

**CONSENSUAL HALLUCINATIONS: CYBERSPACE, NARRATIVE, AND
POETICS IN ASIAN NORTH AMERICAN LITERATURE**

by

SUNNY CHAN

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Abstract

This thesis examines the effects and applications of Web 2.0 in contemporary Asian diasporic literature. Since the early days of cyberpunk, cyberspace has long been considered an object of science fiction to be depicted through futuristic tropes. With the advent of Web 2.0, however, cyberspace has become integrated into our everyday lives and virtual subjectivity is now as much a part of daily experience as racial subjectivity. Previous scholarship on cyberspace in literature has focused largely on the past generation of cyberpunk, and although it acknowledges that imagined Asian subjects are intimately tied to understandings of cyberspace, it has not yet turned its attention to the growing number of texts that treat cyberspace as a quotidian reality. I argue that the recognition that cyberspace is no longer science fiction but is instead a realistic part of ordinary life allows several Asian North American writers to use cyberspace to comment on racialisation.

This study is split into two main parts, which explore cyberspace's relationship with narrative and with poetics in non-canonical Asian North American literature. In the first part, a chapter on the Internet's effect on narrative, I analyse the short stories of Wena Poon's *Lions in Winter* and a graphic novel by Jen Wang, *Koko Be Good*. I read the ways in which cyberspace as a literary concept affects these authors' approaches to racial issues of class and representation. In the next chapter on poetics, I examine Rita Wong's *forage* and its use of what Fred Wah has defined as alienethnic poetics. I then attempt to read Sachiko Murakami's online experimental poetry site, Project Rebuild, through the non-traditional application of alienethnic poetics and propose a new methodology for reading the virtuality of the Internet. This thesis contributes to the existing body of critical work on cyber literature by suggesting new directions for the mobilization of cyberspace as a literary mode.

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Dedication

To my lovely parents, Chris and Iris, who believed in me most when I believed in myself least.

In memory of my grandfather, who passed during the writing of this thesis and who lives on in every note of Chinese opera I hear.

Chapter One: Introduction

An avant-garde poetry movement called "Flarf" emerged in the early 21st century. Flarf's earliest practitioners worked together through an email listserv, and developed an Internet-based technique that involves mining the Google results of strange search terms in order to compile them into poems and other texts. In a deliberate bid to reject accepted standards of poetic quality, Flarf texts often end up being abrasive, comedic, and offensive. Conversations about Flarf so far have been mostly confined to what one would expect to be its natural habitats—avant-garde journals, Internet forums, and poet-blogger communities. Literary discussions of Flarf mostly tend to centre around debating its legitimacy: the influential *Poets & Writers*, for example, ran an article blatantly called "Can Flarf Ever Be Taken Seriously?" in 2009. One notable exception to this trend, however, has been the conversation surrounding Michael Magee's Flarf poem "Their Guys, Their Asian Glittering Guys, Are Gay." Upon publication, it caused a stir not just about Flarf as Flarf but about its content, themes, and poetic strategy. It deploys various Asian and Asian American stereotypes, such as those often found in Hollywood pop culture, pornography, and model minority idealisations. Readers argued over whether lines such as "They like/ opium, the old guys down in Chinatown," "You always hear about sleazy guys who get blowjobs matching/ their spectacular looks to Kimmy, a 21-year-old Asian cutie," and "model minority Asian/ stereotype in a cartoon which the guys really enjoyed (occasion/ was the baptism of their sons)" were ironically racist or just plain racist.

I open with this anecdotal example because it is a snapshot of a collision between literature, cyberspace, and Asian racialisation. Flarf specifically uses Google in its

method of production and in its artistic statement about the proliferation of mass culture. It can be seen, therefore, that the Internet is changing the techniques of literary production. But my thesis argues that the techniques of literature can also be employed to change how we conceptualise or even produce the Internet. The Internet can be treated in literary ways, not only as a medium but as a theoretical concept, and this reading of the Internet is particularly relevant to Asian American and Asian Canadian literature. As a movement or a collective practice, Flarf embraces consumerism and vacuity, and deliberately avoids political and ethical engagements in its poetry. The backlash against it shows that there is a strong interest in bringing ethical uses of language into new arenas of Internet poetics, and in pushing cyberspace as a medium that can accommodate weightier subjects such as race and class rather than one that can only revel in its own superficiality. In an attempt to explore this literary potential of cyberspace, I analyse how cyberspace both affects and is affected by narrative and poetics in contemporary Asian North American literature.

Definition of Terms

The Internet, as a network of networks that enables the sharing of information between computer users, supports a variety of technologies such as email and telephony services. While I will also touch on these usages, the most common and most important application of the Internet, for the purposes of this paper and for our everyday lives at this point in time, is the World Wide Web. In everyday speech, the terms 'Internet' and 'Web' are often conflated with each other; although the Internet is a global infrastructure of hardware and software while the Web is merely one of the services it powers, in deference to common usage the technical distinction between Internet and Web in this

paper will be inconsequential unless otherwise stated. Since 1993, when the first graphic web browser became publicly available, the Web in its most basic form has been a collection of documents joined by hyperlinks potentially "connected to an infinite matrix," and its identity as a new medium has been "defined fundamentally by its connection to other locations and sites" (Marshall 47-8). But this paper deals with a more specific version of the Web. Popularized in 2004 by media mogul Tim O'Reilly,¹ the phrase 'Web 2.0' refers to a vision of the Web as a cooperative social space where the line between producers and consumers blurs. Collaborative websites such as Wikipedia, Youtube, and Tumblr illustrate how relying on user-generated content has become a regular Web practice. Despite the 2.0's implication that it is a second incarnation, Web 2.0 denotes not one particular upgrade but rather encompasses the cumulative changes that have made the Internet a site of virtual communities full of user-generated content.² User-generated content is, according to cyberstudies scholar David Bell, "a key element of Web 2.0 [that] is widely touted as a profoundly significant rewriting of cyberculture" (5). Online content generation, originally regarded as a geeky subcultural practice, has

¹ According to O'Reilly's media company, there are conflicting stories as to the coinage of 'Web 2.0'—Darcy DiNucci uses the term as early as 1999 in an article called "Fragmented Future," but her definition does not capture the same nuances as current usages. From 1999 to 2002, there were infrequent attempts to further define 'Web 2.0' by notable bloggers such as John Robb. O'Reilly claims that the phrase first arose in a 2003 "brainstorming session between O'Reilly and MediaLive International," a producer of technology tradeshows and conferences. Regardless of who invented the term, its meaning as generally understood today was popularised by the first Web 2.0 conference co-hosted by O'Reilly's company and MediaLive in October 2004.

² The spectre of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" recurs throughout this essay, as parallels abound between the virtual community of global 'netizens' and the imagined community of nations, which Anderson claims became possible during modernity due to "print capitalism" and the ability of print culture to support fantasies of simultaneous experiences with other members of one's shared national community whom one might never actually see. Cyber media, as a continuation of mass media's evolution, is also a continuation of this same conception of simultaneity. However, Web 2.0 also offers previously unavailable avenues of simultaneous production. Rather than a central source that distributes material to be consumed by an audience, Web 2.0 allows for all members to produce texts that are then available to the rest of the virtual community.

become quotidian with the advent of Web 2.0. This universalization and normalization of producing cyber content means that, at least for some thinkers like Bell, "cyberculture has become more than passive, more than interactive, even: it has become a key (potential) site of cultural production for its multitude of users" (5). This paper consciously evokes these implications of Web 2.0 in its discussions of the Internet. Rather than the cyberspace depicted by the first generation of cyberpunk, Web 2.0 is the cyberspace of the texts I will analyse, chosen as a topic not because of its strange futurism but because it is intimate and intertwined with the everyday.

This essay also approaches texts from the point of view that race and diaspora are not natural categories, but rather take on definitions just as man-made technologies do. Stuart Hall's methodology in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" guides the theoretical background of this paper. Hall rejects a definition of "cultural identity" as "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' [...] which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (393), arguing instead that cultural identity "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.'" (394). By recognising that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (394), I hold that the observations I make about diasporic community are not definitive but contingent upon this specific moment of time and space. In addition, I use Omi & Winant's theory of race as a "social fact," neither a purely ideological construct nor an objective biological condition, but still having fundamental influence on the realities of social interaction. Omi & Winant's "racial formation approach" is based on a "process-oriented theory of race" that sees "the meaning and salience of race [as] forever being reconstituted in the present" (204). These racial

theories were established before the onset of cyber performativity, which makes the current age of Web 2.0 a fitting time to revisit how race and culture are conceptually constructed. The intervention of cyberspace, with its novel possibilities for identity creation and community formation, both gives new reasons to question racial categories and asks new questions of the existing cultural theory framework.

My use of race as the framework through which to address those 'of Asian descent' in this paper combines the work of Hall and Omi & Winant, which necessarily complicates my definition of 'Asian' (already destabilised by shifting online usages of national and ethnic identifiers) in the formulations of 'Asian American' and 'Asian Canadian' used throughout this essay. I also occasionally choose to use 'Asian North American' when not specifying a particular nationality. Historical similarities in immigration and racism (the flow of indentured labourers in the late 1800s and early 1900s and the yellow peril fears that came to a head during the Cold War, for example, which I will revisit later in this introduction) means it sometimes makes sense to label this grouping thus, and there is also a modern online tendency to conflate the two countries' cultures. I am not trying to perpetuate the conflation so much as I am trying to apply terms as used by contemporary cyberspace practitioners.

Anthropologist Aihwa Ong's work in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* has been instrumental in working out my definition of diaspora. In this text, she meticulously delineates the difference between old migration patterns versus the movement of people in the age of late capitalism, with a focus on Asia. She writes that conventional diaspora studies tend to "look at the subjective experiences of displacement, victimhood, cultural hybridity, and cultural struggles in the modern world" (*Flexible* 12),

and to uphold diasporic subjects as celebrated transgressors of enforced purity in a similar way to postcolonialism's celebration of subaltern subjects. In the case of Asian migration, this alignment of diasporic studies with postcolonialism partially comes from a historiographical association with indentured Asian labour during the height of 19th century colonialism. This view of the Asian diaspora is similar to traditional notions of diasporas like the historical forced Jewish and Black African migrations. However, contemporary forms of Asian migration are often significantly different. In *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong sidelines the continuing reality of Asian refugees in order to point out that today's emigration out of Asia toward North America is primarily market-driven and voluntary, rather than coerced. Although "diaspora as permanent political exile is often conflated with contemporary forms of fairly unrestricted mobility," the term 'diaspora' is "increasingly invoked by affluent migrants in transnational contexts to articulate an inclusive global ethnicity for disparate populations the world over who may be able to claim a common racial or cultural ancestry" ("Cyberpublics" 305). She argues that 'transnationality' and 'translocal publics' may be better words to describe "the new kinds of disembedded diaspora identifications enabled by technologies" (305), since "while some migrations are involuntary or occasioned by war ... , most cross-border flows today are induced and channelled by the ease of travel and the reorganization of labor markets within the global economy" and no longer defined by diaspora's "original sense of a lack of hope of return to one's homeland" (308-9). Despite granting that "diaspora sentiments may linger," she states that it may be analytically inexact to continue calling this new kind of diaspora a 'diaspora' (309).

When I speak of Asian diaspora in this paper, my scope only encompasses the diaspora to North America and I actually mean what Ong has suggested should be called transnationality, where subjects feel a sense of ethnic connection to and community with other Asian North Americans despite often being able to return to their home countries. My continued use of 'diaspora' in this paper recognises Ong's critiques of its limitations; I choose to employ this definition of diaspora anyway because, as Ong herself recognises, the word 'diaspora' continues to be used in self-descriptions. Instead of seeing it as a failure to apply transnationality, I argue that diaspora has taken on a secondary meaning in contemporary discourse—or, to couch it in cybercultural idiom, there now exists a sense of 'diaspora 2.0'. Just as the '2.0' of Web 2.0 does not indicate an upgrade that replaces the original Web but rather signifies a state that has been built upon the original over time, diaspora 2.0 does not replace the traditional sense of diaspora. Diaspora, in the sense of forced displacement, struggle, and painful exile continues to happen in modern Asian migrations. Ong's differentiation between old and new diasporas effectively marks a shift from involuntary to voluntary movements based on the agency gained through affluence, but I myself do not deploy diaspora 2.0 as a new epoch that succeeds the old. Rather, diaspora 2.0 is an acknowledgement that Asian diasporas retain the influence of and continuity from older forms of diaspora while also being qualitatively different in the contemporary moment. The Asian diasporas of today include voluntary mass migrations and the new involvement of the Internet as both a means to organise diaspora and a tool to problematize tropes of Asian racialisation.

A Brief History of the Internet and Asian North Americans in Literature

Cyberspace, as an expression and as a rhetorical concept, comes from the

subgenre of science fiction that became known as cyberpunk. Its origin story as a neologism coined in American-Canadian author William Gibson's *Neuromancer* has practically attained the status of creation myth in science fiction studies, and Gibson is invoked like a muse at the beginning of many articles I have encountered in researching for this paper. The connection between cyberspace and literary metaphor, therefore, is not merely legible, but foundational. Writing in 1982, eleven years before the first graphic web browser Mosaic became available, Gibson depicts his cyberspace as

a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. ...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. (51)

Media theorist Wendy Chun reads the subsequent naming of our cyberspace after Gibson's as a desire to live out a fantasy, since Gibson's cyberspace "is navigable and conceptualizable in a way the Internet, or 'real' cyberspace, is not" and has "little in common with the Net" "other than a common fan base driven by a burning desire" to see the technology of *Neuromancer* realised (4-5). However, while it is true that we cannot physically interface with the Web by 'jacking in' as characters do in the novel, I would argue that 'real' cyberspace in fact has quite a lot common with Gibson's: it is currently experienced by billions daily, and more importantly the same conceptualization of a space that is "nonspace" has remained. Although the "non" denotes no space, or anti-space, "nonspace" still functions as a location in Gibson's description, with a mental geography. Chun perceptively notes that "cyberspace, like the Orient [as analysed by Edward Said], is a literary invention. ... Rather than simply describing the Orient, orientalist have *projected* an Orient that does not easily map onto geographies and

cultures deemed oriental. The status of the Orient as fictional yet indexical to an 'other' space parallels the status of cyberspace" (9). In spite of this parallel (arguably a deliberate one, as Gibson pays minute attention to the aesthetics of *Neuromancer's* Tokyo), neoliberal rhetoric about cyberspace in American politics developed in the direction of 'colourblindness' in the early 1990s. Identified by Omi & Winant as a political technique to avoid addressing real racism, colourblindness became part of the "first wave of utopian thinking on the Internet" (Nakamura, *Digitizing* 181). By the mid-1990s, when the browser Netscape Navigator became available and the consumer Internet boom began in earnest, cyberspace was hailed as a site where one can transcend one's racialised body and interact "without privilege or prejudice accorded by race" (from Barlow's 1996 "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace"). Despite this milieu of neoliberal colourblind rhetoric, however, the history of cyberpunk literature seems to indicate the opposite of this utopic view.

Several critically-acclaimed works of science fiction in the age of Netscape Navigator paid specific attention to Asian bodies in relation to technology. Robert J. Sawyer's Nebula Award-winning 1995 novel, *The Terminal Experiment*, literalises virtual personalities that come to life and features a specifically racialised 'techno whiz' sidekick character named Sarkar Muhammed. Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, winner of the Hugo and Locus awards in 1996, takes a post-cyberpunk version of China as its setting and appropriates Confucian philosophy to deal with society after artificial intelligence. In Linda Nagata's 1995 *The Bohr Maker*, human brains directly interface with computers and Malaysia and Indonesia are depicted as victims of technology where Japan and China thrive as producers and consumers. These texts both belie proclamations of a colourblind

cyberspace and perpetuate problematic racial representations in their own way. Critic Greta Aiyu Niu uses the term 'techno-Orientalism' in her reading of *The Diamond Age* and *The Bohr Maker*. Springing from Morley & Robins' initial designation,³ Niu develops her own definition of techno-Orientalism to mean "a practice of ascribing, erasing, and/or disavowing relationships between technology and Asian peoples and subjects. ... [Her] version of techno-Orientalism points to the way it ignores the history and constructions of relationships between Asian people and technology" (74). She observes that in the science fiction genre, "Asian American subjects and objects are inextricably bound to feared and outlawed technologies" (88). This tendency toward techno-Orientalism in cyberpunk literature reflects similar fears and beliefs about Asians and technology in general.

Perceptions of Asian Americans as a 'model minority' have persisted since late-19th century labourers gained a reputation for hyper-efficiency, and accelerated during the Cold War when Asian Americans' educational and economic successes were held up as the triumph of cultural assimilation over 'colour' disadvantages. Unsurprisingly, this idealisation also led to xenophobic anxieties over this model minority being *too* ideal. When the Internet boom came, so too came a rise in "representations of Asians as possessing 'dangerous expertise' vis-à-vis the Internet because they are less disadvantaged

³ In the 1995 essay "Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic," David Morley and Kevin Robins assert that "techno-orientalism" was a late 1980s and early 1990s American panic response to the rapid rate at which Japan seemed to be overtaking the United States in high-tech fields. Stephen Sohn writes that, "in traditional Orientalism, the East often is configured as backwards, anti-progressive, and primitive" whereas techno-Orientalism configures the East as rather *too* futuristic—both types of Orientalism, then, project "inhuman qualities ... onto Asian bodies," and in techno-Orientalism Asians are imagined to have superb technologically expertise but an "affectual absence" that "resonates as an undeveloped or, worse still, a retro grade humanism" (8). Sohn connects this panic to the overall history and phenomenon of the Yellow Peril. Although Niu states that her own use of the phrase "techno-Orientalism" differs from past definitions (Niu 168), I employ her term with the understanding that her deployment is not completely separate from but instead builds upon these previous interpretations.

than other minority groups," which "exacerbate[s] anti-Asian sentiment" (Nakamura 180). Similar social dynamics in Canada suggest that overall, Asian North Americans as a group are, unlike other racial minorities, considered in popular imagination to be on the advantaged side of the digital divide. Organisations such as the Pew Foundation and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) report that African and Hispanic Americans use the Internet significantly less than White Americans, while Asian Americans, as "one of the most wired groups in America" (quoted from Pew Foundation report in Nakamura 181), are by percentages online more than Whites. According to the more recent "Internet Usage in the United States," a document circulated in 2009 by NAS Recruitment Communications,⁴ "83% of Asian Americans have Internet access in their homes," a marked 10% more than the "nearly 73%" statistic for American Internet access in general. This industry report claims that Asian Americans remain "most likely to have an Internet connection" (n. pag.).

This reported race-wide privilege is the result of a combination of factors. Aihwa Ong's account of Chinese immigration in relation to the modern flow of capital suggests that the new wave of "Chinese capitalism" in the past thirty years or so and the emergence of Pacific Rim powers as "Asian tiger countries" has made the image of the Asian business tycoon a familiar one (35). The American Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the 1967 Canadian changes to the Immigration Act ended both countries' formal non-preference of immigrants from outside Europe, including Asians. The recentness of these policy changes results in the relative youth and/or generational newness of many Asian North American diasporic communities. The 1967 revision of

⁴ NAS Recruitment Communications is an employment and recruiting strategy consulting firm based in the US and Canada. The above statistics are from a report provided through NAS Insights, the company's industry research reports, which are publicly available on their website.

the Canadian Immigration Act also introduced a points system that gave priority to immigrants of working age who possessed higher education or knowledge of skilled trades. Statistics on Asian American Internet usage are therefore partially accounted for by recent immigration patterns that correlate Asian subjects with youth, wealth, and education. Asian North American children who come from wealthy backgrounds will have much more access to the technology and education likely to make them digitally privileged. But of course, not every single Asian North American comes from this kind of background. Asian immigrants tend to be viewed through this expectation of higher-than-average socio-economic status, regardless of significant exceptions to this imagined norm, such as refugee populations or the working poor. Internet reports often use small sample sizes and only survey English speakers, leaving out portions of Asian Americans likely to be less wired. Nakamura argues that statistics on Asian American digital privilege "capitalize on fears that even a slightly higher percentage of Asians online constitutes a large and potentially worrisome majority" (181). Assumptions that anyone of Asian descent is party to this privilege incorporates elements of fear—yellow peril/Asian invasion anxieties for a new century—and essentialist stereotyping, even if the stereotypes can be considered positive.

As the yellow peril anxieties and model minority myths of diaspora 2.0 meet the new practices of Web 2.0, literature has developed in response to move beyond previously established tropes of cyberpunk. My thesis focuses on a new generation of Asian American and Asian Canadian texts that deal with cyberculture while also taking up such issues as the recuperation of virtual and Asian subjectivities as ordinary rather than perilous, the socio-economic stakes of techno-Orientalism, and resistance to

becoming a model online minority through creative expressions of racialisation on the Internet. In chapter two, I examine Wena Poon's short story collection *Lions in Winter* and Jen Wang's graphic novel *Koko Be Good*, to see how the Internet has effected changes in prose narratives about race and Asian diasporic subjects. But in keeping with the spirit of Web 2.0's challenging of traditional top-down flow, I find that this effect is not one-way. I propose that the Internet is also open to being changed *by* literature. In chapter three, I analyse two poetic works, Rita Wong's *forage* and Sachiko Murakami's Project Rebuild, to suggest how the Internet can be used as a poetic medium to which a specific set of poetics can be applied. These diverse texts span several genres, in part to formally reflect the miscellaneous nature of the Internet. More importantly, these texts in particular have been chosen because they do not simply use cyberspace as an attention-grabbing narrative device. Rather, they treat online subjectivities and Asian diasporic identities as equally important in informing their characterisations, thereby moving beyond superficial usages of race and cyberspace as techniques of othering and instead deeply engage with racialised virtuality as a literary concept.

Chapter Two: The Internet's Effect on Narrative

With the ongoing developments of Web 2.0, the topic of cyberspace is no longer confined to science fiction and cyberpunk. It now fits into more realistic narratives about the everyday. The question of how the Internet can be read as a literary concept and how its literariness is relevant to Asian North American literature drives my thesis as a whole. In chapter two, I approach this question by investigating the way the Internet affects how two authors write about race. Both Wena Poon, with her short story anthology *Lions in Winter*, and Jen Wang, with her graphic novel *Koko Be Good*, take a popular narrative form and add a twist. Poon tells stories about returns to homeland with tales in which characters do not go back to their homelands, and Wang presents all the ingredients needed for a classic story about racial and diasporic struggles but then takes her plot to a different conflict. I argue that both of these twists are made possible through the influence of Web 2.0. The Internet as we know it today, as a topic of consideration and as a way of conceptualizing community, has opened up new ways for these texts to tell stories about Asian diasporic subjects. In this regard, cyberspace retains its cyberpunk correlation with Asian characters. Unlike much of the earlier cyberpunk works, however, the new literary generation of texts about the Internet allows for the self-representation of Asian North Americans and the representation of Asians online as ordinary people rather than othered tech-whiz hackers. This chapter explores this shift to the realistic and the familiar, and how this shift is reflected by narrative techniques in *Lions in Winter* and *Koko Be Good*. Web 2.0 has affected how both texts depict intimacy with the Internet, especially among Asian American youth, as well as how they choose to represent landscape and time, diaspora and return, and stability/flux.

Lions in Winter: Diasporic Asian Subjects and the Cyber-return

In the preface to *Lions in Winter*, Wena Poon, who is herself a Singaporean American author of Chinese descent, describes her book as a collection of "love letters" to her homeland (xi). Written in English while in America and first published in Malaysia, the material genesis of *Lions in Winter* reflects the multiplicity of Singaporean migrations: the country of Singapore itself is largely composed of historical migrations from China, Malaysia, and India, and imperial occupations by Japan and Britain. Poon writes about *philopatry*, the love of one's fatherland, as exhibited by sea turtles that "hatch, swim out into the wild tides of the vast ocean, and come back from time to time to their old nesting rounds" (xi). She states that *Lions in Winter* is meant to appeal to people who are "not living in the small town or even the country of [their] birth ... especially if [they] display philopatric tendencies," and ends her preface with the note that "leaving, after all, is never really goodbye" (xi). The metaphor of sea turtles recapitulates Ong's "lingering sentiments" and her observation that modern diasporas are often not exiles, in that modern diasporic subjects can often return. In Mandarin, 'sea turtle' is also a homophonic pun for 'returning home victorious after battle,' and it is used as a euphemism for those who made their fortunes overseas and returned to China after social conditions improved in post-Mao China. Poon deliberately makes no reference to this connotation, and instead insists upon using sea turtles as a general metaphor for the love of homeland that compels one to return. As Poon's short stories progress, however, it becomes apparent that she does not necessarily just mean physical returns to Singapore—'returning' can also take the form of revisiting a relationship or a feeling. Of the eleven short stories in the collection, six do not actually contain characters going back to

Singapore in the action of the story. One of the "new formations of collectivity," to borrow P. David Marshall's phrasing (43), made possible by the Internet is the cyber return. New conceptions of the Web as a time and space allow Poon to tell stories about returns to Singapore in an innovative way.

"Addiction," the first short story in the collection, traces a familiar trajectory: a young man leaves Singapore to study in Britain, falls in love with a career and a companion whom his parents back home would never approve of, and eventually cuts ties with his family to pursue his new life. It is a common plot, set apart from similar stories by its exploration of queer subjectivities and its use of the Internet. The protagonist, Alistair, yearns to tell his family about falling in love with a man, and because he cannot tell his parents he digs up the email address of "a cousin who live[s] in America" who is shunned by his parents because she married a Caucasian (10). Through talking to her, Alistair gains the confidence to live life as he pleases and severs ties with his parents, refusing to return to Singapore when his study visa is over. He ignores their emails, which he imagines as "beam[s] from an alien planet [that] bounce off him. [...] When further emails c[o]me, he delete[s] them unopened" (14). This detail about emails foreshadows debates about the pros and cons of the freedom to control one's own level of engagement (or disengagement) with the Internet, which will come up again later in this chapter. I argue that putting a fairly typical escape-from-tradition narrative like "Addiction" immediately after the preface about philopatry is more than just ironic juxtaposition.⁵ Beyond the contradiction, Poon also suggests a kind of substitution, in which the Internet provides a stand-in 'return' to Singapore that is as philopatric as physical returns. Alistair decides to contact his cousin Joan, to whom he was not

⁵ The table of contents confirms that "Addiction" is not simply the first story because of alphabetical order.

previously close, specifically because she is also Singaporean and is linked to him through the common ties of birthplace and family. Internet usage is not a focus of this story, but Poon is precise in specifying that Alistair first emails Joan rather than phoning her as he does later, to show that there is a difference in how the two forms of connection are used. Where one might not telephone for fear of being too forward, one can establish contact through email. Telephones are used to maintain existing personal relationships, but the Internet can also be used to build diasporic community in a more public sense. As the first story, "Addiction" sets the tone for the rest of the collection. Through depictions of Alistair's Web-powered interactions with Joan, Poon opens *Lions in Winter* with the suggestion that this interaction is a form of "never really saying goodbye," despite the protagonist's literal and seemingly final departure.

Diasporic Asian Subjects and Cyber-class

Another of Poon's stories from *Lions in Winter*, "The Shooting Ranch," implies that the ability to partake of a cyber return is not just an option, but an *expectation* for an Asian diasporic subject. The Singaporean American narrator of "The Shooting Ranch" takes her daughter Anouk to visit her distant cousin Grace in Nevada, where they meet Grace's daughters, Melissa and Mindy. Grace, Melissa, and Mindy live in rural poverty, isolated on a decrepit ranch and subjugated by Grace's abusive husband, Henry. In this short story, Poon defamiliarises the lack of Internet access through her use of focalising characters and setting. She depicts the opposite of the wired Asian cyberkid, and in doing so implies that the Internet has become familiar because the absence of the Internet has become unfamiliar. This active normalization of the Internet is ultimately inflected by class assumptions about the imagined Asian American, who 'should,' as stereotypically

urban, educated, and comfortably well-to-do model minorities, have access to cybertechnology. Poon's narratological moves mark the rural poverty and technological isolation of Grace's family as abnormal to the narrator and Anouk while also demonstrating her awareness that the narrator and Anouk conflate their socio-economic position with normality. In doing so, she brings to light how contemporary Asian American subjects are constituted as classed online subjects.

"The Shooting Ranch" is built upon a series of unexpected diasporic movements. Grace and Henry, both Singaporean, write to each other through a church pen pal network while Grace is still living in Singapore and Henry studies in the United States. They fall in love long-distance, Grace moves to the States to marry Henry, and through unexplained circumstances they end up living on a 'farm' in the desert. Years later, "Aunty Lillian from Singapore" asks the narrator to visit Grace, the narrator's cousin, when the narrator and her daughter Anouk happen to be passing through Nevada (114). At the farm, the narrator seems to feel a compulsion to compare Grace's situation to life back in Singapore. She mentally contrasts Grace's rundown, self-maintained farmhouse with her parents' "small government-subsidized flat in Singapore," which has much less square footage "but at least [has] the feel of a solid bourgeois existence, like most Singaporean homes" (115). Grace's household vehicle is a "beaten-up station wagon, not a shiny little bug of a Toyota that most Singaporeans aspire towards," and "unlike most Singaporeans" her property includes a yard, but it is "just Nevada desert scrub on which nobody would put a price tag" (116). By using the word "bourgeois" alongside "most," Poon already shows the narrator to come from a viewpoint that takes her own position as urban and middle-classed as the natural default. Her continued mental flipping back to

Singapore emphasises how far Grace strays from her vision of the typical Singaporean existence. When the narrator sees Grace's sewing machine, with which she makes simple clothing for herself and her daughters, the narrator registers mild surprise, since she has not seen one in a long time and "[doesn't] think anyone back in New York own[s] a sewing machine, unless they [are] in the fashion industry or [work] in a sweatshop" (116-17). Again, her mental comparison shows Grace to be atypical, outside of the usual class schematics that map easily onto the Asian American body. She is not a young urbanite interested in accumulating cultural cachet, nor does she live in the type of working poverty that is called to mind on the rare occasions one thinks of poor Asian Americans. Poon chooses to place Grace far from stereotypical expectations by isolating her from many of the usual markers of Asian American subjectivity. This choice couches the subsequent observations about this story's depictions of the Internet in a context of racialised class assumptions.

Access to cybertechnology is an expectation that the narrator and Anouk consider both basic and normal. When Anouk first finds out that the twin daughters have never watched television outside of school, she is shocked while Grace is shocked by Anouk's shock. While Anouk looks "as if she was going to have an apoplectic fit" (121), the narrator explains that "Anouk's a bit of a *screenager*. You know, glued to screens. Computer screens, TV" (121). Grace cannot comprehend this concept of a techno-adolescent symbiotic hybrid. Her reaction is set off in a one-sentence paragraph of its own, which simply says, "Grace blinked" (121). Upon further interrogation, Anouk finds out that Melissa and Mindy do not have CDs, a CD player, or access to the Internet. The progression of her questions is significant: she first asks if they have CDs, then asks again

if they are sure that they do not have TV, before asking whether they have the Internet. When they say no, Anouk asks once more, "You don't even have the Internet?" and then adds, "You've got to be fucking kidding me!" (122). It is as though she is able to accept that they might not have other sources of electronic entertainment, but the thought that they do not have the Internet tips her over the edge and provokes incredulous cursing.

Unlike her narrator and Anouk, Poon does not simply claim that using the Internet is normal. Rather, she makes a more subtle demonstration that using the Internet is being sold as normal to the reader by a biased first-person narrator. The narrator and Anouk are placed as focalising characters. We read the narrator's thoughts as the only account of the story, and we see her daughter as the only foil next to dysfunctional social outsiders. Therefore, when they react with surprise and condemnation to Mindy and Melissa's technological isolation, they manoeuvre the reader to react similarly. But of course, the narrator's point of view does not come from an unmarked state but is actually entrenched in her own class position. She sees that Melissa and Mindy cannot use modern media technology largely because their father withholds their access to it in order to maintain his abusive control. One can clearly do a gendered reading of this situation involving male-dominated domestic violence and power imbalance, but it is also intertwined with my classed reading: the uneducated and uncouth wife-beater is a common source of mundane tragedy in the rural poor films the narrator constantly thinks of as she observes Grace's home life. By paralleling Henry's restriction of Internet access with his physically abusive behaviours, lack of cyber access becomes associated with both condemnable conduct and lower economic class.

The narrator's comparison of Henry and Grace's farm to rural poor films reveals Poon's awareness of her narrator's classed assumptions. When the narrator reflects upon the interior of Grace's house, she "recall[s] reading that each year at the Cannes film festival they would screen a few American movies informally known as 'the rurals'" and feels that the farm looks just like a set from one of the rurals (121). She then thinks about how "strange [it is] to see Grace Lee, daughter of Aunty Lillian and Uncle Yew Hock ... in the thick of this rusticity. Grace, who wore braids and went to the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Singapore, who spoke with a thick Hokkien-inflected accent (still, after all those years)" (121). Essentially, she can only conceive of Grace through the memory of her solidly middle-class parents and upbringing back in Singapore, or through the incredibly bourgeois analogy of the Cannes film festival now. Her thoughts, in italics, conclude with the statement, "*Congratulations, Grace. You have been where no Singaporean has ever gone before*" (121). Grace's position, including her lack of access to communications technology, would be considered out of the norm for any contemporary American, but the narrator continually expresses the anomaly as being in relation to her Singaporean roots. As focalisers, the narrator and Anouk pronounce a lack of Internet access as abnormal for Singaporean Americans and push the reader to agree, but Poon makes it clear that to agree is also to be implicitly aligned with the socio-economic standpoint of the narrator, who judges what diasporic subjects should have based on her beliefs about how diasporic subjects should be classed.

Lack of new media access is emphasised as particularly significant for Melissa and Mindy, as they are expected to be digitally connected not only because of their identity as Asian Americans but also because of their youth. Grace is technologically

illiterate as well, but the narrator is much less fixated on Grace's offline state than Anouk is on that of her peers. Poon's assignation of age to cyberspace as a cultural site fits with Nakamura's reading of the Pew Foundation reports referenced in my introduction. Anouk is depicted as the epitome of the stereotypically wired young Asian American. The Pew report claims that "the Asian American Internet population is also one of the most youthful on the Web. Almost two-thirds (63%) of Asian American users are between the ages of 18 and 34," which as Nakamura argues "has a tremendous bearing on their relation to popular culture, as 'youth culture' and expressive cultures tend to cross and overlap" (*Digitizing* 184). This overlap occurs as a generation of young adults who emigrated from their home countries at a very young age or were born in America to immigrant parents concurrently grow up during the development of Web 2.0. Cyberspace becomes a site for performing the tension and the rupture, to use R. Radhakrishnan's terms, between their conceptions of "the old and new homes" (123). By using the Internet, Anouk establishes an ethnic identity for herself in a way that Melissa and Mindy, who are ostensibly of 'purer' Singaporean parentage, cannot. Anouk's exposure to media and allows her to learn about Singapore, while Melissa and Mindy's isolation means that they have never talked to any other Singaporeans besides their parents.

By being violently averse to new media technologies and yet still seen as someone who "ooze[s]" traditional Chineseness (Poon 125), Henry may seem to belie the association between Asian Americans and Internet use. One can argue, however, that like Grace his age, characterisation, and unusual living situation already place him outside of the urban, educated, middle-class Asian American norm implied by the narrator; the usual expectations of Internet use not being applied to him only goes to further suggest

that it would be applied to 'normal' Asian Americans. In *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong constructs an image of the affluent transnational Asian subject that is shaped by immigration policies controlling migration patterns from Asia to North America, which effectively shape the typecasting of Asian North Americans. Restrictions and quotas for Asian immigration were not lifted until well after World War II, and the later Pacific Rim economic boom increased the pool of business class immigrants from which governments could cherry-pick over family and refugee classes. Therefore, Asian North Americans are increasingly perceived as relatively new and relatively affluent, resulting in the production of an assumed age and class for an entire raced diaspora. In "The Shooting Ranch," this youthful bourgeois urbanity is translated to mean a familiarity with cyberspace. The relationship between online subjectivity and Asian subjectivity is not simply that Asian Americans are expected to be wired, but that young and educated urbanites are expected to be wired, and Asian Americans are expected to be young and educated urbanites. There exist, obviously, Asian American elders and unskilled labourers and farmers, but Poon is working with and commenting on the typecasting, made common by shifting immigration patterns, that denies their existence. When Poon shows us characters who fall outside of these age and class expectations, they are not even within a conceivable outlying margin of Asian tropes—rather, they are placed in a setting that is both extremely unlikely and highly symbolic.

Poon shows how she envisions the non-physical site of cyberspace through socio-temporal metaphors in her use of landscape and time in "The Shooting Ranch". In the previous generation of literature about cyberspace, lack of access to cybernetic technology used to be considered the norm while the few special individuals who enter

into a visualised virtuality encounter a fundamentally alien landscape. Recall, for example, the complex lightcycle grids of Disney's *TRON* or the description of cyberspace in *Neuromancer* quoted in the introduction of this thesis. In "The Shooting Ranch," Poon defamiliarises the terrestrial landscape of Nevada through the eyes of her focalising characters, who through their bourgeois sensibilities find cyberspace to be normal and the ranch to be as alien as "the set of a Coen Brothers movie" (121). This reversal is symptomatic of how the habituation of Web 2.0 into the everyday life of the dominant class changes how the Internet is narrated in fiction. Poon does not only estrange the frontier landscape, she specifically foregrounds the strangeness of Melissa and Mindy's physical isolation in the desert through the lack of cybertechnology. When the narrator explains to her incredulous daughter that there is no Internet access because they are "on a farm. There are no fiber optic cables out here," Melissa points out that they actually could get the Internet despite their remoteness, "but [their] dad won't let [them] have it" (122). It is not just that they live in a strange landscape, but that being kept from the Internet is depicted as *like* being trapped in a strange landscape with no means of escape.

The setting of "The Shooting Ranch" also conveys an impression of outdatedness and paralysis through Poon's use of imagery. Subjects who use the Internet to maintain diasporic affiliations generate a sense of creating a living community. Anita Mannur, in her postscript to *Theorizing Diaspora*, writes about using the Web to keep in touch with others who came from her hometown of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. She states that online discussion boards "legitimized a generation of memories of a particular place—Port Moresby—and a particular time—the 1980s and early 1990s," allowing users to "feel part of a community that is alive and well—albeit in cyberspace" (285). Although

she talks of a of time and place already gone, her feeling of vitality also implies constant reinvention as this time and place are taken out of their original context and recreated. By keeping it "alive" and contributing to their discussion board, the diasporic community is also producing, so that their subject becomes not (only) Port Moresby of the 1980s and early 1990s, but their feelings and perceptions of Port Moresby 1980s-1990s *now*. In "The Shooting Ranch," Poon depicts the farm without Internet access as not only isolated, but also frozen in time. The narrator describes Grace's household as "old without being historic or quaint" (117); the plastic lamp cover holds "the dark shadows of dead little moths that had flown into the lamp from summers past," "the curtains [are] hand-sewn and made of a kind of nondescript polyester floral fabric, and "in the center of the parlor was an immense old-fashioned black stove," which serves in place of a modern furnace as the only source of heat (117). There is an overall sense of pastness without living history, stasis rather than vitality. Little dead bodies from bygone days are strewn about the farmhouse as reminders of obsolescence. Cut off from participating in the kind of community Mannur identifies, Melissa and Mindy live not only in symbolic isolation but also symbolic ossification. Rather than constantly producing new senses of subjectivity through user-generated content and online collaboration with peers of similar backgrounds, Melissa and Mindy are stuck on a ranch that is literally non-productive—it is infertile, and instead of cultivating crops or livestock their family makes a living through letting tourists shoot their rabbits.

Diasporic Asian Subjects and Cyber-exile

Poon demonstrates that Melissa and Mindy's lack of access to the Internet is a classed issue that prevents them from living a modern practice of diaspora. In choosing to

set up such a far-fetched example of isolation, Poon discourages reading "The Shooting Ranch" as sociologically representative of less-privileged Asian Americans in real life and instead pushes us toward a metaphorical reading of exile. Alistair's philopatric 'return' to Singapore in "Addiction" hinges upon his ability to use cyberspace. Grace's family in "The Shooting Ranch" can be seen as a metaphor for not just exile from the homeland but exile from the diasporic experience, as defined by the dominant classes that comprise a majority of the diaspora as well as by outsiders who bring their racial assumptions to perceiving that diaspora. This contemporary definition revolves heavily around Internet usage. A new kind of inclusion in diaspora also brings about a new kind of exclusion. Despite Aihwa Ong's claim in *Flexible Citizenship* that modern Asian diasporas no longer revolve around the common thread of exile from the homeland, cyberspace allows for new manifestations of exile. A voluntary joining of diaspora, such as Grace's willing migration to America to marry Henry, can still result in being excluded not just from home country one has left behind but also from the experience of diaspora 2.0 itself. In contrast, Alistair's decision to never return to Singapore does not exile him from access to diasporic community because of his membership in the 'right' cyber-class. The Internet becomes an apparatus for Poon to suggest these insights about race and class for a new generation.

Koko Be Good

Cyberspace opens up new avenues to approach race through technological class expectations and exile from diaspora in *Lions in Winter*, but it also produces other, different tools with which to work through race in *Koko Be Good*. *Koko Be Good* is a graphic novel that tells the intertwined coming-of-age stories of three protagonists: the

eponymous Koko, a young woman on a quest to become a better person, her high school senior friend Faron Lau, and Jon Wilgur, a young man on the brink of a life-changing decision. Set in California, this graphic novel is concerned with issues of racialisation in an age of integrated Internet usage, but in a subversion of typical coming-of-age tropes, the main characters' central conflicts revolve around how to define themselves as morally 'good' beings. Ethnic identity and online life are background details that constantly inform their struggles, rather than the source of those struggles. That is not to say that Jen Wang ignores the reality that many diasporic subjects do find themselves grappling with questions of cultural identity. There is a sub-plot about Jon's girlfriend, Emily, and her relationship with her half-Peruvian heritage, through which Wang demonstrates her awareness of cultural anxiety. However, the focus of the graphic novel tends to be on how the three main characters negotiate their youth and their worries about doing the right thing, rather than their ethnicities. In fact, this focus on age and morality seems to become a strategy to talk around race and strongly imply race without actually naming races. In "Rhizomorphic Reading: The Emergence of a New Aesthetic in Literature for Youth," Kathleen Burnett and Eliza T. Dresang point out a convergence between graphic narratives and "hypertext technology," which "rejects authoritarian, 'logocentric' ... hierarchies of language, whose modes of operation are linear and deductive" in favour of "systems of discourse that admit a plurality of meanings where the operative modes are hypothesis and interpretive play" (428). Graphic novels, these critics convincingly argue, work through a similar type of conceptual organisation used by Web 2.0 practitioners. *Koko Be Good* is a particular graphic novel that bridges the parallel lines of thinking about graphic narrative's connection to race and graphic narrative's connection to

cyberspace. The influence of cyberspace on Wang's graphic novel can be seen in her portrayals of technological proliferation in youth culture and in the narrative techniques of her visual form.

Internet Proliferation in Youth Culture

Like Poon's *Lions in Winter*, *Koko Be Good* implicitly argues that cyberspace is of particular importance to urban, educated, middle-class young adults. Mass communications media do not merely show up in *Koko Be Good*, but are clearly integrated into the characters' lives. Wang depicts the use of new media technology as a regular part of the characters' daily routines, like consuming food or going to sleep. They do not depart from their normal schedule to go check the Internet in a way that is separate from the rest of their day. Indeed, one gets the feeling that they would not be able to live as they do or be as they are without their use of media. By choosing to include cybertechnology so casually into the quotidian, Wang foregrounds its familiarity. Unlike eating and sleeping, using the Internet is not necessary for sustaining human life; by blending it in with such daily tasks, she also suggests that it has become similarly important.

Technology is immediately foregrounded in the first pages of the first chapter, which opens with a juxtaposition of older forms (a cassette tape Jon has received from Emily and the tape recorder with which he listens to it) with the new (the large computer screen in front of which he sits). Uncertain about his plans to move to Peru with Emily, Jon looks up Ayacucho on the Internet. The translation of real-world physical distance into cyberspatial non-distance is represented by a series of frames that first shows a search engine result saying "Come to Peru," and then a topographic map of Peru over

which Jon's mouse cursor hovers, and finally a zoomed-in view of the dot that signifies Ayacucho on the map (6-7). Other examples of Jon's daily immersion in cyberspace include a brief visual reference to watching cat videos (62), which frequent Internet users would understand as a ritual of cyberculture, and the fact that cancelling his Internet is the very first thing Jon does to tie up loose ends with his old life. Once he has committed to moving with Emily to Peru, Jon calls his Internet service provider and says, "Hi, my name's Jonathon Wilgur, I'd like to cancel my Internet"; there is then a pause indicated by the speech bubble, presumably to let the person at the other end reply, and then Jon says, "Yep" (94). We can extrapolate that the person he called may have asked him something like 'Are you sure?' since the Internet is perceived as such an essential service that double confirmation is needed before it is cancelled. The juxtaposition of Jon's declaration of identity and his breaking free of the Internet could be read as an oppositional tension in personal individuality and online subjectivity, but it is ambiguous enough to also be interpreted as an association—the declaration of identity comes with declaring one's Internet status, as though they must go hand in hand. Koko herself frequently makes video blogs, and in a montage sequence that shows her routine before bedtime, she surfs the 'missed connections'⁶ section of Craigslist (54). Her interest in social media and social networking informs her interactions with friends and strangers throughout the graphic novel in a way that is recognisable to targeted readers who, by virtue of being assumed to have an interest in independent web comics and web culture, are assumed to be like her.

⁶ A situation in which two or more people are unable to exchange contact information or the contact information is lost. Through the use of posting personal details in a publication or website, people can seek to find their missed connection. The desired reconnection is usually romantic but they may also be business-related or otherwise. Originally a print media phenomenon, the Internet has changed the missed connections form with its ease of instantaneous contact, its amenity to mobile access, and its compatibility with other search and location services.

On an extra-diegetic level, the Internet is also integral to the narrative of *Koko Be Good* because of its impact on the production, distribution, and interpretation of graphic novels. In an essay on the rise of Japanese graphic novels, or manga, Hoger Briel summarises the development of the cyberpunk genre as influenced by Japan, China, and Korea's economic and technological expansion in the 1980s, as I have also done in my introduction. Briel goes on to argue that Japanese manga and anime conventions became part of "this new influx of the Japanese imaginary" in the first generation of cyberpunk, and as the Internet became popularly available in the 1990s, the easy distribution of images fused Japanese—and to a lesser extent other Asian—graphics with digital visual reception (199). Based on the premise that there have been "distinctly different histories of seeing" in the cultures of the East and West, Briel argues that the Internet inserted themes and styles that were historically 'Eastern' into 'Western' visual media. One example Briel gives of this insertion is the "strong Japanese touch" of anime-style eyes in recent cartoons—these vast, sometimes bubble-filled eyes, previously rare in American cartoons, have now become so commonplace as to be unremarkable (199-200). Wang herself draws most characters in *Koko Be Good* with such eyes. To look at visual media through "the digital gaze" today, Briel quotes Nicholas Mirzeoff to say, is to be affected by Asian aesthetics, whether from techno-orientalist cyberpunk or from Asia itself (200). As a text that originally began as a web comic, and as an independent artist unaffiliated with any of the large, mainstream, American comic book presses, *Koko Be Good* and Jen Wang can be said to come from this racialised, cyberpunk-inspired vision that influences Internet graphic culture. Although she has chosen to adapt *Koko Be Good* into paper form, I argue that she brings a sense of the cyberspace aesthetic from the Web, and that

her cyberspace aesthetic complements the diasporic aesthetic also present in this graphic novel.

Visual Techniques and the Representation of Race

A subject on the Internet, as the inhabitant of an unending and non-sequential series of 'sites,' enacts the idea of a subject in postmodernity whose formation is contingent upon the influences of the moment, which constantly change. Critic Kim-An Lieberman calls the nature of the Internet "a prime example of 'restlessness and flux'" (80), and Wang graphically mirrors this sense of flux through the way she visually represents her characters' interactions and physicality. Her characters flip through different sites of action with very few transition scenes. Their faces sometimes change from page to page, and at times physically resemble each other to the point of indistinguishability. Wang is clearly a gifted artist, and I am inclined to interpret her characters' changing appearances not as a result of poor drawing skills but rather as a deliberate play on the idea of the postmodern, protean self who shifts with each constituting moment. Lieberman also observes that the lack of stability online, especially with "the absence of physical markers," makes it easy to misrepresent one's ethnicity (79). Possibilities of deliberate self-misrepresentation will be further explored in chapter three, but for now I want to suggest that this fluidity of ethnic markers in cyberspace also serves to break down the boundaries that keep racial categories seemingly distinct.

The drawn nature of graphic novels forces author-artists to make deliberate choices regarding the representation of ethnically-coded physical traits. Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which is arguably the most frequently analysed graphic novel in academic literary studies, famously takes this representation to an extreme end by using different species of

animals to signify different national and ethnic identities. Jews are drawn as mice, Germans as cats, Americans as dogs, and so on. In *The Shape of the Signifier*, Walter Benn Michaels calls Spiegelman's choice to represent peoples thus an act that "registers—instantiates—the posthistoricist commitment to seeing the world as organised by identities" (130). In contrast, Jen Wang goes against these clear categorisations of identity and keeps ethnic identities obfuscated by design in *Koko Be Good*, to the point that sometimes it is difficult to tell characters apart. Compare, for example, Faron Lau's older sister in the first panel of page 218, with her round face, round eyes, and long, black hair with Koko on the bottom panel of page 229...with her round face, round eyes, and long, black hair. The unique, almost sepia wash colour scheme of *Koko Be Good* also makes skin colours indistinguishable. Koko is drawn as slightly different, in face and body shape, from the Caucasian women with whom she used to sell cigarettes and candy, but this difference could just be symbolic of her mental and emotional difference from them. Her name is technically of Japanese origin, but it is also popular enough in the West that it could easily be taken by anyone. We never find out her last name, and we never see or hear about any of her biological family. She also embodies melange and flux by changing her fashion and hair styles with extreme frequency, adopting Tokyo street style one moment and emulating a Scandinavian princess in the next. Her ethnicity is something that floats almost within the reader's grasp but never quite stated.

To return to Michaels' terms, it is not that Wang does not organise her world by identities, but that she articulates a world where identities do not have to be organised phenotypically. *Koko Be Good* goes against clear claims of physical racial identity in the post-physiological world of cyber-passing. But I see Wang as commenting on the fluidity

of ethnic subjectivity, not altogether avoiding it. After all, she does not shy away from baldly depicting Faron's Asian American family, both using stereotypes (Faron's parents own a Chinese-American diner and Faron does martial arts) and subverting them (Faron has a secret love of Broadway musicals). Koko's racial ambiguity is less an elision than a refusal to be filed into neat categories. She achieves the destabilisation of racial lines that cyberspace similarly produces. Race and ethnicity have historically been construed as something recognisable through IRL⁷ signifiers, such as appearances or accents, but the advent of the Internet has brought into stark relief how easily these signifiers can become useless, faked, unintelligible, or unavailable. By giving her characters racialised backgrounds and concerns, and yet never allowing the reader to name exact races (other than Emily's subplot, and an episode involving a march for Mexican workers' rights in which Koko, Jon, and Faron's sister end up joining despite not being Mexican, which will be analysed later), Wang reflects this sensibility of the Internet.

The panel format of a graphic novel or comic book helps to supplement this sense of fluidity in ethno-racial representation. In the introduction to a special issue of *MELUS*, "Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative," Derek Parker Royal suggests that "because time is spatialized in graphic narrative, where readers see the character development across panels, comics can underscore the fluidity of ethnic identity" (10). By fragmenting representation into different images, the changeability of the individual self is spatially conveyed, revealing also the changeability of racialisation. Panel formatting also creates gutters, the white spaces between the frames of each panel, the importance of which is widely recognised in the field of graphic novel analysis.

⁷ Common Internet shorthand for "in real life"—tangentially, it would be interesting to think through what the necessity and frequency of this acronym suggests about how people mentally delineate the separation between their online lives and their flesh lives, and how the 'real' in IRL is defined.

Because it is a blank space, it is commonly agreed upon as space where readers must actively work to construct the transition between panels. Evan Thomas explains that while prominent comic book theorist Scott McCloud has argued that the work of the independent reader is so autonomous that "the gutter between panels constitutes a complete break from narrative authority" (159), a newer approach to reading comics proposed by Thierry Groensteen goes against this idea. Groensteen claims, in 2007, that the gutter is "used to designate 'that-which-is-not-represented-but-which-the-reader-cannot-help-but-to-infer.'" It is therefore a virtual, and take note that this virtual is not abandoned to the fantasy of each reader: it is a forced virtual, an identifiable absence" (112-13). His choice of the word "virtual" has interesting implications in light of the post-cyberspace graphic novel, which as previously argued by Briel has been steadily accumulating the influences of techno-Oriental digitality.

Gutters in *Koko Be Good* have a tendency to disappear, allowing the forced virtual to bleed into the everyday world of the story. Many pages have typical guttered panels, but the whole of page 113 is one example of a page with 'dropped' gutters. The page contains one continuous image of Jon and Koko on Koko's fire escape, watching the demonstration pass by; Koko appears three times and Jon appears twice while a zoomed-out shot of the demonstration floats in the upper right corner. There are no panel outlines and therefore no gutters, although the sequential flow of speech bubbles implies the page is to be read from top to bottom. The downward sweep of the reader's eye therefore still makes the action sequential. Interpretation is, in Groensteen's sense of the word, still "forced," but the strict cordoning off of virtual and real spaces disappears on select pages. Note also that in this instance, gutters are dropped specifically at the start of a scene that

also calls attention to diasporic associations. Koko and Jon, without planning to, end up joining a demonstration for Mexican workers' rights, despite neither being identified as Mexican. Faron's older sister then turns out to be at the same march, saying through a loudspeaker that "our parents came to this country with nothing but their will to work for a better life" (117), aligning her Chinese American heritage with the struggle of Mexican and Mexican American workers. Thomas reads Groensteen's theory of the controlled or "forced" gutter to mean that "the gutter is not an abdication of narrative authority, but instead the application of a different narrative tool" (160). Wang's decision to selectively leave out the gutter is also a narrative tool, chosen for use to emphasise the fluidity of spatial and mental categorisations that has been intensified by the naturalisation of cyberspace. Dropped gutters in *Koko Be Good* represent formal changes heralded by Web 2.0: departures from the customary grid format of American comic books become conceivable due to the Internet's rapid dissemination of alternative aesthetic traditions like manga art, and become more mainstream thanks to home graphics technology that encourages grassroots creativity. Although Wang does not herself make this claim, the dropping of gutters can also more broadly be read as representative of how the influence of cyberspace, from mechanics of visual logic to conceptions of fluidity, has been incorporated into daily life.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

By featuring diasporic subjects who are also Internet subjects, Wang's graphic novel sketches out how the two subjectivities overlap, and comments on the importance of fluidity and plurality to both. The cybertextual aesthetic of *Koko Be Good* does not merely fight against the reification of ethnicity, but makes it more difficult for reification

to occur at all—an idea that I will take up further in chapter three of this paper. For both Wena Poon in *Lions in Winter* and Jen Wang in *Koko Be Good*, cyberspace as content and as concept allows their texts to approach different facets of issues surrounding race from non-traditional directions. *Lions in Winter* posits that the Internet has become a familiarised non-physical site of diasporic community for a new generation, while revealing the racialised socio-economic issues raised by this use of the Internet. *Koko Be Good* also imagines cyberspace as a naturalised diasporic site and expands upon it by exploring how the inherently shifting nature of cyberspace epitomises contemporary understandings of racial categories as non-concrete. As we move from this chapter's analysis of how the Internet affects literary representation toward the next chapter on how the Internet can be shaped by literary techniques, we see that conceptions of the Internet can have the power to shape it, since it is a realm where users are also producers. The same themes of self-representation, familiarisation, socio-economic stakes, and confounding racial stereotypes found in Poon's and Wang's texts recur even when we investigate Asian North American cyberspace texts from the opposite direction, to see how literary approaches can turn the Internet itself into a text.

Chapter Three: Toward a Poetics of the Internet

The literariness of the cyberspace manifests not only in its influence on prose narrative, but also in the influence of poetics on the perceptions, uses, potentials, and limitations of the Internet. Whereas chapter two asks how developments in cyberspace have affected narratives of diaspora, this chapter asks how the poetics of racialised writing can affect the reading of cyberspace. Through studying texts by two Asian Canadian poets that deal closely with cybernetic technologies, I argue that poetic techniques can be applied not just on the Internet but *to* the Internet, which has become not only a significant subject for raced literature but also a significant vehicle for it. This chapter looks in particular at Asian Canadian poetics. Fred Wah's concept of alienethnic poetics has been a dominant approach in the kind of politically engaged, avant-garde Asian Canadian poetry with which I am concerned, and I first demonstrate how Rita Wong's *forage* is an exemplary specimen of this poetics as contemporarily applied. Using Wong as a starting point to show the standard application of Wah's poetics to a typically alienethnic text, I then springboard to an analysis of Sachiko Murakami's Project Rebuild and apply alienethnic poetics to this more unconventional online text. I investigate Project Rebuild's effectiveness at illustrating how the Internet can be opened up to the application of a modified, new alienethnic poetics.

In *Faking It*, a collection of critical essays about his poetic practice, Fred Wah defines his "ethnopoetics" as a politically and socially driven desire to "undercut the hegemony" of conventional forms (1) as a raced poet. Wah claims that "race writers" should be particularly "suspicious of any previously constructed poetics" (5) and should "seek to deterritorialize inherited literary forms and language" (60). He proposes that this

deterritorialization be done through innovative forms, such as pointed violations of grammar, unconventional line breaks and capitalization, code switching, prose poetry, and alyrical verse. Put together, Wah names this approach "alienethnic poetics" (52).

Distilled to its simplest base, alienethnic poetics are based on two principles:

undercutting the authority of accepted grammars, and the prioritization and complication of racialised subjectivity as both a motive and means to achieve the first principle.

Neither Wong nor Murakami explicitly label their works as alienethnic poetry, but as practitioners of similar schools of poetry and members of overlapping artistic circles in places such as Vancouver, University of Calgary, and the Banff Centre, both seem clearly touched by Wah's influence on Asian Canadian poetry. The elements of alienethnicity are plainly present in their work, and identifying a discrete set of praxes allows me to talk more succinctly about how these poetics are applied to the Internet.

Rita Wong's *forage*

The following close readings show how alienethnic poetics as a present-day practice manifests in a bound paper text, which for all of its avant-garde innovations can still be seen as adhering to an identifiable tradition and school of Asian Canadian poetry. *forage* deals with environmental crises, new media technology, political injustices, Chinese heritage, and Rita Wong's experience as a young Asian Canadian woman situated in the intersection between these concerns that constantly intrude on her daily thoughts and life. As a situated text, *forage* can be read as an obvious and straightforward application of alienethnic poetics. Formally, Wong implements all of Wah's suggestions for deterritorialization in addition to marginalia and handwriting that push at the constraints of the traditional printed page. Although Wong covers a wide range of issues,

from ecological to economic and from international to intimately familial, her poetic engagement with these subjects is often grounded in her ethnic and ethical position. Despite bringing up cybernetic technologies regularly in her text, cyberspace is for Wong still mostly considered as subject matter rather than as technique.

Unlike Poon's and Wang's characters in their previously examined texts, Wong demonstrates many negative feelings about the almost compulsory imposition of the Internet and cybertechnology into her life. "value chain," the first poem, contains the first mention of computing technology: "electromagnetic fields of refrigerator, phone & computer hum bewildered static/ cartons of cigarettes wait for lungs to reside in" (11). The computer is listed alongside other electronics that we have come to accept as mundane and everyday, but its association with cigarettes in the following line suggests that the consumption of cybertechnology is similarly addictive and unhealthy, and indeed even carcinogenic. In "sort by day, burn by night," Wong draws attention to the harmful physical detritus of discarded electronics:

o keyboard irony: the shiny laptop
a compilation of lead, aluminum, iron,
plastics, orchestrated mercury, arsenic, antimony [...]

where do metals come from?
where do they return?
bony bodies inhale carcinogenic toner dust,
burn copper-laden wires,
peer at old cathay, cathode ray tubes.
what if you don't live in guiyu village?
what if your pentium got dumped in guiyu village?
your garbage, someone else's cancer? (46-7)

I have tried my best to reproduce Wong's aesthetic formatting; although it is not an exact replica, it still demonstrates the importance of unconventional form to her alienethnic project. Rather than accepting typical left margin alignment as the shape her poetry

should take, Wong uses the visual line of her words to help articulate her thematic points. E-waste's harmful effects and the actual "bony bodies inhal[ing] carcinogenic toner dust" (46) are set off to the side, away from the "you" who produces the waste and who is asked these difficult questions. The separation between them, the palpable white space on the page, both highlights spatiality and suggests a distance between the speaker and Guiyu village. Wong emphasizes the materiality of the hardware needed to power, among other things, the Internet, thereby taking the production of the Internet out of the non-spatial realm of cyberspace and returning it to our physical world. These poems critique viewing cyberspace as virtual only, by refusing to forget the human and environmental costs of cheap labour and toxic waste dumping. They show the ironic limitations of using cyberspace as a place of diasporic connection.

Even if one does not conflate the speaker with Rita Wong the writing persona, which due to the text's personal and at times manifesto-like tone is quite easy to do, the speaker of "sort by day, burn by night" can be interpreted as a diasporic subject through hints made by Wong's paratexts. The poem appears in a chapter that opens with a photograph of an immigrant Chinese worker in Victoria, B.C., circa 1889; a footnote to the poem states that it was written "[u]pon watching the video Exporting Harm, <http://www.ban.org/>" (47), implying that it is a reaction from the position of exportation rather than importation into Guiyu; hand-written Chinese marginalia reiterates the symbols for "Guiyu" at the end of the poem, suggesting that the speaker is in fact Chinese.⁸ From this point of view, then, Wong suggests the position of a diasporic

⁸ "Exporting Harm" is a short film put out by the Basel Action Network, or BAN, a non-governmental and non-profit organization working to combat the exportation of toxic wastes to developing countries. The film documents the ecological plight of Guiyu (written in the margin of Wong's poem as 贵屿), a village in China famous for being the largest e-waste reception site in the world.

Chinese subject who uses the Internet at the cost of ruining her own homeland. The price of being able to 'gather' in the third site of cyberspace and co-create a sense of belonging is in some cases the defilement of the land that imparts users with a sense of togetherness in the first place. Where Poon's commentary on cyberspace and class comes specifically from within the recent Asian diaspora to North America, Wong approaches the issue of class from the context of worldwide economics. It is not simply that the Internet is restricted to those who can afford to access the Internet, but that the infrastructure behind cybertechnologies relies on taking advantage of poorer nations. Wong calls out the socio-economic issues of the new cyber diaspora from her position as a raced subject, which has become an established and expected technique of alienethnic poetics and is therefore, though still politically powerful, no longer shockingly innovative.

Wong further calls out the problems behind the real-life origins of the Internet from this raced subject position. In "23 pairs of shoos," she calls the Internet a "child of ARPANET" that "resides on [her] fingertips" (38). ARPANET, or the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, was the first operational packet-switching computer network developed by the United States Department of Defense in the 1970s. Now defunct, it is recognised as the network that led to the development of the modern Web, giving the Internet a distinctly military background.⁹ The same poem also alludes to "jernigan's thorax all over the internet while the housewife remains anonymous" (38), which is a reference to the Visible Human Project, a series of digital photographs of thin cross-sectional slices of two human cadavers, one male and one female. The male body belonged to Joseph Paul Jernigan, a convicted murderer who agreed to donate his body

⁹ For more detailed information on ARPANET and how it fits into the evolution of the Internet, see "Brief History of the Internet" by Barry M. Leiner et al. at <www.internetsociety.org>.

for scientific research after his execution without being informed of how it would be used in the Visible Human Project; the female body belonged to an anonymous woman whose husband requested that her body be used for the project. Some medical societies, such as that of the University of Vienna,¹⁰ have condemned the use of Jernigan's body without strong proof of informed consent and have expressed ethical concerns over the medical community benefitting from murder and execution. Like the exploitation of disadvantaged nations that enables the Internet, the integrity of the Visible Human Project is questionable, but the advantages it provides makes it not outright dismissible as purely negative. Just as the scientific community has made several anatomical discoveries as a result of the Visible Human Project, Wong observes how the Internet despite its problems has empowered "the turn from canwest asperts towards lebanese bloggers" and "discloses the back door of gated communities: favelas" (40). Cyberspace takes the monopoly of voice away from broadcasting mega powers such as the news agency Canwest Global Communications Corporation (founded by the Asper family) and gives it to those who live in favelas, even while the Internet industry may be dumping arsenic and mercury in those same favelas. Wong demonstrates that it is possible to censure negative aspects of the Internet without ejecting all of its democratizing possibilities.

In a common alienethnic vein, Wong's *forage* also displays an anxiety about the dominance of the English language while still trying to locate democratizing possibilities within its framework. The first lines of the first poem in the collection asks "how to turn english from a low-context language into a high-context language?/ tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow takes me back hundreds of years" (11). By alluding to a famous

¹⁰ See "Ethics of executed person on Internet," a letter by G. Roeggla et al. to the medical journal *The Lancet*, volume 345, issue 8944, page 260.

line in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ("tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow") she performs the hegemony of Western English that she questions—Wong demonstrates that she has been taught the English literary canon, and she hails any reader who recognises the allusion as equally inculcated in this canon. Wong's inclusion of Chinese words in the margins of *forage*, written in her own hand instead of a typed font, draws further attention to the dominance of English in print and electronic media. English text is easily mass produced and reproduced, whereas Chinese text is personal, unique to the individual. Although there is also a large amount of marginalia in English, there is not a single instance of printed Chinese text, while English appears as both handwritten and printed. Furthermore, the English marginalia adds content not available in the printed poem or quotes a theorist or writer whose words add new nuances to the text. Anyone who can read the Chinese will realise that it does not actually impart anything not already uttered in English. In "after 'Thinking of a Fair One' (si mei ren)", the Chinese marginalia merely re-conveys 'si mei ren' and 'Qu Yuan,' the name of the poet who originally wrote "si mei ren" and whose English phonetic name is included in the footnote (66). Readers who know both Chinese and English find out that readers who only know English are essentially missing no information, but a reader who knows only Chinese would miss out on the bulk of the poem. Thus, Wong enacts reminders of why we should, to echo Wah, "be suspicious" of English forms.

Several critics of the Internet also feel that one must remain suspicious of the dominance of English, especially in cyberspace. Joe Lockard has stated that "a globalistic 'electronic nation,' which relies on cyber-English as its foundational standard, asserts an elite transnational class commonality," and therefore ethnic communities that run against

this paradigm "challenge the monotonal and monolithic self-conception embedded in virtual whiteness" (172). Although Nakamura argues that "English is no longer the majority language of the Internet, and vast numbers of new Asian users have made it inaccurate to speak of the Internet as a primarily Western medium" (*Digitizing* 180) in the time since Lockard wrote, Lockard's point that cyber-language has a tendency to be English-based still holds. The use of 'LOL' ('laugh out loud') to indicate mirth, for example, is still prevalent in non-English contexts. Lockard asserts that the dominance of English on the Internet "re-enunciates the languages of power that have dominated the economic existence of entire non-white continents" (179). Alienethnic poetics, as a way of challenging the confines of English while still using English, can be one way to address this enunciation of power. Although Wong does not specifically address English in the context of cyber usage, one can extrapolate her techniques and apply them to the Internet. In "after 'Thinking of a Fair One' (si mei ren)," which features one of the instances of Chinese marginalia, Wong expresses envisions a fantasy where cyberspace can be divorced from the flawed system of material production of technology and "restore justice to the virtual workplace, seeds to the squirrels, bamboo leaves to clean water, free for all" (66). Rather than condemning cyberspace itself as irreparably imperialistic, one could instead see the socio-economic systems that currently surround the access and production of cyberspace as problematic, and see potential in cyberspace as one medium that can be used to overturn the dominance of those systems. Interrogating the use of English and of dominant forms that convey meaning is just one of several methods in alienethnic poetics that can be introduced to reading the Internet.

Using Project Rebuild, I will now explore how we might move toward an alienethnic approach to the Internet.

Sachiko Murakami's *Rebuild* and Project Rebuild

Compared to *forage*, Japanese Canadian poet Sachiko Murakami's Project Rebuild does not foreground race as obviously. Neither her artistic website, Project Rebuild, nor her printed poetry collection, *Rebuild*, declares itself as the kind of work that clearly should be read through an alienethnic approach, the way *forage* does. However, despite lacking the more obvious markers that signal *forage* as an alienethnic text, a form of alienethnic poetics can still be applied to Project Rebuild as an Internet text and to the textuality of the Internet itself. As we read Project Rebuild through the context of these poetics, it eventually becomes apparent that its relation to race and racialised capital is quite central. As stated before, alienethnic poetics at its most basic is predicated on two main aims: to subvert the authority of accepted grammars, and to draw attention to raced subject positions as both a reason and a way to subvert said authority. I do not argue that Project Rebuild is inherently alienethnic, but that it is an example of how an alienethnic reading can be applied to the Internet as a poetic practice. With Project Rebuild, I first demonstrate how Murakami disrupts certain 'grammars' of the Internet, and then how this disruption can be linked to the text's racial project.

Before I move on to my analysis, I should define the parameters of my argument. When I speak of a 'grammar' or a 'poetics' of the Internet, I am treating the Internet as if it is like language, in that it is a medium used in artistic expression to carry meaning. Its grammar, then, is a metaphorical reference to the conventions and rules that govern how we have become used to making sense of the Internet—some examples include the

expectation that a website is organised by pages, that going 'forward' or 'back' connotes an unseen page or a previously seen page despite there being no physical directions in cyberspace, or that content can be found by searching keywords. These expectations have become so concretized that they are compiled in numerous web building guides and primers as facts about how the Internet must be configured for users. An online alienethnic poetics would therefore apply the methodologies of grammar disruption and complication from a raced point of view to the Internet, rather than to printed Asian Canadian poetry as originally conceived. An online text such as Project Rebuild speaks back to authority in a way that is distinct from the work already done by *forage* and *Rebuild*. I do not only close read the content of specific poems or renovations from Project Rebuild, but also analyse the textuality of this website as a website, and approach the whole of Project Rebuild as one large poem to be read. In contrast to how Rita Wong uses poetics to comment *on* the Internet, I explore how Project Rebuild uses the Internet *as* poetics.

Project Rebuild and Subverting the Grammar of the Internet

Despite common claims that the Internet is like a sandbox with no rules, it is currently reined in by implied codes of acceptable grammar regarding how websites should be designed and organised. Rosenfeld and Morville's *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web* is a popular textbook in North American university web design classes. Their conception of what they call "information spaces" coalesce around the metaphor of architecture (3). They define the term "information architecture" as "the combination of organization, labeling, search, and navigation systems within web sites" to "support usability and findability," as well as "an emerging discipline and community

of practice focused on bringing principles of design and architecture to the digital landscape" (4). Usability and 'findability' are emphasized as essential values throughout the book. The writers assert that principles of information architecture are not restricted simply to taxonomies, search engines, and other features that directly help users find information on a website—rather, "information architecture starts with users and the reason they come to a site in the first place: they have an information need" (30). But this assertion's failure to account for the significant Web practice of aimless surfing goes to show that the dominant forms of the Internet are forced onto a medium that harbours much more potential.

Artistic, non-directional websites such as Murakami's Project Rebuild perform an Internet poetics that runs against the dominant grammar of the Internet as enforced by web design authorities. The Internet can facilitate new ways to interact with texts that cannot be replicated by traditional print media without hyperlinks. Even if one flouts the implied order of a book with numbered pages by flipping and reading randomly, its contents are still practically constrained within its covers. One might, through allusion, reference, parody, and other devices of intertextuality, make mental visits to other texts, but the physical separateness of books prevents the Internet experience of 'link-hopping' (or, clicking whatever links that attract one's unpremeditated interest until one is so far from the source page that one has trouble remembering where they began). By claiming that users always "seek" something from a site, Rosenfeld and Morville discount the phenomenon of the cyberspace *dérive*. Used by French Situationist Guy Debord to mean "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances," a *dérive* is literally just wandering, and it "involve[s] playful-constructive behaviour" that requires practitioners

to "drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there" (trans. Knabb). *Dérive* refers to both the physical act of wandering and the mental state of wandering. Link-hoppers often find themselves on a virtual *dérive*, drawn by whatever link happens to catch their attention and creating their own unguided 'path' through cyberspace. Of course, the theory of the *dérive*, as a concept that came out of a larger European revolutionary movement that embraced diverse platforms from Marxism to surrealism and that culminated in the May '68 revolts of France, does not match seamlessly with surfing the Web today.¹¹ It does, however, match surprisingly well, especially in a context where the architecture metaphor is already superimposed. Rosenfeld and Morville do note that some users may practice "exploratory searching" (34), where one uses a scattershot approach to gather a wide range of information with no particular correct answer in mind, but it is still implied that the user decides to go to a specific website with the intent to gather information in the first place. There is no mention of accidentally stumbling upon things, no mention of not looking *for* something but simply looking *at* things. College and university textbooks (of which the Rosenfeld and Morville text is typical rather than a unique case) teach web designers, despite everyday experiences of the contrary, that Internet users prefer goal-oriented practices reminiscent of those valued by capitalistic business, and these web designers are

¹¹ Guy Debord's theory of *dérive* is part of the Situationist International (SI) movement, whose main concern was to critique the "society of the spectacle." His essay, "Society of the Spectacle," which is outside of the scope of this thesis but can be read in full at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>, raises interesting questions about the surfer's relation to the Internet. Debord writes that as the accumulation of images overtakes the accumulation of commodities for subjects in the modern world, even acts against consumerism can be claimed as part of the spectacle. The reliance of the Web on images as signs and on the ability to recognise signs as cultural cachet means that a *dérive* through cyberspace could simultaneously be rebellious and contribute to the society of the spectacle.

then employed to produce websites. This trend toward corporatisation of the Internet effectively floods cyberspace websites based on the same basic principles that do not reflect the myriad ways users flout them through common practice. Even personal blogs and other sites of non-professional self-expression are popularly based on templates that include search, keyword, and tagging functions designed to give the imagined user ways to find what they must be looking for. By refusing to provide such functions, or providing them with unexpected twists, Murakami uses Project Rebuild to show how the Internet can be used poetically to unsettle grammars.

Like *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, Murakami's Project Rebuild is built upon architecture metaphors. Project Rebuild is the online complement to Murakami's book of poetry, *Rebuild*; and yet, as an experiment in collaboration and alienethnic Internet poetics, Project Rebuild is also an independent poetry project in and of itself. Both *Rebuild* and Project Rebuild began with a single poem, "Vancouver Special," about the single-unit housing design unique to Vancouver. Murakami explains that she then "renovated" this poem by running it "through Google Translate and back again through four languages of people [she has] known who have lived in Vancouver Specials—Cantonese, Italian, Portuguese and Serbian—and back to English again" ("About"). The resulting, subtly different texts appear in *Rebuild* as separate poems with the same name, and were also sent out to various other poets to renovate as they saw fit. The texts created by these poets then became the "original occupants" of the Project Rebuild virtual neighbourhood, each housed in a clickable graphic of a Vancouver Special. The black and white line drawings of Vancouver Specials differ from each other in style and are arranged in gridded rows and columns. Visitors to the website are invited

to click on any house at will and "move in" to the poem within the link. Clicking on the "renovate" option in the linked poem then puts the poem into an editable textbox, where the user can produce a new text of his or her own, and submitting that text adds a new Vancouver Special onto the front page.¹² There is no vetting of submissions. As Murakami clearly states, "anyone can move into any of the poems on the site, and renovate them."

Project Rebuild explicitly defies the Internet grammar as exhibited by the model website as idealised by Rosenfeld and Morville. Not only is there no search function to find or re-find a specific poem on the site, there are in fact several features designed to make deliberate searches more difficult. The order of houses on the front page changes every time it refreshes—unlike physical houses, they have no permanent street addresses, and unlike the physical book collection of *Rebuild*, the reader is compelled to read a new poem every time he or she does the equivalent of flipping to the same page. It is also very easy to lose one's way on Project Rebuild, as there are no labels or names on any of the Vancouver Specials and poets' names, where given, are only shown when the cursor hovers over a house. I have the first-hand experience of reading a poem by Fred Wah, forgetting to save the URL before clicking through to a few renovations, then losing track of which "previous tenant" I had come from, and then spending half an hour clicking likely links (and therefore reading a few more new poems) looking for the same Wah poem before I found it again. The conventional search function is further subverted by the existence of a "random" button, which takes the viewer to a random poem when clicked, thereby doing the conceptual opposite of a 'find' button.

¹² Please do visit www.projectrebuild.ca and click on the various houses and buttons in order to truly get the full experience of the site.

Non-directionality as an extension of alienethnic poetics, or as a way to flout expectations as delineated by conventional grammar, can also be achieved through offline texts, but not to the same extent. Books of poems, obviously, do not have search buttons either—they generally have a table of contents, but that form of searching requires the readers to at least have some idea of the title of the poem they are searching for. They cannot search for a keyword or a memorable line. *Rebuild* uses tactics of repetition and internal allusion to build its collection, and subsequent poems often reuse phrases or motifs that appeared earlier. The poem "Where We Stand," for example, opens with the lines "Let the home stand./ The floor's function is to restrict and this restriction is beautiful" (65), and upon reading them I felt waves of déjà vu and a certainty that I had read them somewhere before. However, because I could not remember exactly where I had seen those lines I had to flip backwards and skim every page in order to find the reference (it turned out to be in "Let the Home" on page 52, which also contains the line "A second bathroom, a fourth bedroom, sure./ *But a second kitchen?*" which is again referenced in "Where We Stand" by the line "a second kitchen is not beautiful"). On a website with textbook Internet grammar, one would be able to just search for the phrase that one remembers having read before, but on Project Rebuild one would not be able to search at all. In fact, on Project Rebuild, one would not even be able to flip backwards as I did with *Rebuild*, since the orders of 'before' and 'after' are not stable. Project Rebuild and *Rebuild* can stand alone, but taken together, *Rebuild* further illuminates how Project Rebuild's differences can be read as an alienethnic approach to Internet poetics.

The prose poem "Ashore" from *Rebuild* demonstrates the book's awareness of the Internet and of its own Internet counterpart: "Eyes roll, words loll and sink offshore

despite the Internet's calm waves of information: *bzz, bzz*. We resettle into nest blot out white noise city poem. And then the bee in the room: in winter? In Google? Lazily, lazily" (75). The speaker expresses ambivalence about the Internet, which is referred to as both part of the background noise of the urban outdoors that should be shut out of the "nest" when one wants to retreat, and also part of the nest itself. Google, popularly set as many people's homepage even though it is ironically always a site of departure to other sites rather than a fixed 'home', is ambiguously positioned in a sentence fragment. It could be the bee that intrudes into the home, or the unexpected season, or an appositive for the home itself. In the same poem, she also addresses the way in which the radicalness of Internet poetics is still ultimately constrained by the poets who practice it. She writes that she, or we, "[c]an't forget the rules of grammar. Today we are not speaking. Type, titter, trail off, flarf" (75). Even with the deliberate use of Internet as a strategy to subvert grammar, there are still limits to how far conventions can be pushed while still creating meaning.

Flarf, as mentioned in "Ashore" and in the introduction of this thesis, is another technique that attempts to subvert the intended forms of the Internet and reappropriate it as a technology of writing. Practitioners of Flarf mine Google with odd search terms and arrange the results into poetic texts. The central principles behind Flarf (random chance, the creation of a new text from existing texts, non-linear writing) are not previously unheard-of: it is reminiscent of Tristan Tzara's Dadaist cut-ups, wherein he cut up newspapers and brochures and pulled the scraps from a hat. Unlike pre-Internet aleatory techniques, however, the utilisation of search engines introduces the element of search algorithms that are consciously written by programmers. Google's search algorithms take

the user's geographical location, personal Web history, and previous search queries into account, so that different users often return vastly different results for the exact same search term.¹³ As a tool of producing poetry, search engines and the Internet in general has a way of accumulating sediments of meaning, which build up differently depending on the situated user. While the Internet may facilitate innovative subversions of traditional forms through the introduction of new ways to generate poetic meaning, it also introduces new restrictions to how much a subject can step outside of his or her own position and examine it critically, since positions are involuntarily recorded and forced to recur. Subversive approaches such as alienethnic poetics run up against the economic interests of commercial programmers and advertisers. The alienethnic's focus on the prioritization of raced subjectivity is therefore especially important, as it imparts political significance to the struggle against authoritarian grammar. While regulatory forces try to fix Internet subjects into binding positions, the application of alienethnic poetics to the Internet tries to complicate positionality through an engagement with racialisation.

Project Rebuild and Racialised Subjectivity

One example of racial engagement in Project Rebuild is Ray Hsu's untitled piece, a Youtube video of Vancouver 2010 Olympics news coverage dubbed over with a robotic voice reading Murakami's "Vancouver Special". In an interview I conducted with Hsu, one of the "original occupants" of the Project Rebuild neighbourhood, he explains how he, like Flarf practitioners, also used the subversion of an Internet search tool to create his piece. He inputted the entire text of "Vancouver Special" into the search bar of the

13 Internet activist Eli Pariser documents this phenomenon and addresses the potential political awareness problems that can be caused by search algorithms that tailor results to extremely personal tastes, in a famous TED talk entitled "Beware online 'filter bubbles'" that can be viewed at <http://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles.html>.

popular video hosting site Youtube, which he says he remembers reading was the third or fourth most used search engine on the Internet at the time. He then selected the first result that the search returned: a human interest story on Chinese figure skating pair Shen Xue and Zhao Hongbo, likely circulating as a popular video because the Vancouver 2010 Olympics were still going on at that time. Hsu calls it "an interesting confluence of the Olympics and nationalism and commentary on Vancouver housing," at a time when there was a heightened level of activism regarding the displacement of homeless people and the use of unceded Aboriginal lands by Olympic infrastructure. His piece, which pitches together images of financially successful Chinese athletes and an emotionless voice expressing concerns about the affordability of housing, also brings to mind the complex interplay of attitudes in Vancouver toward those perceived as part of the recent influx of 'nouveau riche Asian immigrants' versus those who have been part of Vancouver's local history since the building of the historic Chinatown. In this way, an increasingly commercialised hosting site is commandeered to make an artistic and political statement, not just through its content¹⁴ but through its very functions as a website. Much as the contents of Project Rebuild subvert and creatively re-imagine the poem form, the concept of the Project Rebuild website acts as a catalyst for subversions and creative re-imaginings of the ubiquitous Internet search function, in a sort of ripple effect that radiates outward into other websites.

In talking about his own experience as an Asian Canadian subject involved with Project Rebuild, Ray Hsu says that even while working on a video piece quite formally removed from the other texts created by his virtual 'neighbours,' he was always keenly

¹⁴ By "not just through its content," I mean not just through uploaded videos that consciously address artistic and political points.

aware of the larger project's concern with Vancouver housing and gentrification. While putting the words of "Vancouver Special" into the mouths of Chinese figure skaters, Hsu kept thinking about how "when we're talking about housing we're also talking about race" (telephone interview). The connection between racialisation and housing is emphasised by how Project Rebuild's revolves around the central image of Vancouver Specials, a racially loaded architectural style.¹⁵ The large, efficiently-designed and aesthetically unpretentious units invading neighbourhoods previously populated exclusively by mock Tudor, Craftsman, and West Coast Modern style houses were seen as the physical manifestation of immigrant waves also invading the neighbourhood. According to a brochure put out by the Vancouver Heritage Foundation,

In 1968, 44 percent of international immigrants to British Columbia came from Europe and 22 percent came from Asia. But by 1988, 66 percent came from Asia and only 17 percent from Europe. As a result, many Vancouver Specials in the 1970s were being built and bought by South East Asian and Chinese immigrants. During the heyday of their construction, Vancouver Specials were criticized as monotonous, flat-fronted boxes that were seen to take over neighbourhoods in an intimidating manner. (n. pag.)

In addition to the histories of South East Asian and Chinese immigrants evoked by the Vancouver Special itself, Murakami also brings in the history of Japanese immigrants to Canada. In the tradition of alienethnic practice, she uses her own position as somebody of Japanese Canadian heritage as a starting point for investigation into her topic of poetic engagement. Because of the Canadian government's decision to intern Japanese

¹⁵ To clarify, when talking about Vancouver Specials, both Murakami and the Vancouver Heritage Foundation brochure refer to specific types of houses built primarily from 1965-85, which are characterized by their functional, box-like designs and similar floor plans that could legally house secondary tenants such as extended family or renters that helped the owners, often stereotyped as 'hardworking immigrants,' pay the mortgage. In the late 1980s and 90s, Vancouver Specials evolved into larger 'monster homes' and pre-fab mansions as, due to migration patterns discussed in the introduction, Asian immigrants began to trend toward increasing affluence.

Canadians and confiscate their property out of constructed fears of treason, Murakami's Japanese Canadian father's "family had their property taken away during the [Second World] War. Problems with real estate are a huge part of [her] family history" (Smith), sparking her interest in the issue of property ownership.

Race is further foregrounded by Murakami's choice to include a list of "original occupants" on Project Rebuild's "About" page. The list features several Asian Canadian names considered to be locally famous writers who have influenced the West Coast poetry scene and Asian Canadian literature. I will further analyse the authoritarian implications of this list later in this chapter, but for now I bring up the list in relation to how Internet anonymity and the fluidity of identity that comes with anonymity can complicate the racialising function of names. Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, in the introduction to *Race in Cyberspace*, observe that "to have a virtual presence means deliberately constructing an identity for yourself" (6). In the same anthology, Jennifer Gonzalez further suggests that because "'passing' (or pretending to be what one is not) in cyberspace has become a norm rather than an exception, the representation of race in this space is complicated by the fact that much of the activity online is about becoming the fantasy of a racial other" (29). While I would argue that "becoming the fantasy of a racial other" is only a preoccupation in certain parts of cyberspace and that to claim "much" of the Internet is dedicated to that endeavour is an exaggeration, I agree that pretending to be what one is not IRL has become an expected norm of Internet behaviour. Any kind of passing as another race, whether online or IRL, troubles understandings of race and the processes by which it is reified: physical passing performs the perforations in the lines

drawn around biological race categories, while online passing complicates race as social formation when virtuality changes what it means to be 'social.'

Omi & Winant once wrote that "to be raceless is akin to being genderless. Indeed, when one cannot identify another's race, a microsociological 'crisis of interpretation' results" (202). And yet, cyberspace seems to function in a constant state of microsociological crisis where subjects are raceless and genderless unless self-identified, and even self-identification is to be taken with a grain of salt. Cyberspace has become a social arena where passing, playacting, and pretending are expected and understood by others to be normal. Unlike many examples of racial passing in real life, virtual passing is often not undertaken to gain the socio-economic advantages afforded to members of certain races—passing in cyberspace can be done as a racist caricature to make the target race look bad, to stir up controversy for the sake of entertainment (known as 'trolling'), or for the recreational pleasure of roleplaying, just to name a few widespread phenomena. There are, to this date of writing, no occurrences of racist caricature or trolling on Project Rebuild. However, by being online, Project Rebuild opens itself as welcoming of the norm of assumed passing. As a cyber-text, the Project compels readers to confront the complexities of racial identity in an immersive way that its paper counterpart cannot. A quick survey of contributors' names on Project Rebuild shows that while a majority sign with names that sound plausibly real (although it is of course practically impossible to tell if those names actually belonging to them), it is a small majority. A large number of creators choose to leave their name blank, or write "anonymous," or assume pseudonyms such as "Lemonodo," "The Sidewalk," "radioator," or "Just a student." This open-endedness draws attention to the ephemerality of authority as well as to our

tendency to ascribe race to names, especially 'ethnic-sounding' surnames. It is a tendency that has been notably addressed by mixed race author Fred Wah in works such as *Diamond Grill*, and his name's appearance in Project Rebuild highlights how heightened awareness of pseudonymic possibilities in cyberspace destabilizes racial assumptions. With Fred Wah's name standing next to someone/anyone called "anonymous" and an empty text box that allows one to input any name one chooses, one becomes conscious of the slipperiness of various identities, including racial identity. Murakami, as the administrator of the website, does not require a verification process. Unlike many other websites that host user-generated content, is not mandatory to leave one's email or necessary to create an account, and there is no small print to discourage people from all signing their names as "Fred Wah" should they wish to. One is free to volunteer information in the "Bio" text box, where some poets choose to link to their personal websites or list their previous publications, but many leave it blank.

Rita Wong is another signed name on Project Rebuild, as well as part of the list of "original occupants." She carries the ethical concerns she displayed in *forage* into Project Rebuild. Her renovation of Murakami's "Vancouver Special," also entitled "Vancouver Special," questions economic inequality and raises awareness of the connections between class, race, and ecology. By asking "How much land allocated/ to whom assigned?/ & whom assassinated?", she recalls to mind the forceful removal of the real life original occupants of land in Vancouver: the Musqueam First Nation. The relationship between Aboriginal literature and cyberspace is beyond the scope of this thesis, but we must recognise that Project Rebuild, through its list of "first residents" that implies precedence and through the content produced by some of its contributors, invites this consideration of

First Nations land rights. Although there is no physical land at stake in cyberspace, Project Rebuild began as a critique of Vancouver property distribution, and the recurring language of occupancy problematically highlights fact that none of the "first residents" chosen by Murakami self-identify as Musqueam, as though there is a sort of virtual recursion of the real-life exclusion of Musqueam land claims. Renovations like Wong's seem aware of this fact, although Wong's in particular focuses more on Asian subjectivity and eco-criticism. She writes of the stone lions that affluent Chinese Canadians place on front lawns for luck, in juxtaposition to the wildlife that would naturally have been there before, and how "Again, waste equals food,/ but this time further east, with feeling." Like her poems in *forage*, her content and her form, with its unexpected enjambments and strategic use of ruptures, can comfortably be read through the alienethnic lens. But in the context of Project Rebuild, "Rita Wong" takes on a dual function—the poem she produces is alienethnic, but her name can also be read using alienethnic poetics, by reading it as part of the larger website-as-text and critically engaging with its presence on the list and its unstableness as a raced virtual signifier.

Although we have moved past Lockard's image of the Internet as an exclusionary and mostly White space, and although there are now many areas of the Web that cater to specific minorities, there is still a sense of Whiteness being an exnominated (in the Barthesian sense of passed off as natural) in cyberspace. Recounting website creator Dyske Suematsu's speech on the topic of "Asian American community" at Harvard University¹⁶, Nakamura interprets his audience's reaction to connote that "the default

¹⁶ Dyske Suematsu is the creator and owner of alllookslike.com, a quiz-based website where users are shown photographs of Asian faces and are asked to guess whether the portrait is of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean descent, and then calculates scores comparatively. It humourously plays on the cliché that Asians 'all look the same,' and in the site's introductory blurb Suematsu states that "if you're wondering whether or

whiteness of Web content is so pervasive that Harvard students were inclined to think that any visual representations of Asian Americans online constituted an act of community building" (*Digitizing* 83). This observation leads me to question if, in my application of alienethnic poetics to Project Rebuild, I make certain assumptions about the significance of Japanese Canadian and Asian Canadian heritage to the racial concerns of Project Rebuild, and therefore become guilty of the same pigeonholing. Is this a danger that Project Rebuild courts, when it lists "the first residents of the neighbourhood" by name in the "About" section and makes it difficult to overlook the prominent names of known Asian Canadian poets? Or does the cyberspatial context of this danger make it productive, by asking us to confront and examine our impulses to ascribe racial meaning? Murakami's web design harnesses this tension cyberspace can add, and when one reads Project Rebuild with alienethnic poetics in mind one can see how it writes back against dominant grammars, achieves formal innovation, and troubles normative understandings of racialisation.

Limitations of Applying Internet Alienethnic Poetics to Project Rebuild

Although I have strongly argued that one can think through Project Rebuild's engagement with authority and race using the framework of alienethnic poetics, the importation of poetics to the Internet also presents new challenges. When thinking of Project Rebuild's virtuality as a poetic text, one must remain vigilant to avoid the pitfall of utopian thinking that tends to resurface when academics write about the Internet.

Murakami's website is not a boundless sandbox that stretches into infinity. Axel Bruns coins the portmanteau "produser" (producer and user) to identify the new kind of creative

not to take offense, remember: alllookslike is not a statement. It's a question." Nakamura dedicates an entire chapter of *Digitizing Race* to analyzing how this specific site deconstructs the logic of race as visual culture. As a result of his site's popularity, Suematsu was invited to speak at Harvard in March 2002.

audience empowered by Web 2.0 (Marshall 50), but the producers of Project Rebuild are still limited by the framework Murakami and her web designers set. Bell notes that one complaint voiced by critics of the Internet is that the ease of customization available on the Web may "in fact *reduce* the creative potential of the Web, by offering only preset templates that ordinary users cannot customize" (5). By giving options within fixed parameters, websites may give the illusion of creative control while concealing the constructed constraints of the medium. Whereas the overt stifling of creativity can lead to frustration and rebellion, the illusion of control can be more insidious in that it may be enough to satiate the "will to produce" (Marshall 51) and staunch desires for subversion. Of course, the Internet has a strong history of users deliberately hijacking forms for unintended uses—indeed, I have been reading Project Rebuild as a site that hijacks the form of the traditional website for cyber-art, and cyberpunk literature is historically built on a foundation of hacker stories. But on an individual level, it is difficult for the average person to gain the technical expertise necessary to design, program, or hack. Project Rebuild therefore runs the danger of enforcing its own kind of grammar, preventing its users from achieving their full creative vision even while it fights the dominant grammars of the larger Internet landscape. Attempts to subvert the intended uses of Project Rebuild exist: Darren Wershler (or "Darren Wershler," as the case may be), for example, has renovated "Vancouver Special" into ASCII art rather than a poem in a playful turn.¹⁷ However, his entry still falls within the general conceptual constraints of the website, in

¹⁷ ASCII, or the American Standard Code for Information Interchange, is a code that represents text in computers, communications equipment, and other textual display devices. ASCII art is the production of pictures through the use of the 95 printable characters in ASCII. The characters are put together to visually build a composite picture, rather than read for sense. A common and simplistic example of ASCII art is emoticons.

that he inputted allowable textual symbols into a field when prompted and produced a "house" to stand alongside the other houses of the neighbourhood.

By being on the Internet and therefore necessitating access to material computing technology, there is also a certain class assumption inbuilt to Project Rebuild's availability. Combined with Project Rebuild's list of "first residents of the neighbourhood" included in the "About" page, there is a recursion to the observations Wena Poon made about the expected class and education level of racialised online subjects. While Murakami has stated that she wishes Project Rebuild to be open to all, it is, with or without Murakami's consent, incorporated into global and local hierarchies of socio-economic class. The very fact that it uses the Internet connects it to the international exploitation of inequality that Wong addresses in *forage* as a fact of cyberspace in the current world. While there are ongoing projects to bring the Internet to impoverished communities that cannot afford it (the concept of which is interesting to consider in itself, since it approaches the Internet as something invaluable to the living of a fulfilling human life, and seeks to distribute it among everybody the way other organisations seek to distribute water and medicine)¹⁸, the imbalance of class representation is still a factor to take into account when considering the limitations of Internet poetics. The Project Rebuild neighbourhood is ostensibly open to anyone, but intentional or not there are still hidden gates that keep certain groups of people out.

Another class-related gatekeeping obstacle of Project Rebuild is the effect of its list of "first residents of the neighbourhood," which introduces the idea of original presence. It somewhat muddles the alienethnic goal of overturning assumptions of

¹⁸ One example of such organisations is the W2's Media Café, which brings free Internet and cyber skills education to Vancouver's Downtown East Side. For more information, see <<http://www.creativetechnology.org/page/w2-media-cafe>>.

authority by bringing about a kind of self-policing effect. According to Murakami, Project Rebuild aims to undermine not only dominant grammars but also of the author function. She explains in an interview that she intends for Project Rebuild to challenge the venerated notion of the closed art object, to "unsettle" "that finality of a Poem, printed on a page, bound in a book"; she takes away the power of any one author to write "one great final poem about neighbourhood" and instead keeps poetry open indefinitely (Wilson). If Project Rebuild aims to de-mysticise the Author-/Poet-God and empower readers to become writers, then it may be counterproductive to have locally and nationally famous poets' names stake a pioneering claim. The spirit of the website encourages equality and broad participation, but people who do not feel confident that their poetry can stand up next to 'professional' poems would only be further intimidated when they read the list of names in the "About" section. One (prod)user chronicles her personal experience with Project Rebuild and states that the first time she visited the site, she "clicked on the first house closest to my cursor...and froze," feeling unable to "mess with someone else's writing" or track her muddy footprints through Fred Wah's pristine poem (Wilson). Project Rebuild's inability to break away from name recognition, despite striving to blur the line between amateur consumer and professional producer, keeps it from completely dispelling conventional or indoctrinated reverence for the idea of original authority.

This recurrence of the very authority that the text is trying to undermine is reminiscent of similar problems in Fred Wah's original application of alienethnic poetics to the printed text. In a previous paper, I have written about how the focus on unconventional form pushes alienethnic texts toward unreadability (Chan 88-9). While

the difficulty of comprehending some alienethnic poetry is meant to be a rebellion against the tyranny of accepted forms, it has also been interpreted as exclusionary or even classist. Avant-garde poetry is read by some to reinforce a certain institutionalism and elitism because its radicalness puts off the 'common' reader. There persists a perceived bias in favour of the educated classes and those with cultural cachet, despite active attempts to counter it. If one reads Project Rebuild as an alienethnic text, then one must also acknowledge that its status as experimental poetry may be another classed attribute that limits its accessibility. Like many neighbourhoods IRL, Project Rebuild can shut out those who do not feel welcome in the area, even when care has been taken to not erect literal gates to keep them out. Putting experimental poetry online, however, can be a popularizing move: users, especially youth, are more willing to engage in creative play on the Internet, since it is taken as more fun and less serious than the officiousness of printed text. Although certain limitations of alienethnic poetics persist or manifest in new ways, the Internet, as a tool, a medium, and a text itself, can open up new possibilities for the application of poetics. If Rita Wong's *forage* demonstrates what alienethnic poetics can achieve for racialised avant-garde texts in traditional print media, then Project Rebuild is shows how the turn to cyberpoetics can push Asian Canadian writing further. Where Wong uses violations of form and language rules to question authority, users of Murakami's site participate in flouting authority with every non-directional click of the mouse; where Wong uses paratexts and thematic content to ask readers to consider raced subjectivity, Murakami channels the Internet's qualities to incorporate users into performing and interpreting racial positions. Although Murakami's project does reveal some of the limitations of an Internet-based poetics, it also offers insight into how the

radical changeability of the Internet might be put to future unexpected uses beyond the constraints of previous poetics.

Conclusion

In *Digitizing Race*, Lisa Nakamura asks if Asian Americans were in danger of simply re-enacting the "familiar stereotype of nonthreatening and apolitical 'model minority' in cyberspace," or if there are any ways this model could be "subverted on the Internet" (176). All of the literary works I have analysed in this thesis demonstrate ways of positioning diasporic Asian subjects beyond the techno-Orientalist stereotypes made obvious in early cyberpunk literature but existing long before then. Wena Poon's *Lions in Winter* highlights how the Internet has become normalized as a non-physical site of diasporic community for a new generation, and also how access to it throws the socio-economic issues of racialisation into sharper relief. A normalized and familiarized cyberspace also appears in Jen Wang's *Koko Be Good*, which explores how fluidity in visual culture and the Internet relates to understandings of racialisation. Rita Wong's *forage* engages with the economical and ethical ramifications of this new age of everyday Internet use on a global scale, while also serving as a model for how alienethnic poetics can be a productive approach to racialisation. Finally, using alienethnic poetics to read Sachiko Murakami's *Project Rebuild* turns the Internet into a medium where possibilities for subversion can be executed rather than simply written about. Cyberspace, as I have argued throughout this thesis, has become crucial to how contemporary Asian North American literature engages with racial representation. But literary approaches are also crucial to cyberspace, to sustain its potential as more than a commercial product but instead as a concept with artistic and political power. The hailing of cyberspace as a literary concept of our time takes it out of its previous relegation to a subgenre and mobilizes it as a new mode to engage with class, race, and diaspora.

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