

7. To avoid confusion between my own ellipses and Hong’s, my omissions of Hong’s words in quoted passages are indicated by bracketed ellipses.

8. I am indebted to Susanna Childress for bringing my attention to plurilingualism in her brief review of *DDR*.

9. The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe began promoting plurilingual competence in the year 2000 (Canagarajah 5).

10. See Spector, pages 16-18, for a discussion of mass migration as a consequence of global capitalism.

11. In *When Species Meet*, Haraway critiques Deleuze and Guattari’s “theory of becoming,” which for Haraway fails to address the porous nature of species’ bodily boundaries. Haraway introduces the concept of “becoming with” to illustrate species intra-relations as more than reactions to encounters, but instead as engaged processes of becoming with. Haraway also includes the non-living in her assessment, while new materialist theory allows us to consider the role discourse plays in becoming with.

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