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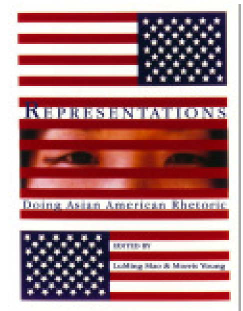

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REEXAMINING THE BETWEEN-WORLDS TROPE IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMPOSITION STUDIES

Tomo Hattori and Stuart Ching

The between-worlds trope has significantly shaped and informed cross-cultural composition pedagogy and research. Two landmark works in cross-cultural composition studies exemplify this claim: in *Hunger of Memory*, Richard Rodriguez (1983) is neither bracero nor scholarship boy, neither of the home nor of school, a stranger in his own household. In *Bootstraps*, Victor Villanueva describes the cross-cultural minority adrift between continents upon a linguistic sea: the "minority lives in a netherworld. Not quite American. No home to return to" (1993, 28). Rodriguez's image evokes a sense of absolute confinement; Villanueva's—the individual linguistically and culturally adrift with no land in sight—suggests confinement through a metaphor of absolute space. Within the sphere of nationalism and its binary construction of race (i.e., black-white, color-white, alien-citizen), there is no home or homeland for the linguistic minority speaker, the mixed blood, the border character who must navigate opposing communities en route to achieving linguistic competence.

Attempting to create a more spacious discourse in cross-cultural composition studies, this chapter reexamines the "caught-between-worlds" trope through an analysis of Asian American rhetoric. By tracing the history of the between-worlds metaphor in two disciplinary narratives—cross-cultural composition studies and Asian American studies—and by placing these histories in dialogue, this chapter argues for the retirement of the between-worlds trope as both an institutional framework and a pedagogical principle in cross-cultural composition and rhetoric studies.

In advancing this argument and dialogue, this chapter disrupts and refigures two foundational concepts in cross-cultural composition

studies: (1) literacy's equation with national citizenship; and (2) narration's equation with nationhood or the nation-state.[1] Challenging the first concept, this chapter acknowledges the relationship between literacy and citizenship and additionally complicates this relationship by illustrating how national citizenship initiates forms of illiteracy in the context of global awareness. Challenging the second concept, this chapter replaces the concept *nation as narration* with *transnation as narration.* While work in composition studies has appropriated postcolonial and cultural studies research that has already moved from national to transnational models, the seemingly unbreakable connection between literacy and national citizenship continues within the context of composition studies to locate our discussions predominantly within the national sphere. This location unintentionally reproduces the hegemonic narratives that compositionists who have used the between-worlds metaphor attempt to subvert. In other words, while the between-worlds trope has motivated composition research to define conflicts between home and school cultures and has informed pedagogical research that attempts to bridge or deconstruct such divides, the trope, cast upon a solely national geography, harms the very participants for whom cross-cultural research advocates. Within a national border, to exist between worlds signifies alienation and exclusion; in contrast, across a global geography, to imagine traveling among worlds becomes a space of possibility.

BETWEEN WORLDS IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

Composition research has both imagined and accommodated the between-worlds trope in varied forms over the past four decades. Significantly shaping composition's process pedagogy movement, Britton's and Vygotsky's models and concepts of language development imagine a gap, or middle space, separating a learner's existing and targeted levels of linguistic and cognitive development. In *Language and Learning,* Britton figuratively defines literacy acquisition as a map. This

1. The relationship between narrative and nationalism has been widely explored in the field of cultural studies. For example, in *Culture and Imperialism,* Edward Said argues that historically, "narrative" determined "who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future." He continues: "As one critic has suggested, nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (1993, xii-xiii emphasis in the original). This area of inquiry also figures significantly in rhetoric and composition research concerned with the relationship among literacy, citizenship, and the nation.

map, which the individual articulates through language, composes the individual's worldview. New learning experiences (particularly in schooling) become comprehensible in proximity to the individual's existing worldview. In contrast, learning experiences far removed from this worldview remain incomprehensible since they exist within a kind of middle space between the individual's existing schema and her target level of development (1970, 11–33). Two of Vygotsky's concepts—the zone of proximal development and scaffolding—affirm this cognitive and linguistic middle space. The zone of proximal development describes the developmental stage between an individual's existing cognitive development and the systems and conventions of logic that she has not yet acquired. Scaffolding signifies curricular and pedagogical bridges that facilitate learning within the zone of proximal development (1978, 79–91).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Britton's and Vygotsky's work highly influenced writing instruction. Pedagogical concepts and strategies such as the writing conference, peer-revision workshops, innovative writing and grammar minilessons, modeling, and numerous prereading and prewriting exercises provided educators with concrete instructional tools, or *scaffolding,* for working within the cognitive and linguistic middle spaces separating a learner's existing and targeted levels of development. By the 1990s, then, these representations of the between-worlds trope as a transitional stage between two levels of development or cognitive maturation were firmly rooted in both composition research and instruction.

Postprocess research and pedagogy have complicated Britton's and Vygotsky's models of the between-worlds trope, motivating volumes of valuable research that attend specifically to cross-cultural contexts in writing instruction. This emphasis has further entrenched the between-worlds trope in composition studies. For example, Heath (1983) has studied the ways in which children's home literacy practices affect literacy acquisition in school and has encouraged educators to bridge cultural divisions between home and school that may impede acquisition of academic literacies. In addition, countering myths and language policies that elevate Standard English and subordinate Black Vernacular English, Gilyard (1991) has called attention to the cultural and linguistic gaps that separate learners' linguistic experiences on the streets and their literacy acquisition in school. Challenging Rodriguez's binary either-or model of literacy, which insists that acquiring Standard English necessitates cultural loss (see *Hunger of Memory*), Gilyard argues that

Rodriguez's model binds bilingual and bidialectical speakers between two linguistic worlds. Like Heath and Gilyard, rather than define this bilingual and cross-cultural position as confinement, additional studies have reconstituted this site between linguistic and cultural worlds with critical power. For example, compositionists have used Pratt's concept of "safe houses" (1991, 40), or imagined places of solidarity amid conflicting cultural and political positions, to advocate spaces within the classroom where marginalized students may cultivate a critical collectivity that counters the dominant culture. Compositionists have additionally used Freire's (1970) ideas of liberatory pedagogy to populate marginalized positions with critical, enabling power.

Revisiting the themes of recent CCCC conventions (CCCC is the premier conference in composition studies) suggests that composition research still largely invests great energy into vesting the between-worlds metaphor with political and critical power: CCCC 2002, "Connecting the Text and the Street"; CCCC 2003, "Re-writing Theme for English B: Transforming Possibilities"; CCCC 2004, "Making Composition Matter: Students, Citizens, Institutions, Advocacy"; and CCCC 2005, "Opening the Golden Gates: Access, Affirmative Action, and Student Success." The "street"; the rhetor's position in Langston Hughes's famous poem; and the spaces of "advocacy," "access," and "affirmative action" all evoke cultural, institutional, and political middle spaces that composition studies seeks to transform from positions of oppression into positions of power.

Despite these efforts, the caught-between-worlds metaphor still remains a position of subjection and subjugation. For example, Fu has studied the conflicts between the home and institutional literacies of Asian students attending American schools. Fu describes her four student subjects caught between cultural and institutional worlds: "Standing far from center stage, Tran, Cham, Paw, and Sy, like any newcomers, are wondering, trying to figure out the contours of their new stage. It is so unfamiliar, so different from their old one. . . . They cannot, nor do they want to, discard their past, but they need to find a way to survive as the selves they choose to be in the new environment." As the title of chapter 2 of the volume suggests, they stand "at the edge of the new culture," between their pasts and the American Dream (1995, 33). Reminiscent of DuBois's image of the citizen who lives between two states of conflicting consciousness and Rodriguez's scholarship boy (separated from the home community by language and from the school community by skin

color), they remain frozen in development, unable to mature. They are caught between worlds.

Hence, in the postprocess era, the between-worlds trope—initially a transitional stage between two places of cognitive development—becomes a transitional place between two stages of cultural, political, institutional, and economic development. Students like Tran, Cham, Paw, and Sy, who live on linguistic and cultural borderlands between home and school (or both figuratively and problematically in the popular imagination, between homeland and America or American Dream) remain developmentally frozen or caught in the middle between dichotomized images of the globe (East-West, third world–first world, bound-free, foreign-domestic, barbaric-civilized). Such dichotomies fail to reflect adaptive and mobile ways of imagining and constituting ethnic identity and global citizenship.

Three seminal literacy narratives—Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999), Victor Villanueva Jr.'s *Bootstraps* (1993), and Morris Young's *Minor Re/Visions* (2004)—have pointed composition studies toward alternative routes beyond national borders. That is, although the discipline has interpreted and applied these works within national literacy debates and contexts, all three authors summon their political and critical power from imagined global locations. Our purpose here, then, is not to explicate the entirety of these rich texts, but to illustrate how three key word usages locate these narratives in transnational locations beyond the U.S. border: "borderland" (Anzaldúa 1999), "folkloristic" (Villanueva 1993, 135), and "deterritorialize" (Young 2004, 40, 72). Mah y Busch emphasizes that the title of Anzaldúa's book, "after all, is not 'borders' but 'borderlands'" (2005, 150). For Anzaldúa, borderlands constitute a fluid space within a transnational geography that is a paradoxical location on "both shores at once" (100). The borderland is never a fixed border; rather it is a continual crossing over and through. Hence, in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa's story and argument originate within this space. As such, her text resists closure. Instead, it remains an open wound, "una herida abierta where Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (25). According to Mah y Busch, this liminal space, along with numerous metaphorical and mythical references, enables Anzaldúa to articulate a kind of "palimpsest, a conceptual layering" that, through articulations, colonial erasures, and

rearticulations, locates the narrator within both the indigenous and the cosmic simultaneously (148).

In *Bootstraps,* while Villanueva positions his argument within a national border, it similarly achieves its generative power by reaching through and beyond national borders toward a more spacious transnational geography. Drawing from Gramsci, Villanueva challenges the "folkloristic," or the ideological that passes as neutral fact or condition rather than political consequence (1993, 95). To do this, he proposes introducing alternative folklores into the writing curriculum: "Those who comprise the various cultures in the classroom would be encouraged to discover their own folklores" (136). And in a later volume of *College English* entitled "Rhetorics of Color," Villanueva seeks these varied folklores in "memory," or *la memoria,* which is a "friend of ours" (2004). Such folklores, implicitly stated in Villanueva's argument, might encompass indigenous ethics and myths that originate beyond America's borders. As such, they reach through the national imaginary, excavating colonial global attachments and relationships and call attention to the ways in which such attachments reveal themselves within the oppressive realities of certain minority communities within the national border.

Like Villanueva, Young positions his argument within the national border. Additionally similar to Villanueva, Young advances his national argument by evoking a transnational geography. Here, we want to focus particularly on the term *deterritorialization,* which Young uses to illustrate Victor Villanueva's critique of the ideologies populating the dominant national discourse that enslaves minor narratives and their languages of origination (2004, 56, 72, 81). While Young applies "deterritorialization" primarily within a national context, the arc of his narrative forges a clear connection between internal colonization and global colonization among nations (both the Philippines and Hawai'i, major subjects in Young's study, were once U.S. territories). This spacious geography becomes even more clear in his discussions of Carlos Bulosan and America's colonial history with the Philippines, as well as Hawai'i's literature and its literacy policies that discriminate against speakers of Hawai'i Creole English. These subjects frame Young's discussion of national literacy policy within the colonial relationships that America has had and continues to have with the Philippines, Hawai'i, and other nations.

As we have asserted, all three studies discussed above, though currently applied by compositionists predominantly in contexts of national citizenship, articulate attachments to global communities. In this way, these

authors resist binary representations of race and literacy. Eschewing the between-worlds trope, they instead opt for fluid and multiple articulations of culture, ethnic identity, and citizenship within the nation. Additionally, they attempt to narrate and reconstitute themselves and the larger cultural, intellectual, and institutional communities in which they participate. Because of their importance in composition studies, the three landmark literacy narratives cited above continue to influence the field of composition and rhetoric significantly. Anzaldúa's and Villanueva's works are among the most highly cited volumes in cross-cultural composition research within the last ten years. Young's book, which earned the prestigious 2006 CCCC Outstanding Book Award, promises the same in the future. As a discipline, we can learn much more from these narratives, for as Mah y Busch notes, in Anzaldúa's work, the "movement from la frontera to the New mestiza is not narrowly physical. The shift ultimately concerns awareness and its role in a person's ability to act" (2005, 148). Movement, therefore, is a function of the individual's capacity to imagine. Composition studies may fully realize the vision of these authors and extend these visions as well, if it reimagines literacy globally beyond the physical national border and travels the routes these authors have opened on a transnational geography.

Recent studies have taken promising turns in these directions: challenging college composition's singular (and uncritical) commitment to an " English-only" policy, Horner and Trimbur encourage pluralizing composition studies. In other words, they support an "internationalist perspective capable of understanding the study of teaching written English in relation to other languages and the dynamics of globalization" (2003, 624). Citing Chiang and Schmida (1999, 85), Horner and Trimbur emphasize the detrimental effects of tacit English-only policies, which force some bilingual college writers into locating themselves "between worlds" (610). Building on Horner and Trimbur's work, Canagarajah articulates one specific version of pluralizing composition studies, arguing that we should encourage students to produce texts that interweave diverse varieties of world Englishes. Such textual "meshing" would challenge the hegemonic functions of Standard English both nationally and globally (2006, 598).

The national border, however, is not easily reconstituted or dismantled in matters of literacy. Indeed, literacy and American citizenship have long been inextricably and problematically connected. In "The Politics of English Only in the United States: Historical, Social, and Legal

Aspects," Carol Schmid offers a concise overview of this troubled history. According to Schmid, increased immigration has historically produced two national responses: fear of foreigners and fervor for Americanization. Both responses remain inextricably interwoven with literacy policies that erase minority languages and that enforce English as the nation's official language. Drawing from a range of sources, Schmid chronicles language policies from 1917 to 1924 directed at the new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. These policies included English-only instructional laws in Oregon; California legislation requiring foreign-language newspapers to publish English translations; and national legislation in the Espionage Act, which required English translations of all war articles written in German. This legislation resulted in ten German newspapers printing their news exclusively in English. Moreover, this legislation was further reinforced by psychological research purporting that bilingual children were handicapped in language development in comparison with monolingual children (2000, 62–66).

Schmid's summary of English-only U.S. national and local policies from the late twentieth century to the present further illustrates literacy's seemingly unbreakable bond with citizenship. Unlike the wave of southern and eastern European immigration at the turn of the century, which coincided with a rapidly expanding economy, recent Asian and Latin American migration has occurred at a time when the economy has grown much slower, fueling attempts to blame minority languages for the existence of social ills that have resulted from economic challenges. Current language policies are also intertwined with other heated political issues such as immigration law, educational policy, and increased patriotism stemming from economy uncertainties (Schmid 2000, 67–73). One thing remains consistent, however, across both ends of the century: within the complexity of political conflict and uncertainty, "the English language has taken its place beside the American flag as a symbol of what it means to be an American" (73).

In addition, citing exclusionary language policies in connection with contemporaneous anti-immigration policies, Schmid argues that national identity is always "articulated through concepts of race, language, country of origin, and religion" (2000, 66). Similarly, responding to English-only policies in the late twentieth century, Aparicio insists that because military aggression cannot be deployed against citizens within its borders, America has inflicted violence against minorities and has excluded these citizens from its political body through other means,

such as language policy: "Language, then, has emerged as a discursive site through which the United States, as a nation, re-imagines itself as desirably homogeneous. Such a nation would necessitate one language to 'glue' its culturally disparate citizens" (2000, 249). As Schmid notes, "Counter symbols that challenge the melting pot theory, such as the legitimacy of speaking and perhaps even maintaining a language in addition to English, add to the current social conflict." Hence, the recent passing of California's Proposition 227, which states that English instruction may be done only in English, exemplifies the inextricable connection between language and national citizenship (Schmid 2000, 73). To be taught English in any other language fuels fears of balkanization and disunity within the nation's borders and the fracturing of the physical border itself.

BETWEEN WORLDS IN ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

Composition studies can learn from the ways in which Asian American studies has struggled with the between-worlds trope from its implantation within the discipline's original cultural nationalist discourse to its various recurrences within the discipline's efforts to accommodate more spacious and complex transnational flows. The between-worlds trope in Asian American studies is best understood within that discipline's history as a component of the American ethnic studies movement. Ethnic studies comes into existence during the highly charged decade in recent American history after the civil rights movement and during the national protests against the Vietnam War. It forms as an institutional response to the demands of American college and university students for a more culturally representative and diverse curriculum. The first ethnic studies programs in the country are established at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley after student strikes in 1968. The Web site of the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley documents a "Chronology of Ethnic Studies at Berkeley" that details the sit-ins, demonstrations, and protests that brought ethnic studies into existence.[2] Today, ethnic studies is a vocationally and intellectually integrated institution; the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University helps students to "teach Ethnic Studies subjects in elementary, secondary, community and college level institutions: or combine this with professional and vocational skills such as business, social welfare, law, and

2. See http://ethnicstudies.berkeley.edu.

medicine."[3] Berkeley's department of ethnic studies "encourages the comparative study of racialization in the Americas" and seeks to situate American ethnic groups "within national and transnational contexts, and to understand how racial and ethnic formation articulate with other axes of stratification such as class, gender, and sexuality."[4] Over the last four decades, ethnic studies has become a distinct if not entirely autonomous discipline like English or composition and a familiar feature of liberal education in American colleges and universities. But while ethnic studies seeks to erase vocational and intellectual marginalization, it does not seek to erase minority culture or identity. Ethnic studies supports vocational assimilation while insisting on racial and ethnic distinction and difference.

Ethnic studies can be understood as the cultural and academic arm of the civil rights movement, with its foundational interest in social equality and justice. Asian American studies begins with the ethnic studies movement as one of its founding constituent areas.[5] At the same time, however, another discourse of American belonging emerges to distinguish Asian Americans in particular from other American minority groups. This is the discourse of the model minority. The model minority idea first appears in American journalism in 1966. In January of that year, an article by sociologist William Petersen appears in the *New York Times Magazine* that declares Japanese Americans "better than any other group in our society, including native-born whites" (21). Later that year, the *U.S. News and World Report* announces: "At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent to uplift negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own, with no help from anyone else" ("Success Story" 1966, 73–78).[6] The competitive vision of race relations inscribed in the model minority thesis exists in tension with the cooperative and egalitarian ethos of ethnic studies. The tension between the desire to be equal and the desire to win ripples through the conversations of Asian American culture.

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3. See http://www.sfsu.edu/~ethnicst/.
4. See http://ethnicstudies.berkeley.edu.
5. The other conventional areas of ethnic studies are African American studies, Chicano/Latino studies, and Native American studies.
6. For a good introduction to the model minority discussion in Asian American studies, see the essays in "Part VIII: The Construction and Deconstruction of the 'Model Minority'" in Zhou and Gatewood 2000. Vijay Prasad (2006) offers an interesting review of model minority formation in relation to other recent discourses of American racial formation. See also the passage "Myth of the 'Model Minority'" in Takaki 1989

One of the notable early efforts by Asian Americans to find a unique cultural voice comes in 1974 in the form of the scream "*AIIIEEEEE!*" by the editorial collective of *AIIIEEEEE! An Anthology of Asian American Writers.* In this initial and founding cultural nationalist phase of what William Wei calls "The Asian American Movement" (1993), this group of Asian American writers explains its anthology's rationale and the title's meaning: "Our anthology is exclusively Asian American. This means Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese Americans, American born and raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, off the silver screen, from television, out of comic books, from the pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something that—when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering—whined, shouted, or screamed '*aiiieeeee!*'" (Chin et al. 1991 [1974], xi-xii).

What this small scream represents to the editorial group is the racial wound of growing up Asian in a white male American media culture. In response, the editors of the anthology rearticulate and amplify this abject and pathetic scream into a bold scream of power and protest: "Asian America, so long ignored and forcibly excluded from creative participation in American culture, is wounded, sad, angry, swearing, and wondering, and this is his *AIIIEEEEE!!!*" The editors claim that this newly reimagined scream is "more than a whine, shout, or scream"—instead, it represents "fifty years of our whole voice" (Chin et al. 1991 [1974], xii).

An inquiry into the rhetorical agency of this scream exposes the editors' misrecognition of domination as equality. Apart from uppercase lettering and two additional exclamation points, the *AIIIEEEEE!* editors claim that the new scream has the backing of an entirely new discourse of Asian American cultural being. This is not the only time this editorial group will scream like this. Seventeen years later in 1991, this group releases *The Big AIIIEEEEE! An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature* (Chan et al. 1991). The full consideration of this speech act thus presents to us three primal screams: the first lowercase "*aiiieeeee!*" noted in 1974 is the derogatory and racist representation of Asian men in white American culture; the second "*AIIIEEEEE!*", spelled in uppercase letters, is the antiracist retort of the Chinese and Japanese American male editorial group; and the third "*AIIIEEEEE!*", the "Big" one, is the 1991 supplement by that group to its first declarative enunciation in 1974. The redundancy of the third scream is the act that exposes and deflates the power of the whole rhetorical triad. To be sure, the second scream, the scream of the Asian American editors, is itself a

dependent mimicry. It lacks the subversive irony of the colonial mimicry and "sly civility" that Homi Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* (1994); it lacks the multiform invention and mythological resonance of feminist theorist Helene Cixous's "Laugh of the Medusa" (1976). The only rhetorical invention of both "The Big *AIIIEEEEE!!!*" and the first Asian American "*AIIIEEEEE!*" to their respective immediate predecessors is, strictly speaking, size and volume. What escapes the *AIIIEEEEE!* editors is that their rhetoric of minority assertion thus subscribes to the same values that rationalize the domination of majorities over minorities. In appealing to the logic that bigger and louder is better and prouder, their very act of proclaiming autonomy and independence reveals a rhetorical and intellectual dependency on the logic of cultural domination. In appealing to the logic of domination to construct an alternative to it, the *AIIIEEEEE!* editors inadvertently alienate themselves through their own strategy of self-empowerment. In this sense, one can see their self-inflicted alienation as an unintended implantation of the between-worlds trope within the heart of contemporary Asian American selfhood.

The most literal application of the between-worlds trope in Asian American criticism might be Amy Ling's metaphor of the Asian subject in the West as a "bridge" in her 1990 book, *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry.* In this book Ling argues for a positive understanding of the role that women writers of Chinese ancestry have had in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and European culture as cultural diplomats who bridge the gap between Eastern and western civilization: "On the one hand, being between worlds can be interpreted to mean occupying the space or gulf between two banks; one is thus in a state of suspension, accepted by neither side and therefore truly belonging nowhere. . . . On the other hand, viewed from a different perspective, being between worlds may be considered as having footholds on both banks and therefore belonging to two worlds at once. One does not have less; one has more. When those who are entirely on one bank wish to cross the gulf, the person between worlds is in the indispensable position of being a bridge" (177).

Ling accepts as given an elemental distinction between East and West that is the defining feature of orientalist thought as elaborated by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). The intriguing element of this otherwise obvious presentation of the bridge as metaphor for the between-worlds condition is the modification she makes to it as she excavates her underlying cultural desire.

What Ling wants to do in *Between Worlds* is to give value to the literary output of writers who have been neglected or debased in twentieth-century European and American culture for their membership in two social categories: Chinese ethnicity and female gender. After arguing for the positive function of Asian subjects as bridges, Ling concludes: "Thus, the factors—one's Chinese face and heritage, for example—that created a sense of alienation in one world are the very factors that enable one to perform the act of bridging; disadvantages turned into advantages by alchemy, dross transmutes into gold" (1990, 177). The argument that a person is valuable because she is in an "indispensable position" of being able to provide "a service not many are able to render" is an argument based on the utility of that person's social function. Ling's small but telling shift in her metaphor of the Asian subject from "bridge" to "gold" locates an important contradiction in competing principles of assessing the value of Asians in American society and life. The difference between the value of bridges and the value of gold is that the value of a bridge is based on function and utility whereas the value of gold is intrinsic. Unlike bridges and other constructed tools, gold has a role in human culture as the standard of value for other commodities. The value of gold in this role is not measured by function or utility as a physical bridge might be. However, in capitalist culture, the utility of a bridge can be measured and expressed as an equivalency to gold. Ling's idea of an "alchemical" transformation of Asian subjects in the West does not criticize the evaluation of Asian Americans for their utility to other cultures rather than for their intrinsic merit. Nonetheless, Ling is aware at least that some form of radical transformation is necessary. In that regard, Ling's between-worlds expression can be seen as an intermediate step in Asian American thought from the monologic cultural nationalism of the *AIIIEEEEE!* group to a preliminary dialogic conception of Asian American transnational subjectivity.

This dialogic conception of Asian American culture also preoccupies Asian American historian Gary Okihiro in *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (1994). The title of this book's second chapter, "Is Yellow Black or White?", succinctly establishes the context of Okihiro's between-worlds discussion. Okihiro's idea of Asian Americans as occupying an intermediate state in national culture differs from Ling's in that Ling thinks about Chinese women writers between two national cultures, whereas Okihiro's context is the binary structure of the black/white American color line. Okihiro diverts the focus of his

question away from the Asian American racial subject, the "yellow," to the conditions in American racial culture that make such a question material and relevant.

"Implicit within the question," Okihiro observes, "is a construct of American society that defines race relations as bipolar—between black and white—and that locates Asians (and American Indians and Latinos) somewhere along the divide between black and white." This construct is "not mere ideology but is a social practice that assigns to Asian Americans, and indeed to all minorities, places within the social formation" whose "relationships function to institute and perpetuate a repression that begets and maintains privilege." In the face of this repression, Okihiro sees the necessity of asserting that yellow is "neither white nor black; but insofar as Asians and Africans share a subordinate position to the master class, yellow is a shade of black, and black, a shade of yellow" (1994, 33–34). Thinking of yellow and black as comparable signifiers of racial disempowerment exemplifies the ethos of ethnic studies and its civil rights era commitment to the antiracist solidarity of oppressed races.

The model minority thesis, on the other hand, argues that yellow is a shade of white and that blacks and browns (Latinos) could improve their economic status if only they adopted some "yellow" (Asian) social characteristics. Okihiro's own answer prefers the affinities of yellow to black. "We are a kindred people, African and Asian Americans," he declares, as he notes the shared histories of migration, European colonization, American racial oppression, and American struggle for freedom and equality that convince him of this kinship. But despite a kinship "forged in the fire of white supremacy and struggle," Okihiro wonders, "[H]ow can we recall that kinship when our memories have been massaged by white hands" and "when our storytellers have been whispering amid the din of western civilization and Anglo-conformity?" (1994, 33–34). As historically perverse and dysfunctional as the kinships of white with black and white with yellow have been, historically dominant whiteness is the family name under which African Americans and Asian Americans discover their kinship: yellow is black because white is neither. Despite their different framings of the Asian subject relative to the boundary of American national culture, Ling's and Okihiro's between-worlds metaphors both privilege the marginal status of the Asian racial sign as the frame of reference for the political work of cultural belonging.

Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996) follows in this tradition by arguing that Asian American subjectivity and

culture stand as "countersites" to American national culture. Echoing Ling, Lowe observes that "the Asian American, even as a citizen, continues to be located outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation." Lowe persistently challenges the European intellectual culture of universalism, which she sees as the founding logic of national culture and which she calls "the universality of the national political sphere." Rather than assimilating into this universality, Lowe believes that the Asian immigrant in the United States is "at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation" and that this "distance from the national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation" (4, 6). Lowe concludes: "Rather than expressing a 'failed' integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy" (6).

One can hear Ling, Okihiro, and the basic premise of difference that grounds the project of ethnic studies in this last sentence. What is different about Lowe is that she advocates a postnational cultural practice that, unlike Ling, does not situate the Asian subject between two fixed national cultures and that, unlike Okihiro, does not situate the Asian American subject between the American racial constructions of blackness and whiteness. Okihiro at least emphasizes that American race is a construction and not a natural or predestined state of being. Lowe challenges the structuring assumptions of European Enlightenment thought to situate Asian American subjectivity and culture in a location that, by virtue of exclusion by a historically Eurocentric national culture, is free from the boundaries and constraints of both nationalism and universalism.

Lowe elaborates upon a vision of postnational culture structured not on the unity of the same and the expulsion of the different but on a more varied and plural set of cultural operations that she calls "heterogeneity, hybridity, multiplicity."[7] Lowe stresses heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity in Asian American culture "as part of a twofold argument about cultural politics, the ultimate aim of which is to disrupt the current hegemonic relationship between 'dominant' and 'minority' positions" (1996,

7. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences," which appears as the third chapter of *Immigrant Acts,* was originally published in *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991).

66–67). The dominant and minority positions that Lowe refers to are not the white and black of Okihiro's discourse. Lowe does not want to situate Asian Americans between dominant and minority culture. Rather, she wants to dissolve the rhetoric and the power of the system of difference represented by those two symbiotic terms. While Lowe's argument about the heterogeneity of Asian American culture "is part of a strategy to destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogeneous group," she also calls for "a dialogue within Asian American discourse, to point to the limitations inherent in a politics based on cultural, racial, or ethnic identity." Lowe's concern is that Asian American culture is just as invested in nationalism and its habit of definition by exclusion as the dominant national culture under which it exists: "I argue for the Asian American necessity to organize, resist, and theorize *as* Asian Americans, but at the same time, I inscribe this necessity within a discussion of the risks of a cultural politics that relies on the construction of sameness and the exclusion of differences" (68; emphasis in the original). Lowe's placement of the Asian American subject for once situates Asian Americans outside of a between-worlds model and instead places Asian Americans on the side of heterogeneity and difference against the overall culture of dominant and minority nationalism and universalism.

Not everyone in Asian American studies is happy to lose the coherence of national form. Sau-Ling Wong describes the trends inspired by Lowe's work as a "denationalization" that threatens both the cultural and political core of the discipline. Wong worries in "Denationalization Reconsidered" that new trends toward interdisciplinarity and diasporic perspectives will seduce Asian American scholars into an "unwitting subsumption into master narratives" and an uncritical depoliticization of a discipline whose origins are in student radicalism and the activism of minority communities. Wong's critique of the postnational turn in Asian American studies in the mid-1990s divides the phenomenon into three functions: the easing of cultural nationalist concerns, the growing permeability between "Asian" and "Asian American" studies, and the shift from a domestic to a diasporic perspective: "I have found myself raising questions about the consequences of an uncritical participation in denationalization, as if it represented a more advanced and theoretically more sophisticated (in short, superior, though proponents rarely say so directly) stage in Asian American studies" (1995, 12).

Wong's objections contain a distinct trace of professional envy when she describes the postnational or "denational" trend as appearing "to

promise novelty, intellectual excitement, delivery from the institutional ghetto of ethnic studies, or even, perhaps, better funding" (1995, 2). Lament over the intrusion of economic interest into the culture of minority knowledge production, however, also marks the boundary between the national racial egalitarianism of ethnic studies and the postnational frontier of global capitalist difference. Wong claims to be arguing from a position of pragmatic political interest: "Not only are one's time and energy for action finite, but whatever claiming one does must be enacted from a political location—one referenced to a political structure, a nation" (19). Wong's essay appeared in *Amerasia Journal* in 1995. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, serve as an accessible contemporary symbol for the obsolescence of Wong's conception of pragmatic locale.

THE POTENTIAL OF RHETORIC

In this chapter, we have explained the emergence and the persistence of the between-worlds trope in two disciplines. In composition studies, the between-worlds trope remains entrenched, first, because influential cognitive models (for example, Vygotsky and Britton) have privileged a middle space between two sites of cognitive development. Likewise, social-political models (for example, Rodriguez, Villanueva, and Gilyard) have privileged a middle space between conflicted sites of culture and oppositional sites of race. Collectively, these models have accommodated and have presumed the notion of an individual's spatial location between two cognitive stages, between two cultural universes, and between two racial worlds. Second, literacy's equation with national citizenship continues to position cross-cultural debates largely within the national border. This spatial location continues to accommodate and reify binary and dehumanizing models of race and national identity that imagine individuals in absolute categories: citizen, alien; self, other; privileged, marginalized. Those who do not fit into one or the other remain, as in the case of Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*, caught between worlds. Finally, as we have argued, while the works of Young, Villanueva, Anzaldúa, Canagarajah, and Horner and Trimbur have imagined literacy's place and potential beyond national boundaries, the discipline's history and literacy's shared identity with citizenship continue to resituate our discussions within the national border.

As we have illustrated, despite the move toward a postnational imaginary, the between-worlds trope also remains entrenched in Asian

American studies. Wong's anxiety over the denationalization of Asian American studies is the same root fear that anchors the "between-worlds" trope in current composition studies. Letting go of a stable world, one that depends on the presumption of unity, even if unity is only an illusion, is difficult in any era. The rhetorical and political problem of postnational criticism in the humanities is that it has not yet created an honest and accurate language to describe how humans will occupy and inhabit the space vacated by nationalism. The very phrase "postnational Asian American studies" or "postnational American studies" is contradictory or at least unclear about what the term *American* refers to in the absence of a national frame.

In place of nationalism, one could propose a "global citizenship." However, there is, in reality, no such entity as a global citizen in the same fashion as national citizens. No one state exists that covers the entire globe with a uniform administration of state and citizenship rights. Outside of metaphor, the only citizenship that currently exists on the globe is administered by national governments, none of which is extensive enough, even in federation, to administer the rights and privileges of civil society across the globe. To even the most casual political observer, other institutions easily exceed and surpass the nation in the speed and flexibility of their global reach: capitalism, fundamentalism, terrorism. Thus, with no fully articulated alternative to the discourse of nationalism, the between-worlds trope persists, as do the schisms that we posit between the rigidly defined national borders that we imagine.

In seeking an alternative discourse, we turn to the potential of rhetoric. As Berlin argues, social-epistemic rhetoric locates epistemology at the nexus of thought, linguistic utterance or composition, and social-political context (1987, 165–179). As forms of social-epistemic rhetoric, the works of Young, Anzaldúa, Villanueva, Horner and Trimbur, and Canagarajah are promising because they create new epistemological potential by situating linguistic utterance in conflicted spaces of national identity that, counter to common wisdom, reject presumptions of unity and homogeneity. Lowe's postnational thesis in Asian American studies is also largely rhetorical. Her conception of the cultural subject defies both dominant and minority nationalism. Rhetorically, she attempts to reconfigure the ways in which we imagine nation-states and global relations—to move us from an imagined finite existence to the precarious and provisional reality of hybrid nations and citizenries that are always becoming something other.

THE COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC TEACHER AS COUNTERTERRORIST

Translated into post-9/11 politics, Lowe's subject defies both the imperialist and the insurgent. In an ideal ethical struggle, a campaign like the War against Terror should have a warrior who fights against terror as a tactic rather than terror as simply the term for the actions of the enemy. Her battle is rhetorical. She knows that to a free mind and to a liberal education, the enemy is terror itself.

In composition pedagogy, scholars such as Anzaldúa, Young, Villanueva, Horner and Trimbur, and Canagarajah have pointed us in promising directions toward such liberation. Collectively, they remind us that, certainly, a literate composer writes deftly across many genres and purposes, but a deft composer is not truly literate—in fact, remains impoverished—until she has a full understanding of her medium—that is, the local and global contexts of empire that shape the English language and those who use it. Our dialogue between composition and one branch of ethnic studies is our attempt to add to the conversation that extends the literacy of national citizenship beyond the borders of the nation-state. Such an approach inquires into the ways in which imperialism reveals itself in local contexts of literacy, and how local attitudes toward literacy illuminate one's perception of global conflicts. Such an approach in a writing class would engage students in various tasks of composing while engaging students and teacher alike in a variety of critical inquiries into historical, local, national, and transnational sites where race, power, language, and empire intersect. The dialogue that our chapter has initiated between composition and Asian American studies serves as one potential domain of inquiry that might drive a writing classroom and that would invite, illuminate, and complicate the kinds of textual meshing that the scholars we have cited advocate both in their literacy narratives and in their formal research.

When a writing teacher sits in a class or office and does what liberal education calls teaching, the golden opportunity opens to retire the "between-worlds" trope that creates, formalizes, and freezes the disabling differences of the "different" student. Danling Fu's student newcomers, Tran, Cham, Paw, and Sy, "[s]tanding far from center stage," challenge the literacy of teachers as much as the literacy of teachers challenges them. The teacher's success at the former challenge is integral to the students' success at the latter. The world that is created when a teacher

meets a student is not the result of one world's assimilation of the other. It is not even in our thinking an intermediate space or bridge between two worlds. Rather, we argue for seeing this encounter as an opening of possibility in which the oppositions and identities that choke the cultural world have yet to secure their stultifying closures. This instance of potential is where teaching happens and where meaningful composing begins. It is the moment that rhetoric can enter to refigure the discourse of human relations in ways that do not compress the intricacies of transnational flow into the static unities and intransigent oppositions of the between-worlds trope.

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